

Retrospective Feelings of Difference Based on Gender and Sexuality Among Emerging Adults

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Feelings of difference (FOD) based on gender and/or sexuality (i.e., gender–sexuality FOD) can occur among all youth regardless of sexual or gender identity and can influence future identity development. This online questionnaire and open-ended response-based study examined retrospective experiences and the presence of gender–sexuality FOD among sexual minority and heterosexual emerging adults ($N = 879$; $M_{\text{age}} = 18.87$ years, $SD = 1.75$, range = 18–22). More than half of all participants reported gender–sexuality FOD ($n = 500$; 57%), which often occurred by early adolescence regardless of sexual or gender identity. Participants were primarily White ($n = 685$; 77.1%), female ($n = 666$; 75.8%), and heterosexual ($n = 794$; 90.3%), with a minority of sexual minority participants ($n = 85$; 9.7%). Sexual minority individuals were significantly more likely to report gender–sexuality FOD than heterosexual individuals. Sexual minority women reported significantly greater felt impact (i.e., lasting effects) of gender–sexuality FOD than heterosexual men (no other significant group differences characterized this result). No significant group differences were found in age at which participants first experienced gender–sexuality FOD. Binary logistic regressions of codes generated through content analysis suggested that the first gender–sexuality FOD experiences of sexual minority individuals were more likely to involve fear of disclosure, shame and guilt, and acceptance of self, while those of heterosexual individuals were more likely to indicate acceptance of society. The coded accounts of women and men were not significantly different. Implications of these findings are discussed, particularly as they relate to future interventions for youth.

Public Significance Statement


More than half of all emerging adults reported feelings of difference (FOD) based on gender or sexuality with significant differences in their likelihood (e.g., sexual minority groups and heterosexual women were more likely to report FOD than heterosexual men), felt impact (e.g., sexual minority women perceived greater impact than heterosexual men), and the content associated with FOD (e.g., fear of disclosure and feelings of shame and guilt were more likely among sexual minority vs. heterosexual participants). This work has implications for future research about meaning making among emerging adults related to retrospective narratives of difference based on gender and sexuality.

Keywords: emerging adulthood, feelings of difference, gender, identity development, sexuality

Given the emphasis of sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (SOGIE) in the sociopolitical sphere of the United States (e.g., bathroom bills, antidiscrimination policies; Parent & Silva, 2018), it is critical to consider that individuals perceived as sexual minorities, gender-atypical, or nonconforming may experience harassment by peers or authority figures (e.g., parents; Ansara & Hegarty, 2014).¹ Gender atypicality is often perceived as indic-

ative of sexual minority identities, regardless of actual sexual orientation (Horn, 2007; Lehavot & Lambert, 2007). Sexual minority youth often report being gender-atypical as young as 8 years old (D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2008), and many describe their own and others' perceptions of their gender atypicality as reasons for "feeling different" or being teased or bullied (Flowers & Buston, 2001; Johnson, Singh, & Gonzalez, 2014; Savin-Williams & Cohen, 2015). As identity development is a hallmark of adolescence, identities surrounding SOGIE may become particularly salient during this time given feelings of difference (FOD) based on perceived SOGIE (Diamond, 2008; Savin-Williams &

This article was published Online First September 16, 2019.

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¹ We use the term *atypical* to refer to the most common, or modal, patterns of gender development. In referencing "typicality," we do not intend to suggest that certain patterns of development are prescriptively superior or inferior.

Diamond, 2000). These FOD based on gender and sexuality (i.e., “gender–sexuality FOD”) are those that are experienced in relation to one’s peers (often same-gender peers) such that an individual is made aware that they are distinct from those around them (e.g., a same-gender peer points out that an individual has atypical gender expression; D’Augelli et al., 2008). Thus, it is important to understand more about the nature of gender–sexuality FOD, given that actual and perceived SOGIE often overlap (i.e., Johnson et al., 2014), and because gender–sexuality FOD may impact individual development among sexual minority and heterosexual individuals.

Theoretical Framework

According to Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 1994) bioecological systems theory, individual development is influenced by contextual and societal forces, understood as systems specified at various levels. Derived from queer (and feminist) theory, heteronormativity, the act of privileging heterosexuality (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Halperin, 1995; hooks, 1981, 2000; Marchia & Sommer, 2017; Warner, 2000), is one societal force that can operate at Bronfenbrenner’s macrosystem level, influencing lower systems (i.e., exosystem, mesosystem, microsystem) and the individual (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Heteronormativity can be further specified as the normalization of heterosexuality and all other sexual identities are seen as unnatural or abnormal and should be punished (Carroll, 2012). Another construct that is intertwined with and serves to reinforce and stabilize heteronormativity is cisnormativity (i.e., the normalization of cisgender identities and all other gender identities are seen as unnatural and should be punished; Ansara & Berger, 2016; Ansara & Hegarty, 2014; Baril & Trevenen, 2014). These two constructs function together to reinforce the norms (e.g., women and men must act in specific ways and those who do not should be punished; Ansara & Hegarty, 2012) that gender identity is binary (i.e., men and women) and based on genitalia, and that people should be in sexual and romantic relationships based on said gender binary (i.e., heterosexuality).

Heteronormativity and cisnormativity (always) co-occur and exist at all levels of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system, given the interrelatedness of systems interacting with one another (Cao, Mills-Koonce, Wood, & Fine, 2016) and how heteronormativity and cisnormativity present themselves in each system. For example, the ways in which school district policies related to SOGIE are developed and enacted reflects the movement of power/knowledge at the institutional level (i.e., the exosystem) that is reinforced through microsystem-level interactions to negatively impact those diverse in SOGIE (Foucault, 1980; Marchia & Sommer, 2017). Heteronormativity and cisnormativity also operate at higher levels such as the macrosystem (e.g., societal and cultural beliefs around SOGIE) and the chronosystem (e.g., how beliefs change over time). The mesosystem (i.e., the blending of microsystems) also includes the enactment of heteronormativity and cisnormativity among peer groups, schools, and families (e.g., a teacher is fired for being gay as a result of prejudice; Halley, 1993). Finally, these forces may exist at the microsystem in which people interact with friends and family directly (e.g., feeling pressured by peers to engage in inappropriate sexualized behaviors; Jewell & Brown, 2013; Sullivan, Moss-Racusin, Lopez, & Williams, 2018; Vandello & Bosson, 2012).

Together, these ecological systems influence, facilitate, or reinforce the development of heterosexist and cisnormative beliefs, as well as homonegative attitudes and internalized stigma (i.e., internalization of negative beliefs about one’s identity), which both may relate to gender–sexuality FOD (Baker & Fishbein, 1998; Horn, 2007; Johnson et al., 2014; Savin-Williams & Cohen, 2015). Addressing internalized stigma is crucial, given its association with several negative health outcomes for sexual minority individuals (e.g., depressive symptoms; Herek & Garnets, 2007). Although internalized stigma affects minority group members, majority individuals (e.g., heterosexual, cisgender) also experience the policing of their gender-nonconforming or sexual behaviors if they deviate from heteronormative and cisnormative standards (Nadal et al., 2011). For example, harassment regarding perceived SOGIE negatively affects heterosexual and sexual minority youth (e.g., heterosexual men become more aggressive when perceived as gay; Bosson, Weaver, Caswell, & Burnaford, 2011; Fish & Russell, 2018) as behavior and expression are important signals of identity (e.g., expressing one’s self as a sexual minority individual; Halperin, 2002). Thus, retrospectively exploring gender–sexuality FOD that occurred during childhood and adolescence could provide greater understanding about the experiences of emerging adults diverse in SOGIE.

Gender–Sexuality FOD

Although many sexual minority people mention feeling gender-atypical by age eight (D’Augelli et al., 2008), gender norms (i.e., often dictated by heteronormative and cisnormative values; Carroll, 2012) are salient to children by age 4 (e.g., “girls play with dolls,” “boys have short hair”; Brown & Bigler, 2005). Gender exclusion and gender-based teasing, as well as the devaluing of feminine behaviors and interests are several ways that heteronormativity and cisnormativity influence individuals through the vectors of various ecological systems throughout development (Braun & Davidson, 2017; Harwood & Copfer, 2015). From institutional segregation of athletics (Messner & Bozada-Deas, 2009), housing (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014), and even binary sex assignment (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014), products of heteronormativity and cisnormativity—such as sorting individuals by gender—are evident across ecological systems.

The pervasiveness of heteronormativity and cisnormativity operating throughout all ecological system levels provides a clear rationale for the purposive exploration of gender-based FOD among emerging adults. Although FOD likely occur for everyone, given cultural devaluing of feminine characteristics, gender-based FOD may be more likely among women than men. It may be difficult, however, to separate gender from sexuality in considering FOD based on SOGIE, given assumptions that gender expression is indicative of sexual identity, or vice versa (e.g., “effeminate men are gay”; Lehavot & Lambert, 2007). Research has shown that when individuals with multiple minority identities (e.g., Black lesbian women) experience harassment, it is sometimes difficult to decipher which identity is targeted (e.g., gender vs. sexual identity; Bowleg, 2008). In addition, the qualitative nature of gender–sexuality FOD could differ by SOGIE. Experiences such as fear of disclosure or denial and suppression of feelings may be unique or more commonly emphasized among sexual minority versus heterosexual individuals (Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card, & Russell,

2010). Little research, however, has focused on the qualitative nature of gender–sexuality FOD among heterosexual individuals, such as the distinctiveness or frequencies of the experiences themselves.

Perhaps because heteronormative and cisnormative expectations affect both heterosexual and sexual minority people (Jackson, 2006), individual interpretation of experiences could be similar. For example, male youth, regardless of sexual identity, are socialized in a world where masculinity is not only highly encouraged, but deviations from masculinity may be punished (e.g., boys perceived as gender-atypical are harassed; Vandello & Bosson, 2012; Vandello, Bosson, Cohen, Burnaford, & Weaver, 2008). This may be particularly true for sexual minority boys who experience victimization at school, often a result of “deviating” from heteronormative ideals (Bosson et al., 2011; Flowers & Buston, 2001). Thus, sexual minority and heterosexual male youth may fear disclosing interests perceived as feminine (e.g., playing with dolls) or experience shame and guilt about failure to earn status as a man (e.g., being “effeminate”; Vandello et al., 2008). Thus, examining the prevalence of gender–sexuality FOD (broadly considered), and the nature of those experiences (e.g., feelings resulting from overt teasing vs. internalized stigma) is warranted among individuals diverse in SOGIE.

Retrospective Accounts: Emerging Adulthood

The development of life course narratives is integral to social identity development. During emerging adulthood, one begins to fully form and make meaning from their life story to understand their past experiences (Hammack & Toolis, 2014). As such, understanding how individuals later recall and interpret gender–sexuality FOD is informative. As adolescents become emerging adults, they begin to develop nuanced narratives of their own lives. However, based on the limited capabilities of youth to report on and describe their experiences (i.e., the ability to fully articulate narratives, especially related to identity, develops across adolescence), it may not be until later in development that they elaborate on those experiences (e.g., evaluation of risk and reward, as well as emotion regulation continue to develop during adolescence; Steinberg, 2005). Thus, examining retrospective accounts related to SOGIE from emerging adults may provide a perspective that would not have emerged earlier (Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2011).

Sexual minority, similar to heterosexual, identity development follows a trajectory of early, typical, and late developmental paths (Calzo, Antonucci, Mays, & Cochran, 2011). By emerging adulthood, those along early or typical pathways typically label their sexual identity and describe relevant experiences (e.g., coming out), but those who are late-developing may have just begun to understand and label their identities (McClelland, Rubin, & Baumeister, 2016). Although late-developing individuals are not atypical in their trajectory, research focusing on adolescence may not fully capture the diversity in sexual identity narratives (Calzo et al., 2011; Morgan, 2013). As emerging adults are generally more capable than adolescents in cohesively integrating their internal sexual identity into a broader master narrative of their life (Hammack, Thompson, & Pilecki, 2009; Hammack & Toolis, 2014), emerging adulthood as a developmental stage may be ideal for data collection about earlier experiences related to SOGIE.

The perceived intensity of an experience, the *felt impact*, is likely an important component of FOD (Meyer, 2003; Wright & Wegner, 2012). Felt impact relates to an individual’s cognitive appraisal of the incident, such as labeling an experience as one that affected them or made them feel different on the basis of their SOGIE status (i.e., gender–sexuality FOD; Meyer, 2015; Walch, Ngamake, Bovornusvakool, & Walker, 2016; Wright & Wegner, 2012). As a result of heteronormativity and cisnormativity, those who identify as heterosexual and/or male may be less likely to “feel different” as a result of certain experiences (e.g., hearing a sexist joke; Jewell & Brown, 2013) as compared to individuals who have a minority group identity (e.g., sexual minority, female; Sue, 2010; Wong-Padoongpatt, Zane, Okazaki, & Saw, 2017). Thus, the context-dependent nature of FOD, such as how and whether an individual attends to the experience, is an integral consideration of felt impact and gender–sexuality FOD.

The Current Study

Utilizing bioecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1994) and queer (and feminist) theories (i.e., heteronormativity; hooks, 1981, 2000; Warner, 2000), we investigated how emerging adults recall gender–sexuality FOD. To our knowledge, no study has done so using a multimodal approach among emerging adults who identify as sexual minority and heterosexual, and female and male (Morgan, 2013). Although some research has investigated recalled narratives and retrospective identity development separately among sexual minority and heterosexual individuals (Kuper & Mustanski, 2014; McClelland et al., 2016; Morgan, 2012; Wood & Conway, 2006), no research we know of has simultaneously considered a sample of both sexual minority and heterosexual individuals. Also, earlier research has generally relied on singular method narrative analysis approaches or focused solely on identity development (Morgan, 2012; Thompson & Morgan, 2008; Weststrate & McLean, 2010). In addition, research about the perceived impact of gender–sexuality FOD has generated mixed findings; some studies (but not others) have suggested differences by gender or sexual identity (Greene & Britton, 2012; Killen, Mulvey, & Hitti, 2013; Wood & Conway, 2006). Thus, our research questions were informed by three gaps in the literature: (a) the need to consider sexual minority and heterosexual individuals in the same sample, (b) the absence of multimodal research, and (c) mixed findings on felt impact and differences by gender or sexual identity. Thus, our investigation of retrospective experiences may provide further evidence about possible mechanisms (i.e., FOD, felt impact of FOD) by which deleterious effects associated with heteronormativity and cisnormativity might occur, and whether patterns differ among individuals diverse in SOGIE.

We assessed participants’ gender–sexuality FOD through a series of closed- and open-ended survey responses to investigate whether participants had experienced gender–sexuality FOD, the perceived impact of those FOD, and the age at which their first gender–sexuality FOD occurred. We coded participants’ descriptions of the gender–sexuality FOD via a content analysis and anticipated that open-ended responses would reflect the broader literature on sexual minority identities (Russell et al., 2011) such that sexual minority individuals would report experiences related to fear of disclosing one’s identity (Mustanski, Newcomb, & Garofalo, 2011) and shame and guilt associated with one’s identity

(Toomey et al., 2010). Further, when considering our quantitative analyses, we also hypothesized that sexual minority individuals would be more likely than heterosexual individuals to report experiences of gender–sexuality FOD. We also anticipated finding content that reflected experiences of gender exclusion (Braun & Davidson, 2017) and pressure (e.g., related to dating or sex; Friedman & Morgan, 2009) reported more often by women than men. We did not, however, make any additional qualitative or quantitative hypotheses regarding how sexual or gender identity would relate to the likelihood of an individual reporting gender–sexuality FOD.

Method

Participants

Data from this sample ($N = 879$) were collected as part of a study about retrospective experiences regarding sexuality and gender. Most participants were White ($n = 685$; 78%) and identified as female ($n = 666$; 76%). They averaged 18.88 years old ($SD = 1.75$). The majority reported a family household income over \$100,000 ($n = 344$; 39%). Most were heterosexual ($n = 794$; 90%; see Table 1), yet a minority were sexual minorities ($n = 85$; 10%). Specifically, 31 identified as lesbian/gay (LG), 29 as bisexual (B), seven as pansexual (P), three as queer (Q), and 15 as a combination of identities (e.g., lesbian/gay and queer). Three participants did not identify as cisgender and were placed into specific categories when possible (e.g., a nonbinary lesbian was included in the sexual minority category but not in a specific gender category).

Procedure

Participants were recruited through the psychology student pool at the authors' institution (a large university in the American South) where they received course credit, as well volunteers via social media (e.g., Facebook) and organizations (e.g., LGBTQ+ community centers) between 2016 and 2017.² We did this to purposively oversample sexual minority individuals. The only prerequisite was to be age 18 or older. Participants received a link to the study survey on Qualtrics. Following consent, participants completed a series of multiple-choice and open-ended questions. No financial compensation was provided. Participants received a short debriefing explanation upon completion. The University of Kentucky Institutional Review Board approved the study.

Measures and Procedure

Demographic questions. Participants received questions about their age, as well as their racial/ethnic, gender (female, male, transgender, self-describe), and sexual identities (asexual, bisexual, lesbian/gay, pansexual, queer, questioning/unsure, straight, self-describe). Participants were also asked to report their family household income (reported in thousands [K], where under 15K = 1; 15K to 24K = 2; 25K to 34K = 3; 35K to 49K = 4; 50K to 74K = 5; 75K to 99K = 6; and 100K+ = 7).

Gender–sexuality FOD. Participants received a question asking them to recall their first gender–sexuality FOD: “Please tell us about the first time that you felt genuinely different from your peers (or family) in a negative way specifically related to your

gender or sexual identity.” Then participants were asked to “Please describe the situation and the feelings that you experienced.” Finally, participants were asked, “Were there aspects of this event or your emotional response to the event that you did not understand or could not explain at the time? Do you understand them/are you able to explain them now? If you can, please try and explain them.” These questions were developed from previous LGBTQ+ identity-related narrative research about how individuals diverse in SOGIE describe various negative retrospective experiences regarding their developing sexual and/or gender identity (McClelland et al., 2016; Savin-Williams & Cohen, 2015). Felt impact of the gender–sexuality FOD was assessed through the question, “How much did the situation described impact/bother you?” on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a good deal*) with higher scores indicating greater impact. Wording for this question was based on research about the extent to which past homonegative microaggressions were perceived to bother or impact LGB participants (Wright & Wegner, 2012). Finally, participants were asked to report their age in years when their first gender–sexuality FOD occurred.

Content coding. All responses provided by participants who reported gender–sexuality FOD ($N = 500$; $n = 75$ sexual minority) were inductively analyzed for patterns using content analysis (Berelson, 1952). Content analysis is a methodology used to group common features (e.g., codes, units of content) within qualitative data. These corresponding units of content, or codes, can then be quantified and examined in relation to other measurable variables of interest (e.g., sexual identity; Krippendorff, 1989; White & Marsh, 2006). Initial inductive open coding (Boyatzis, 1998; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008), which involves separating the data into organized units, was conducted by the second author from responses of 200 participants. These represented 61 sexual minority participants who reported a single sexual identity (e.g., “lesbian” rather than “lesbian” and “queer”) and approximately double the number of heterosexual participants ($n = 139$; randomly selected). This total number of 200 participants ensured that there was representative sampling to generalize findings (Krippendorff, 1989) and that coding saturation was achieved (e.g., no new patterns within data; Bowen, 2008; Fusch & Ness, 2015). This in turn allowed for the development of themes that closely resembled participant narratives (Boyatzis, 1998). Initial coding resulted in 20 distinct units of content (see Table 2).

The first and second author then used the 20 codes to develop a codebook to describe and refine these units of content (White & Marsh, 2006; codebook available on OSF at https://osf.io/d9g3k/?view_only=a81beb9f574a4338b2dbef08c53650fe). Next, to ensure adequate reliability and validate the codebook (Krippendorff, 1989), the first two authors and a trained research assistant independently coded this initial set of 200 responses. After doing so, the trained research assistant led a coding team of two new research assistants to independently code the remaining 300 responses. Thus, there were five total coders. Responses were coded for whether a code was present or not. For example, one response given by a male participant: “I did not like particularly masculine

² All responses were anonymous to ensure participants' privacy (i.e., we cannot differentiate data collected from the university and snowball samples).

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Participants by Sexual and Gender Identity

Demographic characteristic	SM women (<i>n</i> = 52)	SM men (<i>n</i> = 30)	Heterosexual women (<i>n</i> = 604)	Heterosexual men (<i>n</i> = 180)	SM (<i>n</i> = 85)	Heterosexual (<i>n</i> = 794)	Women (<i>n</i> = 666)	Men (<i>n</i> = 210)	Total (<i>N</i> = 879)
Age (in years)	19.75 (2.66)	20.20 (3.08)	18.51 (1.03)	19.25 (2.18)	19.21 (2.71)	18.42 (1.28)	18.33 (1.14)	19.29 (2.30)	18.87 (1.75)
Race (% White)	63.5	73.3	81.6	70.3	64.7	79.0	78.8	72.9	77.1%
Gender (% female)					61.2	76.1			75.8
Sexual identity (% sexual minority)							7.8	14.3	9.7
Family income (% \$50,000 to \$74,999 and greater) ^a	57.8	76.7	77.0	78.8	62.4	77.4	75.5	78.5	76.2

Note. Means (and standard deviations in parentheses) or percentages are presented. SM = sexual minority.

^a Higher percentages indicate a greater amount of family income (1 = under \$15,000 to 7 = \$100,000 or more). Slight differences in numbers are the result of missing data.

activities” was coded as a yes (1 = yes, 0 = no) for the response “disinterest in gender-typical activities.” At least three raters coded each response, and the majority ruling represented the final code (i.e., if two research assistants coded a response as “yes” and one as “no”, then the final code was “yes”). Individual responses could be assigned multiple codes (e.g., coded as “yes” for fear of disclosure and acceptance of self). Research assistants met frequently to resolve coding issues.

Intercoder agreement was assessed using Krippendorff’s alpha (K- α), which is ideal for this type of coding as it accounts for missing data, any number of coders, and any type of variable (e.g., nominal, ordinal, ratio; Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). K- α values range from 0 to 1 (i.e., 1 = perfect agreement); $\alpha \geq .800$ or higher are ideal, whereas the lowest acceptable are $\alpha \geq .667$ (Krippendorff, 2004). Initial reliability of codes yielded alpha levels between .515 and 1, with an average alpha of $\alpha \geq .800$. Full sample reliability resulted in K- α s between .793 to 1, demonstrating acceptable to perfect interrater agreement (Table 2 includes reliability and frequencies for each code).

Analytic plan. We provide descriptive statistics about our total sample, as well as about the subsample who reported experiencing gender–sexuality FOD. Following, we conducted binary logistic regressions (Morgan & Teachman, 1988) to assess possible differences in whether participants had experienced gender–sexuality FOD (yes/no) based on group identity (e.g., sexual and gender identity). Logistic regressions provide an odds ratio value (i.e., the probability of the dependent variable occurring) that can be interpreted as the likelihood of one group reporting a code proportionately more than the other group (Peng, Lee, & Ingersoll, 2002). For felt impact and age of experience, we conducted one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), as well as Bayesian statistics to supplement frequentist analysis. A Bayes factor (BF₁₀) of 1 to 3 indicates anecdotal evidence, and BF₁₀ of 3 to 10 indicates moderate evidence for the alternative hypothesis (i.e., BF₁₀ of 3 indicates that data are three times more likely to occur under the alternative rather than null hypothesis; Lee & Wagenmakers, 2013).

Finally, binary logistic regressions were performed to assess the likelihood of a code (White & Marsh, 2006) based on sexual identity (i.e., sexual minority or heterosexual) and gender identity (i.e., male or female). Because of small cell sizes for the analyses, binary logistic regressions were conducted separately for sexual

and gender identity. Finally, given the number of null hypothesis significance tests conducted across all our logistic regression investigations, Bonferroni corrections were included with alpha levels set to $p = .001$.

Results

The majority of participants reported having experienced gender–sexuality FOD ($n = 500$; 57%). By sexual and gender identity, more than half of all sexual minority women ($n = 43$; 82.7%), sexual minority men ($n = 29$; 96.7%), and heterosexual women ($n = 346$; 57.3%) reported gender–sexuality FOD, but slightly fewer than half of all heterosexual men reported a gender–sexuality FOD ($n = 75$; 41.8%). Sexual minority individuals were significantly more likely than heterosexual individuals to report gender–sexuality FOD ($B = 1.88$, $\chi^2 = 29.86$, $p < .001$, $\phi = .21$, $e^B = 6.56$, 95% confidence interval (CI) [3.34, 12.87]). Women, however, were not significantly more likely than men to report gender–sexuality FOD ($B = -.38$, $\chi^2 = 5.61$, $p = .018$, $\phi = -.08$, $e^B = .69$, 95% CI [.50, .94]).

We next explored these descriptive results further by sexual and gender identity, resulting in comparisons of four groups: sexual minority women, sexual minority men, heterosexual women, and heterosexual men. Sexual minority women were significantly more likely than heterosexual men to report gender–sexuality FOD ($B = 1.56$, $\chi^2 = 22.97$, $p < .001$, $\phi = .34$, $e^B = .15$, 95% CI [.07, .33]). That is, sexual minority women were 6.67 times more likely than heterosexual men to report gender–sexuality FOD. Sexual minority women, however, were not significantly different in likelihood of reporting gender–sexuality FOD as compared to sexual minority men ($B = 1.80$, $\chi^2 = 2.78$, $p = .095$, $\phi = .21$, $e^B = 6.07$, 95% CI [.73, 50.52]) or heterosexual women ($B = 1.29$, $\chi^2 = 11.79$, $p = .001$, $\phi = .14$, $e^B = 3.63$, 95% CI [1.74, 7.58]). Further, sexual minority men were significantly more likely than heterosexual men to report gender–sexuality FOD ($B = 3.70$, $\chi^2 = 12.97$, $p < .001$, $\phi = .39$, $e^B = 40.6$, 95% CI [5.41, 304.64]). That is, sexual minority men were 40.60 times more likely than heterosexual men to report gender–sexuality FOD. Sexual minority men, however, were not significantly different from heterosexual women in likelihood of reporting gender–sexuality FOD ($B = -3.09$, $\chi^2 = 9.19$, $\phi = -.17$, $p = .002$, $e^B = .05$, 95% CI [.01, .34]). Heterosexual women were significantly more likely than heterosexual men to

Table 2
Frequency of Codes by Sexual and Gender Identity

Codes	α	SM women (<i>n</i> = 42)	SM men (<i>n</i> = 29)	Heterosexual women (<i>n</i> = 347)	Heterosexual men (<i>n</i> = 74)	SM (<i>n</i> = 75) (15%)	Heterosexual (<i>n</i> = 425) (85%)	Women (<i>n</i> = 389) (77.8%)	Men (<i>n</i> = 103) (20.6%)	Total (<i>N</i> = 500) (100%)
Fear of disclosure	.879	12 (28.6%)	10 (34.5%)	7 (2.0%)	0 (0%)	24 (32%)	7 (1.6%)	19 (4.9%)	10 (9.7%)	31 (6.2%)
Shame and guilt	.860	14 (33.3%)	9 (21.4%)	23 (6.6%)	7 (10.0%)	23 (30.7%)	31 (7.3%)	37 (9.5%)	16 (15.5%)	54 (10.8%)
Something wrong	.841	11 (26.2%)	2 (6.9%)	10 (2.9%)	2 (2.7%)	13 (17.3%)	12 (2.8%)	21 (5.4%)	4 (3.9%)	25 (5%)
Isolated or left out	.873	18 (42.9%)	6 (20.7%)	73 (21.4%)	13 (3.8%)	24 (32%)	87 (20.5%)	91 (23.4%)	19 (18.4%)	111 (22.2%)
Rumors spread by same-gender peer	.915	4 (9.5%)	1 (3.5%)	2 (0.6%)	0 (0%)	5 (6.7%)	2 (.5%)	6 (1.5%)	1 (1%)	7 (1.4%)
Denial and suppression of feelings	.871	11 (26.2%)	3 (10.3%)	5 (1.4%)	2 (2.7%)	16 (21.3%)	7 (1.6%)	16 (4.1%)	5 (4.9%)	23 (4.6%)
Acting the part	.831	3 (7.1%)	1 (3.5%)	8 (2.3%)	1 (1.4%)	6 (8%)	9 (2.1%)	11 (2.8%)	2 (1.9%)	15 (3%)
Teasing and bullying	.917	18 (42.9%)	15 (51.7%)	203 (58.5%)	52 (70.3%)	35 (46.7%)	256 (60.2%)	221 (56.8%)	67 (65%)	291 (58.2%)
Disinterest in gender-typical activities	.881	0 (0%)	5 (17.2%)	15 (4.3%)	3 (4.1%)	6 (8%)	18 (4.2%)	15 (3.9%)	8 (7.8%)	24 (4.8%)
Interest in gender-atypical activities	.873	1 (2.4%)	4 (13.8%)	29 (8.4%)	5 (6.8%)	6 (8%)	35 (8.2%)	30 (7.7%)	9 (8.7%)	41 (8.2%)
Atypical gender appearance/expression	.874	1 (2.4%)	5 (17.2%)	34 (9.8%)	6 (8.1%)	8 (10.7%)	41 (9.6%)	35 (9%)	11 (10.7%)	49 (9.8%)
Body image	.928	3 (7.1%)	0 (0%)	31 (8.9%)	7 (9.5%)	3 (4%)	39 (9.2%)	34 (8.7%)	7 (6.8%)	42 (8.4%)
Puberty	.971	0 (0%)	1 (3.5%)	34 (9.8%)	6 (8.1%)	1 (1.3%)	42 (9.9%)	34 (8.7%)	7 (6.8%)	43 (8.6%)
Preference for different-gender friends	.908	0 (0%)	4 (13.8%)	0 (0%)	20 (27.0%)	4 (5.3%)	20 (4.7%)	20 (5.1%)	4 (3.9%)	24 (4.8%)
Peer pressure related to dating or sexual behavior	.922	1 (2.4%)	0 (0%)	88 (25.4%)	26 (35.1%)	1 (1.3%)	114 (26.8%)	89 (22.9%)	26 (25.2%)	115 (23%)
Gender exclusive activities	.901	2 (5.8%)	0 (0%)	89 (25.7%)	5 (6.8%)	2 (2.7%)	96 (22.6%)	91 (23.4%)	5 (4.9%)	98 (19.6%)
Supportive friends	1.0	4 (10%)	2 (6.9%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	7 (9.3%)	1 (2%)	5 (1.3%)	2 (1.9%)	8 (1.6%)
Supportive family	.823	1 (2.4%)	2 (6.9%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	4 (5.3%)	1 (2%)	2 (.5%)	2 (1.9%)	5 (1%)
Acceptance of self	.795	11 (26.2%)	8 (27.6%)	38 (11.0%)	5 (6.8%)	21 (28%)	44 (10.4%)	49 (12.6%)	13 (12.6%)	65 (13%)
Acceptance of society	.802	7 (16.7%)	0 (0%)	97 (28.0%)	24 (32.4%)	7 (9.3%)	122 (28.7%)	104 (26.7%)	24 (23.3%)	129 (25.8%)

Note. Frequencies, percentages, and Krippendorff's alphas for each code are displayed. Data are missing throughout because of incomplete responses (i.e., some individuals reported a gender but not a sexual identity or vice versa). SM = sexual minority.

report gender–sexuality FOD ($B = -.61$, $\chi^2 = 12.62$, $p < .001$, $\phi = -.13$, $e^B = .54$, 95% CI [.39, .76]). That is, heterosexual women were 1.84 times more likely than heterosexual men to report gender–sexuality FOD.

Given that gender–sexuality FOD were of interest, all subsequent analyses involved only the subsample who reported gender–sexuality FOD. Demographics for this subsample ($n = 500$) reflected the larger overall sample (with no significant differences in income, race, age, or geographic location between those who had and had not experienced gender–sexuality FOD): most were female ($n = 389$; 79%) and White ($n = 390$; 78%), and averaged 19 years old ($M = 18.89$, $SD = 1.67$). Family household income over \$100,000 was most common ($n = 208$; 42%). Regarding sexual identity, 421 (84%) identified as heterosexual and 75 (15%) identified as sexual minorities. Specifically, 31 were lesbian/gay, 22 bisexual, five pansexual, three queer, and 14 reported multiple labels. Sample size and degrees of freedom change slightly throughout analyses due to missing data (e.g., incomplete reporting).

Felt Impact

Average felt impact of gender–sexuality FOD ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.13$) was moderate (between *a little bit* and *somewhat*). ANOVA comparing all four groups (sexual minority women and men; heterosexual women and men) showed significant differences in felt impact, $F(3, 487) = 8.00$, $p < .001$, $BF_{10} = 17.24$. Post hoc analyses using Bonferroni corrections for significance showed that sexual minority women ($M = 3.45$, $SD = .89$; $p < .001$, 95% CI [.35, 1.48]), reported significantly greater felt impact than heterosexual men ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 1.09$). Sexual minority women, however, were not significantly different in felt impact compared to sexual minority men ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.38$; $p = 1.00$, 95% CI [−.49, .92]), nor to heterosexual women ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 1.10$; $p = .001$, 95% CI [.22, 1.18]). Further, sexual minority men were not significantly different from heterosexual women ($p = .137$, 95% CI [−.08, 1.05]) or heterosexual men ($p = .023$, 95% CI [.06, 1.3]). Finally, heterosexual women were not significantly different from heterosexual men ($p = .784$, 95% CI [−.16, .59]).

Age of Experience

On average ($M = 11.96$ years, $SD = 3.83$), individuals generally reported experiencing their first gender–sexuality FOD between late childhood and early adolescence. ANOVA comparing all four groups (sexual minority women and men; heterosexual women and men) indicated no significant differences, $F(3, 487) = 1.47$, $p = .221$, $BF_{10} = .001$. That is, sexual minority women ($M = 12.43$, $SD = 3.85$) and sexual minority men ($M = 12.72$, $SD = 4.24$), as well as heterosexual women ($M = 11.73$, $SD = 3.86$) and men ($M = 12.47$, $SD = 3.45$) were not significantly different in the age they experienced their first gender–sexuality FOD.

Logistic Regressions by Sexual and Gender Identity

Using binary logistic regression, significant differences were found across several codes described by sexual minority and heterosexual individuals related to their experiences of gender–

sexuality FOD. Compared were heterosexual individuals, sexual minority individuals were more likely to report the following codes: fear of disclosure, denial and suppression of feelings, something wrong, shame and guilt, supportive friends, and acceptance of self ($ps < .001$). Further, compared with sexual minority individuals, heterosexual individuals were more likely to report the code acceptance of society ($p < .001$). There were no significant differences between sexual minority and heterosexual individuals in likelihood of reporting the following codes: isolated or left out, rumors spread by same-gender peer, acting the part, teasing and bullying, disinterest in gender-typical activities, interest in gender-atypical activities, gender appearance, puberty, preference for different-gender friends, gender exclusion, and supportive family ($ps > .001$; see Table 3; given space constraints, see OSF codebook at https://osf.io/d9g3k/?view_only=a81beb9f574a4338b2dbef08c53650fe). Finally, there were no significant differences between women and men in likelihood of reporting any code ($ps > .001$; see Table 4).

Discussion

These findings, which provide mixed support for our hypotheses, contribute to scholarship about gender–sexuality FOD recalled among sexual minority and heterosexual emerging adults. We found support for our initial hypothesis that sexual minority emerging adults would report experiences related to shame, guilt, and fear of disclosing one's sexual identity and that they would be more likely to do so compared to heterosexual emerging adults. We did not find support, however, for our hypothesis that women, as compared to men, would be more likely to report experiences of gender exclusion and pressure related to dating or sex. Our final hypothesis was that sexual minority individuals would be more likely to report gender–sexuality FOD as compared to heterosexual individuals, which was supported, but this finding was qualified by gender identity. Specifically, sexual minority women and men, as well as heterosexual women, were more likely to report gender–sexuality FOD as compared to heterosexual men. No other significant differences, however, were found among these groups. In the following text, we further detail our exploratory findings and our contribution to the broader scholarship on recalled gender–sexuality FOD among emerging adults.

To our knowledge, this is the first study to explore recalled gender–sexuality FOD among a sample simultaneously comparing sexual minority and heterosexual participants. It is important to underscore that over half of the sample, regardless of SOGIE, reported gender–sexuality FOD that had occurred between late childhood and early adolescence. We found differences, however, based on SOGIE in other descriptive aspects of these experiences. Compared to heterosexual individuals, sexual minority individuals were more likely to report gender–sexuality FOD and to perceive greater impact of those experiences. Specifically, heterosexual men were less likely than all other groups to report gender–sexuality FOD. That is, sexual minority women, sexual minority men, and heterosexual women were not significantly different from one another in likelihood of reporting gender–sexuality FOD. There were also differences based on sexual identity, but not gender, in our content analyses. As anticipated, sexual minority individuals were more likely than heterosexual individuals to report fear of disclosure, as well as shame and guilt (Toomey et al.,

Table 3
 Summary of Logistic Regression Analyses by Sexual Identity (Heterosexual = 0, Sexual Minority = 1)

Codes	B	SE (B)	Wald's $\chi^2(1)$	<i>p</i>	Odds ratio (OR)	95% confidence interval OR
Fear of disclosure	3.34	.45	53.88	<.001***	28.10	[11.53, 68.48]
Shame and guilt	1.73	.31	30.58	<.001***	5.62	[3.05, 10.37]
Something wrong	1.98	.42	21.85	<.001***	7.22	[3.15, 16.53]
Isolated or left out	.60	.28	4.81	.028	1.83	[1.07, 3.14]
Rumors spread by same-gender peer	2.72	.85	10.29	.001	15.11	[2.88, 79.39]
Denial and suppression of feelings	2.79	.47	34.51	<.001***	16.19	[6.40, 41.01]
Acting the part	1.39	.54	6.57	.010	4.02	[1.39, 11.65]
Teasing and bullying	-.55	.25	4.75	.029	.58 (1.72)	[.35, .95]
Disinterest in gender-typical activities	.68	.49	1.91	.167	1.97	[.75, 5.13]
Interest in gender-atypical activities	-.03	.46	.01	.945	.97 (1.03)	[.39, 2.39]
Atypical gender appearance/expression	.11	.41	.08	.784	1.12	[.50, 2.49]
Body image	-.89	.61	2.09	.148	.41 (2.44)	[.124, 1.37]
Puberty	-2.09	1.02	4.22	.040	.12 (8.33)	[.02, .91]
Preference for different-gender friends	.13	.56	.06	.815	1.14	[.38, 3.44]
Peer pressure related to dating or sexual behavior	-3.30	1.01	10.62	.001	.04 (25.00)	[.01, .27]
Gender exclusion	-2.37	.73	10.62	.001	.09 (11.11)	[.02, .39]
Supportive friends	3.78	1.08	12.29	<.001***	43.65	[5.29, 360.33]
Supportive family	3.17	1.13	7.95	.005	23.89	[2.63, 216.81]
Acceptance of self	1.21	.30	16.11	<.001***	3.37	[1.86, 6.09]
Acceptance of society	-1.36	.41	11.00	<.001***	.26 (3.85)	[.11, .57]

Note. Values <1 represent lower odds for sexual minority participants; inverses provided for clarity.
 *** *p* values that are statistically significant following Bonferroni corrections.

2010). Although we anticipated that women would report gender exclusion more than men, we found no significant differences by gender in coded narratives. Overall, these findings extend our understanding of how emerging adults recount earlier experiences related to gender and sexual identity development, and how gender–sexuality FOD are described by emerging adults who vary in SOGIE.

It is unsurprising, given previous research on these topics (e.g., Calzo et al., 2011; Savin-Williams & Cohen, 2015), to find that sexual minority individuals were more likely to recall gender–sexuality FOD than heterosexual individuals. These findings may be aligned with research indicating that sexual minority youth experience higher victimization rates than their heterosexual peers during middle childhood and early adolescence—developmental

Table 4
 Summary of Logistic Regression Analyses by Gender Identity (Female = 0, Male = 1)

Codes	B	SE (B)	Wald's $\chi^2(1)$	<i>p</i>	Odds ratio (OR)	95% confidence interval OR
Fear of disclosure	.74	.41	3.29	.070	2.09	[.94, 4.65]
Shame and guilt	.56	.32	3.01	.083	1.75	[.93, 3.29]
Something wrong	-.35	.56	.38	.535	.71 (1.41)	[.24, 2.11]
Isolated or left out	-.30	.28	1.14	.285	.74 (1.35)	[.43, 1.28]
Rumors spread by same-gender peer	-.47	1.09	.19	.666	.63 (1.60)	[.08, 5.26]
Denial and suppression of feelings	.17	.53	.11	.741	1.19	[.43, 3.33]
Acting the part	-.39	.78	.25	.620	.68 (1.47)	[.15, 3.12]
Teasing and bullying	.35	.23	2.26	.132	1.42	[.90, 2.23]
Disinterest in gender-typical activities	.74	.45	2.69	.101	2.10	[.87, 5.10]
Interest in gender-atypical activities	.14	.40	.12	.732	1.15	[.53, 2.50]
Gender appearance	.19	.37	.27	.603	1.21	[.59, 2.47]
Body image	-.27	.43	.40	.527	.76 (1.32)	[.33, 1.77]
Puberty	-.27	.43	.40	.527	.76 (1.32)	[.33, 1.77]
Preference for different-gender friends	-.29	.56	.28	.599	.75 (1.34)	[.25, 2.23]
Peer pressure related to dating or sexual behavior	.13	.26	.25	.614	1.14	[.69, 1.88]
Gender exclusion	-1.79	.47	14.26	.001	.17 (5.99)	[.07, .42]
Supportive friends	.42	.84	.25	.619	1.52	[.29, 7.95]
Supportive family	1.34	1.01	1.78	.182	3.83	[.53, 27.54]
Acceptance of self	.002	.33	<.001	.995	1.00	[.52, 1.93]
Acceptance of society	-.18	.26	.50	.480	.83 (1.20)	[.50, 1.39]

Note. Values <1 represent lower odds for sexual minority participants; inverses provided for clarity.
 *** *p* values that are statistically significant following Bonferroni corrections.

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periods when peer regulation of behaviors related to SOGIE are particularly heightened (Martin-Storey & Fish, 2019). As such, our findings can be interpreted in the context of ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) that are influenced by heteronormativity and cisnormativity (e.g., peers engage in harassment based on societal norms such as the normalization of negative sexualized behavior; Jewell & Brown, 2013). When youth enter adolescence, puberty and sexual identity development are often at the forefront, which may underlie why there were no differences in age at which individuals first experienced gender–sexuality FOD as a function of SOGIE in our sample.

Further, that sexual minority women reported greater felt impact as compared to heterosexual men also aligns with a rich literature cataloging how sexual minority women experience institutional oppression at a unique intersection in which heteronormativity, cisnormativity, and sexism simultaneously occur (Leaper & Brown, 2014; Marchia & Sommer, 2017). Queer theory suggests that the combination of identities leads to experiences that are not always shared by those with one singular marginalized identity (Halperin, 2002). That is, the experiences of sexual minority men are different from sexual minority women, whose experiences in turn are also different from those of heterosexual women. Thus, although all individuals can be negatively impacted by experiences influenced by heteronormativity and cisnormativity, the experiences of those with less privileged identities (i.e., sexual minority women) may be linked to more regular occurrences of gender–sexuality FOD that are also perceived as more impactful when compared to individuals with privileged gender and sexual identities (i.e., heterosexual men; Calzo et al., 2011; Russell & Fish, 2016).

Our logistic regression analyses illustrated novel findings indicating contrasts by sexual identity in distinct codes related to gender–sexuality FOD. It is compelling that some codes were more common among sexual minority participants, while one (i.e., acceptance of society) appeared more often among their heterosexual peers. Sexual minority individuals were more likely than heterosexual individuals to have experienced fear of disclosure, shame and guilt, something wrong, denial and suppression of feelings, supportive friends, and acceptance of self. The increased likelihood of these codes may relate to experiences of “forced passing” (e.g., pretending to be heterosexual because of feeling unsafe about revealing their sexual minority identity) and internalized stigma among sexual minority individuals resulting from heteronormative and cisnormative values enacted at micro- and mesosystem levels (Flowers & Buston, 2001; Frost, 2017). Relatedly, these codes often reflected interactions with peers, which underscores the ecological systems that may influence individuals as they make meaning of their experiences (Nadal et al., 2011). For example, the code “supportive friends” relates to individual relationships represented in microsystems and follows the “coming out” narrative among sexual minority youth and emerging adults. That is, after disclosing one’s sexual identity, friends may respond positively and validate the individual’s sexual minority identity (Mustanski et al., 2011; Toomey et al., 2010).

Two specific codes that may be particularly noteworthy were the increased likelihood for sexual minority individuals to report acceptance of self and the increased likelihood for heterosexual individuals to report acceptance of society. These findings contribute to our understanding of gender–sexuality FOD when un-

derstood through a feminist lens. Sexual minority and heterosexual individuals are under social pressures to “perform” their gender and sexual identities per heteronormative and cisnormative scripts (e.g., for male individuals, “proving straightness” by rejecting feminine attributes; Boyer & Galupo, 2015; Cheryan, Cameron, Katagiri, & Monin, 2015; Levitt, 2019). Because sexual minority individuals were also more likely than heterosexual individuals to report shame and guilt or denial and suppression of feelings, it may be that sexual minority individuals are more attuned to “see” heteronormative and cisnormative scripts as damaging as a result of their sexual and/or gender identities (Levitt, 2019). In turn, they may be more likely to endorse an identity development journey that involves the rejection of “heteronormativity acceptance” (e.g., Troiden, 1988), while many heterosexual individuals may accept heteronormative and cisnormative scripts as prescriptive and appropriate facets of society. As informed by ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007), queer (Warner, 2000) and feminist theories (hooks, 1984, 2000), these ideas might relate to our finding about how first gender–sexuality FOD were recalled around the same age, regardless of sexual identity, yet were experienced in the context of different circumstances among sexual minority and heterosexual youth.

We found mixed support for our hypotheses related to gender identity. Although gender exclusion was experienced among our sample, there was not a significant difference between women and men in this regard. Further, we found no significant differences based on gender identity for any of our codes. Although women and men certainly have different experiences related to gender identity (and expression), individuals of varying gender identities can be restricted through heteronormative and cisnormative pressures and scripts (Ansara & Berger, 2016; Marchia & Sommer, 2017; Myers & Raymond, 2010). Heteronormativity and cisnormativity may reinforce the belief that negativity is simply part of what it means to be a woman or a man (e.g., one must struggle to “achieve” manhood), rather than perceiving these pressures as forms of structural oppression (Myers & Raymond, 2010; Vandellos & Bosson, 2012). Bioecological systems theory would also support the notion that societal beliefs (e.g., heteronormativity and cisnormativity) are related to institutional rules that “trickle down” to influence peer interactions among youth based on gender identity and expression. For example, compared to heterosexual men and boys, heterosexual women and girls transgress gender norms more often, receive fewer social consequences from doing so, and are more likely to self-identify using labels conveying some level of gender nonconformity (e.g., “tomboy”; Compton & Knox, 2015). If heterosexual women deviate from what might be considered the “ideal feminine woman,” it may be that slight variations still comfortably fit within heteronormative standards (Reynolds & Ringrose, 2008).

Compared with heterosexual women, heterosexual men often feel greater pressure (at multiple ecological systems levels) to perform their masculinity, experience stricter boundaries related to “acceptable” gender-nonconforming behavior, and are often labeled by others in negative ways (e.g., teased, called a “sissy”) if they appear or act in gender-nonconforming ways (Compton & Knox, 2015; McGuffey & Rich, 1999). Although heterosexual women may have more “room” to deviate from gender norms, it is important to acknowledge that for women and men, cisnormativity functions to ensure that deviations from gender norms are still

restricted within socially acceptable boundaries (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Renold & Ringrose, 2008). That is, women can be “tomboys” and exhibit gender-atypical interests (e.g., trucks instead of dolls; Braun & Davidson, 2017; Compton & Knox, 2015) as long as these behaviors still align with a female identity. Women are able to express and have masculine interests, but, like men, are punished if they move beyond cisnormative expectations into gender identities and expressions that are considered to be “abnormal” (Leaper & Brown, 2014; Sullivan et al., 2018).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

To our knowledge, no existing work has simultaneously included analyses regarding retrospective narratives of gender–sexuality FOD, their felt impact, and age of experience. Even so, our study is not without limitations. The inclusion of a more diverse sample of emerging adults, especially in terms of racial/ethnic and gender identity (e.g., transgender, nonbinary) would make these findings more generalizable. Additionally, the majority of our sample was drawn from a university in the U.S. South. Given the wide cultural variability in the United States, it may be that these findings are largely bound to individuals living in the South. Not only may there be variation among different sexual identities but there is likely also wide variation in experiences based on geographic location (Oswald, Cuthbertson, Lazarevic, & Goldberg, 2010). Sexual minority individuals in a progressive metropolitan area in the U.S. North or West Coast may not be as likely to report fear of disclosure of their sexual minority identity as were participants in our sample. Further, because of small subsample sizes, all individuals who identified as sexual minorities were grouped together; future work should recruit larger samples to allow for within-group comparisons among sexual minority identities as well as to increase power for statistical analyses. It may be that individuals with specific sexual minority identities (e.g., queer) have unique experiences, or that some experiences are shared across sexual minority identities (e.g., bisexual, pansexual; Calzo et al., 2011).

A follow-up study with greater precision might also provide stronger evidence of the effects found here. For instance, our initial question is double-barreled in that it specifically notes “teasing and bullying” as an example. There were no significant differences, however, in the teasing and bullying code among our groups and there were a wide variety of codes generated through our content analysis across the sample. Further, though the wording for these items were based on previous research (McClelland et al., 2016; Wright & Wegner, 2012), they did represent single-item measures. Although not without limitation, previous research about the experiences of sexual minority individuals has also relied on single-item measures and produced robust findings (Riskind & Patterson, 2010; Riskind & Tornello, 2017). Furthermore, when conducting content analysis to develop codes for quantitative analysis via an inductive approach, it is not uncommon for final themes representing the data to show little resemblance to the original questions asked (Boyatzis, 1998).

Although there was a considerable gap between the current average age of participants (i.e., emerging adults) and the average age they recalled their first gender–sexuality FOD (i.e., early adolescence), this may be a strength. Asking emerging adults about first gender–sexuality FOD roughly half a decade later may

allow for reflection on how these earlier experiences were impactful over time (Hammack & Toolis, 2014; Russell et al., 2011). Despite nuances in felt impact (i.e., sexual minority women were different from heterosexual men but no other group differences were found), many heterosexual individuals did report gender–sexuality FOD. This suggests the importance of exploring identity-based FOD among majority group populations (e.g., heterosexual, male) as well as among women and sexual minorities (Morgan, 2012). Future research should involve both adolescent samples to examine gender–sexuality FOD at the time they first occur and adult samples to further investigate recalled experiences. Finally, as we focused descriptively on gender–sexuality FOD, future work should examine possible associated outcomes such as identity achievement or psychological adjustment (e.g., depressive symptoms).

Our results provide direction for future studies on gender–sexuality FOD using a multimodal approach. One implication from our findings is that some experiences related to gender–sexuality FOD appear to be shared similar among groups (e.g., puberty, body image). Some codes, however, were not shared; for example, no sexual minority men reported the code, acceptance of society. This points to areas for future investigation—for example, why do heterosexual men report shame and guilt as well as interest in gender-atypical activities, but not fear of disclosure? Studies targeting possible discrepancies in experiences among sexual minority and heterosexual youth related to heteronormativity or self-acceptance may be informative (Friedman & Morgan, 2009; Woodford, Kulick, Sinco, & Hong, 2014). Future work could help to explain why sexual minority individuals may be more likely than heterosexual individuals to perceive heteronormative and cisnormative scripts as damaging.

Implications for Practice

These findings have implications for understanding how emerging adults make meaning from previous experiences, particularly those during early adolescence. Consistent with previous literature about sexual identity development, it may be that gender–sexuality FOD are more likely to be catalysts for introspection among sexual minority (McClelland et al., 2016; Troiden, 1988) than for heterosexual individuals. There are numerous negative psychosocial outcomes associated with codes related to internalized stigma (e.g., fear of disclosure) and victimization for sexual minority youth (Fedewa & Ahn, 2011; Frost, 2017; Mustanski & Liu, 2013; Toomey et al., 2010). Less work, however, has focused on how heterosexual emerging adults understand gender–sexuality FOD (e.g., Morgan, 2012). More research is necessary, but our findings may point to how heterosexual individuals perceive mistreatment of their sexual minority peers. As it appears that heterosexual people view gender–sexuality FOD as normative, it is possible that they would also not easily recognize how FOD may negatively impact their sexual minority peers.

Exploring how individuals diverse in SOGIE describe FOD may provide direction on how best to support youth development. Even though the likelihood of experiencing gender–sexuality FOD differed as a function of sexual identity, heterosexual and sexual minority participants endorsed all 20 units of content indicated in our content analysis about recalled gender–sexuality FOD. Additionally, there were only significant differences based on sexual

identity in seven of our 20 codes. This result suggests that, even though there is wide qualitative variability, the experiences of sexual minority youth may be understandable to and even shared with heterosexual youth (Bosson, Taylor, & Prewitt-Freilino, 2006). Our findings could inform youth interventions in family, school, or community settings that promote positive identity development and foster empathy among all youth. Awareness-building and education could potentially benefit majority group members. For instance, these activities could reduce gender role stress among heterosexual male youth, which could in turn facilitate positive interventions for sexual minority youth (e.g., given that bystander effects are stronger when gender role stress is high; Leone, Parrott, Swartout, & Tharp, 2016). Moreover, such interventions could be effective in uniquely addressing and reducing the impact of gender–sexuality FOD by helping sexual minority youth cope with difficult feelings such as fear of disclosure as well as shame and guilt.

Conclusion

This study extends previous research on how sexual minority individuals come to understand their sexual identity (Calzo et al., 2011; McClelland et al., 2016; Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000) by including open-ended responses on past gender–sexuality FOD with quantitative analyses. A defining trait of sexuality and gender development, regardless of SOGIE, is that identities are increasingly complex, dynamic, and variable in their expression and narrative (Morgan, 2013). By simultaneously comparing how heterosexual and sexual minority emerging adults understand experiences related to their gender or sexual identity, our results extend previous research on retrospective narrative development primarily conducted among sexual minority youth and adults (Calzo et al., 2011; D’Augelli et al., 2008; McClelland et al., 2016; Morgan, 2012). Our findings are novel in demonstrating that a majority of sexual minority and heterosexual emerging adults recalled gender–sexuality FOD that had typically occurred by early adolescence. Although we did find some differences in the likelihood, impact, and nature of the gender–sexuality FOD based on SOGIE, there were no differences in age of experience. Moreover, many qualitative themes surrounding gender–sexuality FOD were shared among participants. Thus, gender–sexuality FOD appear to be common experiences among adolescents regardless of SOGIE. Our findings provide information on what intervention targets, such as addressing gender “typicality,” may be effective in benefiting all youth, as well as those that may uniquely benefit sexual minority youth, such as managing fears related to disclosure.

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Received February 20, 2019

Revision received August 7, 2019

Accepted August 13, 2019 ■