

Model of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Development

Anthony D'Augelli

Assumptions

- Views identity as shaped by interactions with environment – “social construction”
- Development of sexual orientation is a life long process.
- No two people have the same developmental journey – differences based on individual personalities and experiences.
- Individuals will work on multiple processes at one time – not a stage model where one process needs to end before the next may begin.

A New Approach to Non-Heterosexual Identities

Despite their shortcomings, linear stage theories remain the primary sources for most teaching and learning about how non-heterosexual people develop sexual orientation identity. However, theories about how the identities of gay men and lesbians develop are shifting focus. While scientists and practitioners continue to use stage-based models of development, a few theorists have branched off into other, less incremental, ways of understanding how non-heterosexual individuals grow and change. The major forms of this work, published within the past decade or so, examine identity using non-psychosocial models, including life-span approaches, ethnic/subcultural analyses, and typological models. Anthony D'Augelli summarized the need for change as a revision of our operational definition of sexual orientation must occur, allowing for study of the continuities and discontinuities, the flexibilities and cohesiveness, of sexual and affectional feelings across the life span, in diverse contexts, and in relationship to culture and history (1994a, p. 331).

In his work, D'Augelli presented a lifespan model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity development based on his social constructionist view of sexual orientation. The model uses steps instead of stages, indicating an individual's ability to go back and forth between steps. Avoiding the notion of progressive stages, he posited six interactive processes related to lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity formation.

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Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S., & Guido-DiBrito, F. (1998). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 96-98). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Adapted from Materials on www.case.edu/provost/lgbt/pdf/DAugelliModel.pdf, www.units.muohio.edu/saf/glbtdocuments/DAugelliidentitydevelopment.doc, web.missouri.edu/~umcstudentlifelgbt/resources/daugellimodel.pdf

Exiting Heterosexual Identity

There is recognition that a person's sexual orientation is not heterosexual. Recognition that one's feelings and attractions are not heterosexual as well as telling others that one is lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

Developing a Personal Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual Identity Status

A person develops a personal lesbian-gay-bisexual identity status that is their own, a "sense of personal socio-affectual stability that effectively summarizes thoughts, feelings, and desires" (D'Augelli 1994). One must also challenge internalized myths about what it means to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Developing a personal identity status must be done in relationship with others who can confirm ideas about what it means to be non-heterosexual.

Developing a Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual Social Identity

The individual develops and finds more community support and friendships by creating a support network of people who know and accept one's sexual orientation. Determining people's true reactions can take time. Reactions may also change over time and with changing circumstances.

Becoming a Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual Offspring

The individual focuses on coming out with his or her biological family and dealing with the variety of issues and responses that result. D'Augelli noted that establishing a positive relationship with one's parents can take time but is possible with education and patience. This developmental process is particularly troublesome for many student-children who depend on their parents for financial as well as emotional support.

Developing a Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual Intimacy Status

While developing lesbian-gay-bisexual intimacy status, many gay and lesbian couples are invisible, thus making it difficult for gays and lesbians to publicly acknowledge gay and lesbian relationships. Therefore, this is a more complex process than achieving an intimate heterosexual relationship. "The lack of cultural scripts directly applicable to lesbian/gay/bisexual people leads to ambiguity and uncertainty, but it also forces the emergence of personal, couple-specific, and community norms, which should be more personally adaptive" (D'Augelli, 1994).

Entering a Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual Community

A person enters the lesbian-gay-bisexual community and becomes active in political and social settings. Key factors in the formation of identity are personal subjectivities and actions (perceptions and feelings about sexual identity, sexual behaviors, and the meanings attached to them), interactive intimacies (influences of family, peers, intimate partnerships, and the meanings attached to them), and socio-historical connections (social norms, policies, and laws). There are varying degrees of commitment to this stage - some individuals never take this step; others do so only at great personal risk, such as losing their jobs or housing.