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The Need for Liberatory Understandings of Queer and Trans Identity Development: A Critical Review of Identity Development Models

Max Cordes Galbraith

Canonical identity development models applied to queer and trans students' experiences are insufficient, hierarchical, and antithetical to a contemporary understanding of queerness and transness. In this article, I critique four canonical sexual identity and gender & gender identity development models and explore how these models erase queer and trans students' identities and experiences, using my own experiences as a source for critique. Then, I uplift implications for queer and trans-centered theory and for supporting queer and trans students.

Keywords: queer and trans, nonbinary, college student, student development theory, identity development model, sexuality, sexual identity, gender, normativity, oppressive theoretical frameworks

Queer and trans identities resist simple classification and neat descriptions of identity development. The complexity of queerness and transness makes choosing language for, and writing about, queer and trans identities incomplete. Language choices often necessarily flatten queerness and transness. However, the dearth of scholarship centering queer and trans students necessitates increased publication, particularly work by queer and trans scholars (Flint et al., 2019). This need includes studying, critiquing, and writing sexual identity and gender identity development models. My experiences and study of canonical sexual identity and gender identity development models make obvious to me these models were not written and designed with queer and trans people in mind; they erase and restrict my queerness and transness through

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multiple forms of normativity, including heteronormativity, homonormativity (Denton, 2016), cisnormativity, and transnormativity (Bradford & Syed, 2019). My experiences lead me to examine the enforcement of hierarchies in queer and trans communities, hierarchies that prioritize whiteness, wealth, monosexuality, cis identity, binarism, masculinity, monogamy, outness, and other cisheteronormative approaches to being and being in relationships (Denton, 2019). I understand these models to reinforce these hierarchies within the queer and trans community and to give them credence through theoretical support.

In this article, I overview and critique four canonical sexual identity and gender identity development models to name the harm normative identity development models cause queer and trans college students. With my critiques, I aim to invite student development and queer scholars into a unified conversation about the needs of queer and trans college students. I offer critiques that connect heavily to my experiences of feeling erased and demeaned by identity development models with the hope my critiques resonate with other queer, trans nonbinary student affairs scholars. I then consider possible approaches to implementing my critiques into student development theory. My critiques are simultaneously an opportunity for exciting exploration with other queer and trans student affairs scholars and practitioners and a call to action for cis and straight student affairs scholars and practitioners to resist normative understandings of identity that perpetuate harm against queer and trans people.

I understand queer and trans identities to be both separate and impossible to separate. Too often, uncritical and under-critical scholars conflate queerness and transness. This lack of complexity erases how queer people, trans people, and queer and trans people experience oppression differently and eliminates the opportunity to center solidarity among queer and trans people who hold different identities. In an attempt to recognize the interconnectedness of my queer and trans identities and explicitly recognize the connectedness of normativity within queer and trans communities, I chose to critique both sexual identity and gender identity development models in this paper.

I start with my positionality to recognize my privileged and marginalized identities and how my identities and experiences impact my approaches to scholarship, and I name the language choices I made in this paper. To ground the reader and increase this paper's accessibility to readers beyond the field of student development theory, I provide a brief overview of student develop-

ment theory and the distinctions between the waves of student development theory. I provide brief overviews and critiques of four canonical identity development models. I then move to considering possibilities for improving and recreating theory. I overview a recently published nonbinary identity model and use it as a lens to explore four key areas I identify for change, incorporating fluidity, resisting universalizability, incorporating multiple dimensions of development, and forming Critical Trans Theory. I uplift this recent model to center my critiques as one part of the rich historical and contemporary scholarly exploration into the need for queer and trans identity models that uplift and celebrate the experiences of queer and trans folks.

Positionality

I am a white, queer, trans genderqueer nonbinary, able-bodied, middle-class, northern Appalachian, English-speaking U.S and German citizen. In addition to my identities, my relationships and connections to place strongly influence my sense of self and how I navigate the world. I have lived in southwestern PA on stolen Osage land, on Long Island, NY on stolen Rockaway land, in Minneapolis, MN on stolen Wahpékute Dakota land, and in Burlington, VT on stolen and unceded Abenaki land; I also am strongly influenced by my connection to my family in northwestern Germany.

Currently, I am a student pursuing a master's degree in Higher Education and Student Affairs Administration. I work for the Office of Equity, Belonging, and Student Engagement in the College of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences at the University of Vermont, where I advocate for queer and trans students in science, technology, engineering, and math. My experience as an undergraduate computer science student heavily impacts my desire and approach to my work advocating for queer and trans students in STEM, and my experiences and interests as an undergraduate linguistics student inform my attention to language in my scholarship. As a queer and trans person in academia, I have a responsibility to center the experiences, learning, and knowledge of other trans and nonbinary students and scholars and to uplift intersectional, abolitionist trans liberatory thought and frameworks through the privileges and access I gain through my institutional position.

In large part, I credit my exposure to queer and trans identity models as playing a pivotal role in my interest in theory and my decision to join the field of student affairs. One of the first identity development models introduced

to me was Cass's original model in a class for Resident Assistants when I was an undergraduate college student. I remember feeling mixed emotions, excited to have my queerness represented in the classroom but conflicted by the normativity and hierarchism I felt Cass's model contained. I longed for a model written by a queer and trans scholar that I felt adequately represented my queerness and transness.

Language Disruption

I feel a tension between uplifting the language I use to represent and identify myself, particularly queer, trans, and nonbinary, and using the language of scholarship to contextualize my scholarship within a long-standing community of queer and trans scholarship. Throughout this article, I use the term queer and trans people to talk about people with critical understandings of both sexuality and gender who are queer, trans, or queer and trans. I strive for recognizing the radical work of current and past queer and trans scholars while using language I feel describes me and my communities. In this paper, I attempt to balance these needs by naming the language of scholarship and referring to models with the language used by the author but returning to my language of choice outside of these specific instances.

Sexual identity is a scholarly term used to describe a person's understanding of their sexuality. I use this language of scholarship to connect my critique to the existing body of discussion and critique, but I do not use this language to understand myself or when I consider my development as a queer person. The ability to universalize the term sexual identity, unlike queer or straight, allows scholars to harm queer people by both erasing the influence of queerness on understandings of sexual identity and by suggesting sexual identity development is the same for people with normalized sexualities and people with nonnormalized sexualities, namely queer identities. Additionally, I understand the term sexual identity to center sexual orientation over romantic orientation and other forms of relational connection. I believe it is essential to continuously and explicitly recognize much of the insight in sexual identity development models comes from marginalized queer folks' learning and knowledge. While I use the term queer to describe myself and to describe my understandings of queerness, I recognize the challenge of applying the language of queer identity to scholarship written using other identity labels, such as lesbian, gay, homosexual, and bisexual. Additionally, queer holds many meanings; it can be an identity label, a specific community of LGBTQ+

people, an umbrella term for LGBTQ+ people, or a theoretical perspective. In this paper, I primarily use the word queer to reference an understanding of sexuality and identity rooted in nonnormativity. I also use the term queer to indicate that my focus is specifically people who identify as queer and with a critical understanding of nonnormativity, not the LGBTQ+ community at large. Due to the complexity of language used by queer people, when discussing specific scholarship, I often maintain the language the authors used, but outside of my explicit conversation about theory and existing models I often use the terms queer and queer identity.

Similarly, gender and gender identity is a scholarly term used to describe and equate the gendered experiences of cis people and trans people. I instead prefer to explicitly center the experiences of nonbinary trans people. Language options and respectful use are constantly in flux in the trans community. Throughout this paper, I use the terms trans, genderqueer, and nonbinary because they are terms claimed by me and other trans people who I am in community with. However, even authors within the trans community use different terms based on when they wrote their model and their own identities and relationship to language and identity terms. When referring to the models themselves, I use the language of the authors, but elsewhere, I use language that feels more applicable and liberatory to me. Additionally, I believe there is a transphobic dichotomy created between the ideas of gender and gender identity, making it necessary to interrogate whose gender is validated through the assignment of their experience to the category of gender and who is subjugated and deemed deviant through assigning their experiences to the category of gender identity. I use the term gender identity—shortening from gender and gender identity to be more concise—to situate myself within current scholarship, but elsewhere I use the terms trans and nonbinary identity development to center the knowledge and inherent expertise of trans and nonbinary people.

Critiques

In this section, I provide a theoretical overview of student development and describe the three theoretical waves within student development theory. I then overview and critique four second-wave identity development models. In my critiques, I observe how the four models I chose to represent the limitations of second-wave identity development models harm queer and trans people.

Student development theory is the guiding theoretical framework for the field of student affairs and practitioners within the field (Patton, et al., 2016). Student development theory describes how students engaged in postsecondary education grow as a result of their educational experiences through identity development models. Scholars, including Jones and Stewart (2016), separate student development theory into three theoretical waves. The first wave is considered the foundational theories of student development. First wave identity development models focus on psychological and developmental approaches and present development as linear, universalizable, and individualistic (Jones, 2019), allowing the models to be used as tools for assimilation, colonization, and other forces of normativity and oppression (Salis Reyes & Tauala, 2019). The second wave brought models focused on the development of students from marginalized social identities (Jones, 2019); however, the models did not examine dominant identities, reinforcing the normalcy of privileged identities (Jones & Stewart, 2016). Many of the second wave models maintained the first wave's focus on psychological and developmental understandings, which preserved the linear and sequential aspects of first wave theories, implying that once one develops sufficiently, one's development will stop (Jones, 2019). Third-wave theories, the current wave, focus on structural inequality and the connections between structures and individuals (Jones, 2019). The third wave moves beyond the individual and seeks to explicitly name power, privilege, and oppression and strives for liberation and justice. In this paper, I use identity development models to analyze scholars' understanding of queer and trans identity. I critique the limitations of four queer and trans identity development models from the second wave of student development theory, and I emphasize the need for queer and trans identity development models grounded in the critical frameworks of the third wave.

Critical Response to Identity Development Models

In this section, I critique two sexual identity models and two gender & gender identity development models. Cass's (1979) Homosexual Identity Formation Model and D'Augelli's (1994) Life Span Model of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity Development are the two sexual identity models. The two gender & gender identity development models are Bilodeau's (2005) Transgender Identity Development Model and Rankin and Beemyn's (2012) Transgender Identity Milestones. Each of the four identity development models perpetuates normativity, hierarchies within queer and trans communities, and other harm against queer and trans people. In this section, I examine the continuance

of this harm through the four identity development models' assumptions, structure, and conception of gay identities.

Cass's Model

Cass's Homosexual Identity Formation Model, initially published in 1979, is a canonical Sexual Identity Development Model and is still one of the most commonly cited gay and lesbian identity development models (Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014). Cass also published updated models in 1984 and 1996. Cass's first model includes six stages: (1) identity confusion, (2) identity comparison, (3) identity tolerance, (4) identity acceptance, (5) identity pride, and (6) identity synthesis (Cass, 1979). Cass's updated model includes one pre-stage and four stages, combining stages 1 and 2 and stages 5 and 6. The model considers a gay person's identity development from identifying as straight to identifying as gay. Cass's model is notably groundbreaking for its non-pathologizing approach (Patton, et al., 2016). Yet, Cass's stage model is incomplete and gives credence to oppressive understandings of queer identity.

Cass's model applies normative, assimilatory, and hierarchical pressure on understandings of homosexual identity development, which continues to harm gay and queer people. The model is a linear stage model, meaning it assumes people move from one stage to the next and can only be in one stage at a time. A linear understanding of identity does not fit with understandings of queerness as constantly in flux and being less restrictive. Cass's model explores entering into the queer community and no longer identifying as straight, but it does not explore how one's understanding of their queer identity can change. The model also suggests there is an endpoint to development instead of understanding queerness as an identity that constantly evolves throughout one's life (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). While Cass's model represents exploring this fluidity and instability as an early, underdeveloped stage, instability is a foundational and continuous aspect of queerness (Denton, 2016). Change is inherent to queerness, which is flattened by Cass's model.

Cass's model does not adequately recognize the political implications of queer identity, which deradicalizes, assimilates, and norms queerness. The initial model removes activism and resistance to homonormativity from the final stage of the model, which positions resistance of assimilation and queer antagonism and violence as less mature and developed than assimilation and abandonment of radical resistance. This view perpetuates a queer antagonistic

society and the idea of heterosexuality as the default (Denton, 2016). It also neglects to explore sustained activism in the queer community by positioning queer activism as something only engaged in by people who have not fully developed their queer identity. Additionally, the model's emphasis on deradicalization excludes people who are motivated by anger due to violence against queer people from the final stage of development. The model also does not recognize the political and safety implications of coming out. Kenneady and Oswalt (2014) describe a person's decision to come out as automatic and "a nonissue" (p. 232) once they have reached Cass's final developmental stage. To achieve this developmental ideal, individual queer people would need to completely disregard the risks of coming out or queerness would need to promote its own palatability through hetero- and homonormativity. Cass's Homosexual Identity Formation Model incorrectly and violently positions queerness, nonnormativity, resistance, and commitment to liberation as underdeveloped and not integrated, which perpetuates assimilation and homonormativity. Cass's model harms queer people by not recognizing or celebrating the fluidity and political nature of queerness and by not resisting assimilation and normativity.

D'Augelli's Model

D'Augelli's Model of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity Development, published in 1994, is a lifespan model designed to challenge the essentialism of linear identity development models and consider the impact of the social construction of identities (Patton, et al., 2016). D'Augelli's model includes six stages: (1) exiting heterosexual identity, (2) developing a personal lesbian-gay-bisexual identity status, (3) developing a lesbian-gay-bisexual social identity, (4) becoming a lesbian-gay-bisexual offspring, (5) developing a lesbian-gay-bisexual intimacy status, and (6) entering a lesbian-gay-bisexual community (D'Augelli, 1994). Like Cass's model, this model considers LGB identity development from not yet recognizing one's queerness to identifying as an LGB person. D'Augelli notably expanded queer scholarship by recognizing structural barriers and queer antagonism in his model (Patton, et al., 2016). Even so, D'Augelli's model describes queerness in ways that encourage gate-keeping and oppression.

Despite D'Augelli's goal of a lifespan model being more inclusive, it perpetuates many of the oppressive expectations found in stage models. D'Augelli attempted to design a more universalizable model for lesbian, gay, and bi-

sexual people but still created a binary model that only acknowledges women and men, suggesting lesbian, gay, and bisexual people cannot be nonbinary and cannot be attracted to nonbinary people. D'Augelli's model also essentializes many of the assumptions of stage models, namely coming out, access to LGB community, and engagement in romantic and sexual relationships. The model, similarly to Cass's model, positions coming out as necessary to accomplish full LGB identity development, and even requires a person to come out to enter the first stage of development (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996), instead of recognizing how LGB identity development differs for people who are out to varying extents (e.g., recently came out to a few people, out to all loved ones, has not come out to anyone for a long time, was recently outed). This requirement ignores that coming out can be a never-ending process and that some people never come out, creating a hierarchy within the queer community between people who have come out and those who have not. Exploration of how coming out impacts identity development is necessary, and it must be done in a way that recognizes that a person's understanding of their own identity regardless of whether or not they have come out; that coming out is not a set process, it is different for everyone and the extent to which a person is out is constantly changing; and that people potentially face danger and violence when coming out. Additionally, the model considers it critical to join LGB community, which creates a hierarchy between queer people who have access to queer community and those who do not (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). It is important to investigate how this hierarchy can lead to a prioritization of urban centers over rural areas because urban areas often have larger queer populations. The model also claims involvement in romantic and sexual relationships is essential to developing a queer identity, which may exclude asexual and aromantic people. Additionally, the hyperfocus on romantic and sexual relationships restricts queerness to a relational identity instead of recognizing other identity dimensions, including queerness as an individual, communal, and political identity. D'Augelli's model's attempts to universalize and reject the violence and essentialism of stage models do not go far enough, causing D'Augelli's model to perpetuate hierarchism within the queer community and among queer identities.

Bilodeau's Model

Bilodeau's Transgender Identity Development Model, published in 2005, is a model based on D'Augelli's Lifespan Model of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity Development. Bilodeau's model includes six stages: (1) exiting a traditionally gendered identity, (2) developing a personal transgender identity, (3) developing a transgender social identity, (4) becoming a transgender offspring,

(5) developing a transgender intimacy status, and (6) entering a transgender community (Bilodeau, 2005). The model describes a trans person's development from not recognizing their trans identity to identifying as a trans person. Bilodeau has significantly increased scholarship centering trans participants and non-pathologizing approaches to trans identity development. However, Bilodeau's model restricts trans identity by inadequately interrogating normative expectations of trans people's experiences and expressions.

Bilodeau's model perpetuates many of my concerns with D'Augelli's model, including its necessitating of transphobia and essentializing of coming out, accessing trans community, and engaging in romantic and sexual relationships. The model requires the trans person to come out to others in the first stage. This requirement does not consider the experiences of trans and nonbinary people who never come out and delegitimizes their understanding of their identity. Additionally, it does not adequately wrestle with the potentially harmful implications of coming out or the effects of positioning coming out as a choice for folks who have been outed, especially early in their experiences of coming out. I am also concerned by the model's focus on "understanding identity through challenging transphobia." (Bilodeau, 2005, p. 32) By making challenging transphobia part of transgender identity development, it essentializes transphobia and trans antagonism for the existence of trans identity. This definition is oppressive and rooted in cisnormativity through a dependence on violence to form identity. Additionally, it perpetuates a conflation of activism and identity (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996) by requiring trans people to continuously engage in activism without adequately recognizing the labor and the harm of the continual need to advocate for yourself and your communities. Instead of radically centering trans and nonbinary people's liberation, Bilodeau's model recenters cisnormativity, even in its attempts to recognize trans antagonism. This recentering of cisnormativity reinforces the obstacles trans and nonbinary people experience in defining their identities without relying on cis identity and cisnormativity. The model continues to harm trans people by neglecting their experiences in order to conform to transnormative narratives in scholarship. Bilodeau's model does not go far enough to consider the experiences of trans people who are less visible and intentionally not recognized in scholarship.

Rankin and Beemyn's Model

Rankin and Beemyn's Transgender Identity Milestones, published in 2012, are eight milestones Rankin and Beemyn identified in their study participants.

The milestones follow trans and nonbinary people's development from initially feeling different because of their gender to an integrated understanding of their trans identity. The milestones are (1) feeling gender different from a young age; (2) seeking to present as a gender different from the one assigned to them at birth; (3) repressing or hiding their identity in the face of hostility and/or isolation; (4) initially misidentifying their identity; (5) learning about and meeting other trans people; (6) changing their outward appearance in order to look more like their self-image; (7) establishing new relationships with family, partners, friends, and coworkers; and (8) developing a sense of wholeness within a gender normative society (Rankin & Beemyn, 2012). Rankin and Beemyn also identified four gender groups and specified differences in the milestones for each group. Rankin and Beemyn made significant contributions to queer and trans student scholarship and intentionally represented genderqueer people in their scholarship. However, their model did not sufficiently address normativity and binarism within the trans community.

Rankin and Beemyn's milestones reinforce a transnormative narrative about the experiences and expressions of trans and nonbinary people. The first milestone perpetuates the idea all trans and nonbinary people understand their gender variance at a young age. In their distinctions between gender groups, Rankin and Beemyn's milestones also medicalize trans identity. The milestones for trans men require taking hormones and pursuing top surgery (Rankin & Beemyn, 2012). Trans women are required to take hormones but considered less likely to have surgery. For genderqueer people, medical interventions are not even considered. The variation of medical requirements and assumed access to medical care between gender groups medicalizes trans and nonbinary identity and enforces medicalized hierarchies (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). It delegitimizes trans women and men who do not want medical interventions or who cannot access them, whether because of financial cost, regional accessibility, medical racism, ableism, fatphobia, or other medicalized oppression. It also discounts nonbinary people who pursue medical interventions. The model also suggests trans men are normally able to look like men, but trans women often are not able to look like women. This claim suggests that trans women are not actually women and trans men are not actually men. While it is essential to recognize the danger of being visibly trans, and the intersection for many trans women of being visibly femme, scholars need to name this as oppression instead of conforming to normative, trans-exclusionary understandings of what gender looks like. Trans identity development models need to resist medicalization and transnormativity to adequately represent trans and nonbinary identities.

Possibilities

In this section, I explore possibilities for integrating my critiques into student development theory. My understanding of what is possible is deeply grounded in queer theory's understanding of queerness and transness as unstable, fluid, nonnormative, and non-hierarchical (Denton, 2019) and in critical feminist theories' gender analysis and commitment to resisting essentialism and challenging subordination (Robbins, 2019). I identify three imperative changes to identity development models: the need for greater fluidity within identity development models, the need for decentering normative assumptions of universalizability, and the need to center multiple dimensions of development. In each area, I offer possibilities for change and reference Dolan and Garvey's (2021) Emergent Model for Nonbinary Identity Development as a tool for grounding my possibilities in practical application. Then, I consider the need for expanding critical theories to include a new perspective, Critical Trans Theory. Dolan and Garvey's model is a nested representation of growth model with four key concepts: (1) embracing fluidity and ambiguity; (2) identity exploration; (3) witnessing and mirroring; and (4) world-making: relationality and kinship. They intentionally center nonbinary students with a model that considers individual, interpersonal, and structural identity development.

Fluidity

Fluidity must be recognized within the structure of identity development models and within the understanding of identities themselves. When writing models, scholars must explicitly construct models designed with a nonlinear lens to recognize an individual's potential to approach development in ways that do not align with linear stages or assumed finite start and endpoints. Dolan and Garvey (2021) explicitly name in their model, "Students may occupy more than one stage at a time, and movement in any direction through model does not hold negative or positive value." (p. 22) Dolan and Garvey's move away from hierarchical stages is a radical shift from the hierarchism of second-wave models. This shift needs to be prioritized in future queer and trans identity development models. Scholars must center individuals' agency and encourage individuals to explore their identity through approaches that feel most accessible instead of through prescriptive and restrictive development models. When applying theoretical models, student affairs practitioners need to assess a model's capacity for centering and developing a student's sense of agency and for creating space for a student to embrace fluidity. Practitioners must take particular care to encourage student development without

implying the student is underdeveloped or making the student feel infantilized or naive. By embracing the fluidity of queer and trans identities, scholars and practitioners can better support students by recognizing their experiences and uplifting their self-knowledge and capacity for growth.

Resisting Universalizability

To resist normativity and assimilatory pressures, scholars writing queer and trans identity development models must obstruct attempts to universalize identity development models and confront normative forces, including heteronormativity, homonormativity, cisnormativity, transnormativity, ableism, whiteness, racism, colonialism, and Eurocentrism, among others. Instead, scholars must center multiply marginalized queer and trans people in their scholarship through their study participants, scholarly goals, and research interests. When creating identity development models focused on sexuality and gender, scholars must center the experiences and expertise of queer and trans people, including through the language they use and the models they design. Scholars must stop claiming identity models can be validated when their only study participants are white gay cis men (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). Additionally, as Dolan and Garvey (2021) address, scholars must refrain from universalizing experiences within queer and trans communities; scholars must take particular care to not generalize the experiences of cisgender queer people and binary trans people. Instead, Dolan and Garvey focus on nonbinary trans people. Recognizing that many models center normativity and resisting the universalization of identity development models is a powerful and necessary opportunity to resist the harm queer and trans people experience from identity development models.

Multiple Dimensions of Development

Identity development models need to center multiple dimensions of development, not only internal individual development. I consider three dimensions of identity development: individual, communal, and structural (Dolan & Garvey, 2021). When considering both queer and trans identities, models must recognize the importance of individual development instead of depicting queer and trans identities as only identities experienced relationally. While I resist models that conflate individual and community involvement, I recognize that individual identity development is not the only potential dimension for identity development (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). In addition to individual development, models must consider communal development, such as Dolan and Garvey's (2021) concepts

of witnessing and mirroring and of kinship and relationality. These concepts consider development when others recognize an individual's nonbinary identity and when an individual forms community with other nonbinary people. A third needed dimension of development is structural. Models must explicitly recognize how queer and trans antagonism and violence affect queer and trans people's identity development. In addition to broad consideration, scholars need to consider how different forms of antagonism and violence varyingly impact development. Forms of antagonism and violence to consider are targeted violence, witnessing violence against others in your communities, and the use of language and spaces that exclude queer and trans people. Considering individual development embraces individual agency, examining communal development acknowledges the influence of community and relationships, and scrutinizing structural development recognizes the impacts of structural oppression and queer and trans antagonism. By recognizing the multiple dimensions of identity development within one model, models cause less harm to queer and trans people by better recognizing the complexities of queer and trans identities.

Forming Critical Trans Theory

My research highlights the limited centering of trans and nonbinary people in both research and theoretical perspectives and the limitations of not having a critical framework designed to interrogate and critique the systems of power and oppression specific to transness. These limitations lead me to call on trans and nonbinary scholars and critical scholars centering the experiences of trans and nonbinary people to expand upon current critical perspectives to form Critical Trans Theory. While I deeply value and ground myself in FemCrit's recognition of the importance of gender and prioritization of critiquing, disrupting, and dismantling the patriarchy, I hope and call for an additional critical theoretical perspective that foregrounds critiquing, disrupting, and dismantling binarism. This paper centers my belief in the power of critique in resisting oppressive systems, which is why I call for the forming of a Critical Trans framework as a possibility to address the binarism and other harms perpetrated against queer and trans people by identity development models.

Conclusion

Canonical sexual identity and gender identity development models harm queer and trans students by not adequately recognizing the complexities

of queer and trans identities. All four identity development models, Cass's Homosexual Identity Formation Model; D'Augelli's Model of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity Development; Bilodeau's Transgender Identity Development Model; and Rankin and Beemyn's Transgender Identity Milestones, perpetuated harmful understandings and assumptions of queer and trans identities and identity development. My work to highlight binarism, normativity, hierarchism, essentialism, and other forms of oppression leads to my call for developing a new theoretical perspective, Critical Trans Theory, and three fundamental changes to identity development models, the needs for greater fluidity within the models, for decentering normative assumptions of universalizability, and for centering multiple dimensions of development. By implementing these possibilities, student affairs scholars and practitioners have the opportunity to radically center and support queer and trans folks in their theory, practice, and praxis and to resist the historically normative, oppressive structures within higher education and student affairs that limit queer and trans liberation.

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