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Abstract

Although it is commonly acknowledged that homophobia and racial marginalization influence queer African American male youth, there is very little research to back up this belief. Due to the paucity of information for clinicians, families, and communities on the relational dynamics of queer African American male youth and their parents, queer African American male youth were interviewed to explore the ways in which they understand their experience of the disclosure process, paying particular attention to the interface between race and sexual orientation and relational dynamics. This exploratory, qualitative study examined data gathered in interviews with individual male youth that identified themselves as African American and queer. Eleven participants were interviewed in semi-structured interviews for the purpose of exploring participant's experience of the disclosure process with specific emphasis on their racial identity. Data analysis revealed essential structures which underlay the interpersonal and intrapersonal disclosure experience. In addition, a preliminary stage model, including pre-disclosure, disclosure and experience after disclosure was found. Implications for clinicians working with queer, African American male youth and their families are discussed as are suggestions for future research.

Growing Up Gay in Black America:
An exploration of the coming out process of Queer African American Youth

By

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Dissertation
Submitted in partial fulfill of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Marriage and Family Therapy

Syracuse University
December 2011

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Homophobia and heterosexism have adverse effects on all members of our society. Rothenberg (2001) suggested that heterosexism, racism, sexism, and class privilege are systems of advantage that provide those with the "right" sexual orientation, race, gender, and class with opportunities and rewards that are unavailable to other individuals and groups in society. Homophobia and heterosexism come in various forms from overt discrimination to more subtle forms, which include denial that they exist.

Moreover, Font (1997) suggested that the effects of homophobia and heterosexism are more pronounced for marginalized communities. When that marginalization is based both on race and sexual orientation, the effects may be devastating. Akerlund & Cheung (2000) noted that queer people of color face unique and complex challenges --- integrating two marginalized identities in a society that does not fully accept either one. For example, in some African American communities, homophobia and heterosexism are taught openly from the pulpits of churches while parents reinforce those messages through their daily overt and covert interactions with their children. These messages shape and mold the views of both queer and non-queer youth planting seeds of internalized insecurities and self-hatred in all African American youth regardless of their sexual orientation (Lehoczky, 2005). Lehoczky (2005) further found that these messages directly increase the risk for African American queer youth for devastating problems such as drug usage, family alienation, homelessness, and suicide.

The effects of homophobia and heterosexism are not limited to youth themselves, but permeate familial relationships as well. In the African American community, where homophobia is so omnipresent, many youth may be less likely to come out to family members and friends, for fear of further alienation, leaving them isolated and distraught. D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks (2005, p. 474) reported, "Adolescents whose families were unaware of their sexual orientation reported more fear of verbal and physical abuse from families than adolescents whose families knew." The combination of homophobic beliefs along with issues of racial marginalization may be a deadly blend, and may perpetuate internalized self-hatred for queer, African Americans and a lack of support from those they love.

Research Statement

The main research question for this study was how queer African American male youth understand their experience of the coming out process paying particular attention to the impact on their relationship with their parents and on the interface between race and sexual orientation. The study is interested in how these multiple identities affect one another, however focusing on homophobia and heterosexism in the African American community. I used interviews with queer, African American male youth to explore their disclosure process and how this process affected their relationships with their parents. Further, I explored the impact that homophobia and heterosexism may have on the coming out process and on the relationship between African American male youth and their parents.

Based on the historical context of oppression and subjugation of the queer individuals in our society, along with the residual effects of slavery on African Americans, I chose a theoretic perspective that is able to honor and hold how the effects of their collective experience may influence their identities. This research was conceived and evaluated through the theoretical framework of the Multicultural Perspective.

The Multicultural Perspective

The Multicultural Perspective (MCP) (Hardy and Laszloffy, 1992) is a theoretical framework which values contextual differences in relational dynamics. Hardy and Laszloffy believe that racism, sexism, homophobia, among others are intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural systems of privilege and subjugation that affect familial systems. This perspective values seeing, holding, and challenging the complexities of different contextual variables such as: race, gender, sexual orientation, age, class, and ability. The MCP is the lens through which I see the world and relationships in relation to these contextual differences. It emphasizes the importance of challenging privileged positions in society. Rothenberg (2001) noted that the system of oppressive practices, such as, racism, sexism, and heterosexism, are communicated in everyday life. They are mirrored in the discriminatory attitudes that individuals carry into work and the community. These privileged positions in society evoke themselves as righteous stances from water cooler conversations to all forms of media outlets. In addition, the longevity and institutionalized value placed on injustice is so salient in our culture that it has also infused its way into discriminatory practices and policies of local and national government.

The totality of this institutionalized system of oppression is so omnipresent that it profoundly affects mental health in individuals and in family relationships. However mental health fields like Marriage and Family Therapy have also been hamstrung by the very same prejudice and bias, interrupting the field's ability to intervene effectively. Historically, the field of Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) paid little to no attention to issues of cultural differences (McGoldrick, 1998). Like other societal institutions, family therapy has been structured in ways that support the dominant value system, by keeping invisible certain organizing principles of our lives, including race, gender, and sexual orientation (McGoldrick, 1998; Hardy and Laszloffy, 1992).

For instance, Hardy (1989) stated that as recently as the late 80's and early 90's race, culture, and ethnicity had not been fully incorporated into the mainstream of family therapy literature. Moreover, it was commonplace for family therapists to commence, maintain, and terminate treatment without having the slightest appreciation, knowledge, or respect for the larger contextual issues that subsequently impact treatment. Through his contextual understanding of multiculturalism, Hardy (1989) suggested that it was important for the next generation of family therapists to be prepared clinically, theoretically, and experientially, to recognize and accept the multitudinous ways in which minority families specifically, and families in general, are like all other families, like some other families, but like no other family.

MCP theorists suggest that on occasion, these oppressive practices work in isolation from each other, but most often they operate in combination, creating a system of advantage and disadvantage that enhances the life chances of some while limiting the life chances of others (Rothenberg, 2001). Because of the institutional systems of

privilege, individuals' thoughts, feelings and behavior correspond to the positions in which they find themselves located. These positions of privilege shape our views of reality and influence our beliefs about self and others.

Hardy and Laszloffy (2005) suggest that those who have multiple positions of powerlessness and lack of privilege experience oppression from multiple sources. For example, coming out and having to face discrimination from one's own family and racial group is threatening for a queer person of color, who is already facing racial discrimination (Laird, 1996; Morales, 1996). "Since the family and/or the community may be the most crucial source of support in living within a hostile dominant culture, fears about loss of family support may seem to some too high a price to pay for coming out" (Johnson & Keren, 1998, p. 322). Laird & Green (1996) stated that for many Latino gay men, disclosure to family members about their sexual orientation create anxiety for reasons related to Latino cultural values, because it goes against the cultural expectation of machismo. The subjugation of a population by other oppressed people is rooted in institutionalized oppression.

The MCP encourages critical consciousness whereby we challenge the cultural realities that organize our worldview. For example, Hardy and Laszloffy (1992) discussed the importance of recognizing the ways in which race and racism shape reality and all positions of power and powerlessness shape our individual perspectives. A culturally competent family therapist must discover ways to raise cultural awareness and increase cultural sensitivity. While awareness involves gaining knowledge of various cultural groups, sensitivity involves having experiences that challenge individuals to explore their personal cultural issues (Hardy and Laszloffy, 1995). For example, nearly

all African Americans are impacted by the psychological effects of racial oppression. Rage is a natural and inevitable response to the painful degradation of racial oppression; rage is a critical issue in the lives of African Americans and must be explored within the context of therapy (Hardy and Laszloffy, 1995).

From this MCP worldview, I, as an African American male must hold the complexity of both my subjugated (African American) part as well as my privileged (male) part, and nurture and challenge both parts as I continue to develop my personhood.

In addition, this perspective highlights how context relates to who an individual is, how they see the world, and how they are in relation to others. As stated earlier, one of the great gifts of the Multicultural Perspective is that it allows space to deal with and challenge one's own context. Laird (1998) added,

> ". . . if we do not learn about our own cultural selves and that culture of the other, it will be difficult to move beyond our own cultural lenses and biases when we encounter practices that we do not understand or find distasteful; we will not be able to ask the questions that help surface subtle ethnic, gender, or sexuality meanings; and we may not see or hear such meanings when they are right there in front of us. Our own cultural narratives help us to organize our thinking and anchor our lives, but they can also blind us to the familiar and unrecognizable and they can foster injustices" (p. 22).

The Multicultural Perspective allows us the opportunity to challenge our own context, as well as challenge the context of institutionalized oppression to create a greater human connection in the world.

While the MFT field has embraced some cultural diversity in its literature, research, and practice, it must continue to challenge its beliefs regarding issues of homosexuality. It is the researcher's hope that this research adds to the multicultural perspective which is gaining ground in the field of MFT. I hope this research contributes

to the process of making visible the oppressive practices which invariably continue to negatively impact the field, our clients, our families, and ourselves.

Definition of Terms

In this research, I utilize my own definition of terms in combination with those of other researchers.

1. Homosexuality: Jagose (1996) defined homosexuality as a term used to describe an individual's sexual attraction for someone of the same gender. The researcher added that it is the emotional, sexual, and/or physical attraction to someone of the same gender.
2. Homophobia: Lock & Kleis (1998) indicated that homophobia is characterized by negative attitudes toward homosexual people. In addition, it is the disdain, and/or fear of individuals who identify themselves as homosexual, gay, bisexual, and/or queer.
3. Heterosexism: Flowers & Buston (2001) described heterosexism as the attitude of privileging heterosexuality over homosexuality. They further suggested that heterosexism is less visible than homophobia. In addition, I suggest that heterosexism is the belief that the values, beliefs, and/or rituals of heterosexuality are more valuable than those of homosexuality.
4. Queer: Stone Fish & Harvey (2005) indicated that they use the term queer as opposed to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered because it is a more inclusive term. In this study, it is used as an inclusive term, as well as a term of empowerment for those who identify themselves as queer.

Even though I am using it as an inclusive and referenced term for empowerment, I understand its derogatory historical meaning. Historically, queer has been a term used to objectify, demean, and disempower individuals with same sex attractions. In addition, even though I am utilizing the term queer, that does not mean that participants in this study would identify themselves as queer. So, although I chose to use the term "queer" to describe and identify individuals and the literature on minority sexual identity, I respect and honor each individual's right to identify him/herself.

5. Male: Based on cultural identities of males, for this research male is defined as an individual that has biological male sexual organs and identifies himself as such. I have chosen to focus on male gender identity, to allow myself the opportunity to deeply research one particular gender and focus on that gender and the dynamics that occur in parent/male child relationships.

6. Youth: Stone Fish & Harvey (2005) noted that the word youth is preferred when discussing the coming out process because the process of sexual orientation development is longer than the period of adolescence. In addition, (Savin-Williams, 2001) added that youth come out to parents, on the average, between the ages of 18 and 19. For the purposes of this study, I use the term, "youth" to define young men between the ages of 18-22 who are reflecting on their youth.

7. Coming Out: Beeler & DiProva (1999) defined coming out as the disclosure of one's same sex sexual orientation to others. They added that it is considered to be a crucial task in establishing a gay or lesbian identity. Moreover, I add that the coming out process is the progression by which an individual openly declares his queerness, which was once kept hidden.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it explores a complex psychological and systemic process that has not yet been fully explored in the research literature. It expands and brings depth to the existing research on queer people of color, particularly queer youth of color. In this study, I examine the ways in which queer, African American male youth's process of coming out to their parents is developed and influenced by culture. I explore the ways in which race and sexual orientation intersect. I also investigate the ways in which being African American and queer coexist in the coming out process. Moreover, I explore the participants' childhood experiences of homophobia and heterosexism to learn how these experiences influenced their beliefs about sexual orientation.

In addition, I sought to create a context in which queer, African American male youth were encouraged to discuss the complexities of their experiences as members of multiple marginalized communities. In so doing, my hope is that this research study can provide clinicians with a better understanding of the complexity of the experiences of queer African American male youth and their families. This information has the potential

to better prepare family therapists to use more effective culturally competent interventions to better support queer youth and their families.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature review outlines past research and theoretical articles that are related to major themes in this research. It illustrates themes in the areas of homophobia and heterosexism, cultural victimization, the coming out process, intersection between race and sexual orientation, and African American culture and homophobia. In so doing, I lay out the initial framework for understanding the queer, African American youth experience and their parental relationships.

Heterosexism and Homophobia

Heterosexism

Heterosexism is a part of the cancerous disease of oppression. It is defined as the assumption that all people are or should be heterosexual or have heterosexual attraction. It is the belief in the superiority of heterosexuality and the inferiority of homosexuality (Kort 2008). It has been defined as a world-view, a value-system that rewards heterosexuality, assumes it as the only apposite manifestation of love and sexuality, while lessening the worth of homosexuality (Herek, 1984). In addition, Perez (2005) remarked that members of the queer community are viewed through the lens of heterosexism as violators of societal gender norms. Case in point, queer men are often loathed based on the fact that they are considered “feminized” and violate the rules of masculinity by being attracted to other men.

Heterosexism in our society is well documented. Due to homophobic ideology and heterosexist beliefs, some queer youth are thrown out of their homes after telling their parents they are queer, and some states do not allow queer men to adopt children (Perez, 2005). In addition, heterosexism is illustrated in more subtle ways such as the exclusion of queer couples in film, television programming and advertisements, as well as an under-representation of queer events and activities. Perez (2005) indicated that other examples of heterosexism in the U.S. include widespread lack of legal protection from anti-queer discrimination in employment, along with housing and social services. It also appears in the "don't ask, don't tell policy that was only recently overturned in our armed forces. In addition, hostility toward committed queer couples is dramatized by passage of federal and state laws against same-sex marriage.

Peel (2001) wrote that heterosexism shifts the emphasis from individuals' attitudes, to include social customs and institutions as part of the problem. Heterosexism is so pervasive that its principles influence not only individual beliefs and institutional values, but cultural notions and intrapersonal thinking as well.

For instance, rituals and other specific customs are significant because they link private and public meanings, and demonstrate an acceptance and/or rejection of social convention (Roberts, 1988). Our society grants heterosexual marriages and weddings, which link the personal decision to marry with heterosexual privilege carrying profound social, legal, financial, and religious rights. These rights are privileges that are not available to queer people in our society (Oswald, 2000). "In addition, within current public discourse and policy, privilege linked to the union of one man and one woman is bolstered by defining gay individuals as a threat to family life based in heterosexual

marriage (e.g., Federal Defense of Marriage Act, 1996). Thus, weddings not only celebrate heterosexuality, they also symbolize the multiple social benefits surrounding marriage that are denied to Gay people" (Oswald, 2000, p. 350).

Homophobia

Out of heterosexism, evolves another pervasive form of oppression identified as homophobia, which is more overt and visible than heterosexism. It is the fear of individuals who identify themselves as homosexual, gay, bisexual, lesbian, transgendered, and/or queer.

> "'Homophobia is the feeling(s) of fear, hatred, and disgust about attraction or love for members of one's own sex.' It is prejudice based on the belief that lesbians and gays are immoral, sick, sinful, or somehow inferior to heterosexuals. It results in fear of associating with lesbians and gays in close proximity --- physically, mentally, and/or emotionally --- lest one be perceived as lesbian or gay, and fear of venturing beyond 'accepted' gender role behavior" (Rotheram-Borus, Reid, & Rosario, 1994).

Moreover, Perez (2005) noted that homophobia is the fear of homosexuality, queer men, lifestyles and culture, and a prejudice against queer people. For instance, "The use of the words 'faggot,' 'sissy' and 'gay,' as an insult or to express dissatisfaction with a personal's behavior is common at school campuses, football fields and even workplaces" (Perez, 2005, p. 26).

Homophobia is the fear and disdain for individuals who identify themselves as gay or lesbian. According to Sprecher and McKinney (1993) homophobia begets negative and/or fearful attitudes about homosexual people or homosexuality. Lock and Kleis (1998) said that homophobia is characterized by negative attitudes toward homosexuals, while Richmond and McKenna (1998) stated that it is a dislike or distrust

of homosexuals' lifestyles based on personal, social, institutional or cultural beliefs (Hodges and Parkes, 2005).

Queer people are profoundly impacted by heterosexism and homophobia expressed at all levels of culture in our society. Unlike other forms of oppression, homophobia is more accepted, based on social, legal, financial, and religious ideologies. Preferential treatment of heterosexual people is not only mandated by law, it is upheld by many cultural, governmental, and religious institutions (Perez, 2005). It is vital to understand the complex dimensions of heterosexism and homophobia because these dynamics are in flux, and profoundly affect the lives of queer people and their loved ones (Walls, 2008).

Levels of Homophobia and Heterosexism

In order to better understand homophobia and heterosexism, one must first comprehend the various levels of influence. These levels of influence include the intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural.

Intrapersonal Level

. The intrapersonal level of homophobia and heterosexism occurs when queer people internalize homophobic, beliefs that their sexual orientation is inferior and wrong. This internalization stems from not being able to tolerate one's own queerness. Perez (2005) remarked that internalized oppression in the queer community is rooted in its members buying into the disempowering messages about who they are as individuals and as a group. Influenced by homophobia and heterosexism some queer people accept, at an unconscious or conscious level, the idea that they are less than heterosexuals. In

addition, Hodges and Parkes (2005) described internalized homophobia as the self-loathing or denial of one's own sexual orientation as part of an identity struggle linked with an affirmation of queer identity more commonly referred to as coming out.

For example, Neisen (1993) noted that, the impact of heterosexism and homophobia on queer people hampers individual and emotional growth, and often produces a sense of internalized shame. Oppression adds to the shame as many queer individuals learn at an early age to devalue self and place a superior value on heterosexual persons.

The intrapersonal level is the level in which queer people internalize homophobic beliefs. This internalization stems from not being able to tolerate one's own queerness within oneself. Many queer people go to extremes to deny their sexual orientation. They may pretend to themselves and to others that they are straight, and some attempt counseling to take away their emotional, sexual, and physical attractions. Because of internalized homophobia, a queer person feels damaged, flawed, and shamed. Shame is a major component in the intrapersonal level (Rotheram-Borus, Reid, & Rosario, 1994).

Interpersonal Level

The interpersonal level of homophobia and heterosexism is characterized by individual acts of discrimination and prejudice. Hodges and Parkes (2005) suggested that homophobia on an interpersonal level is the prejudicial attitude that individuals have towards queer people, ranging from discomfort to outright hatred, as experienced on a personal level by queer individuals.

Hodges and Parkes (2005) indicated that there are numerous examples of interpersonal homophobia and heterosexism illustrated in the literature, ranging from

subtle heterosexist remarks, to verbal and physical abuse, and to murder. Perez (2005) provided an example of subtle heterosexism when she wrote, "My colleague Alma Soongie Beck recently had a ceremony with her partner and they exchanged traditional looking rings. When she asked a man at a deli for a chicken sandwich with no onions, he noticed her ring and said. 'Oh, what are you worried about. You already have a man.'" (p. 26)

Institutional Level

The institutional level of homophobia and heterosexism is based on rules and regulations by governmental and other organized establishments that consciously or unconsciously perpetuate the oppression and subjugation of queer people. It includes written policies, laws, and codes of conduct that are based on principal values and systems that consciously or unconsciously exclude members of the queer community.

The Medical and Mental Health Community further institutionalized a pathology view of homosexuality by including it as diagnosable mental illness until 1973. The American Psychiatric Association finally removed it. The World Health Organization followed suit and removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses in 1981. It is hard to discern how categorizing homosexuality as a mental illness for so long has affected public opinion but one assumes that it had a powerful effect. Only recently has there been a shift in public opinion of same-sex marriage. In the most recent Gallup Poll conducted in 2011 which surveyed public opinion of same-sex marriage, indicated that 53% of Americans believe same-sex marriage should be legalized (Gallup.com).

Cultural Level

The cultural level of homophobia and heterosexism refers to systemic pressure within our society and communities that intentionally or unintentionally continues the oppression and subjugation of queer people. The cultural level of homophobia and heterosexism is crystallized in its generational effects on a people. These cultural beliefs are primarily developed through community, religious and familial relationships, along with social norms. The cultural level is based on cultural norms and dominant cultural values, which is subjective and dictates what is acceptable, beautiful, and appreciated (Perez. 2005; Ungar, 2004).

Perez (2005) remarked that for queer people of color, the daily targeting by individuals with pro-racist ideology in society-at-large makes them particularly vulnerable and increases their need to be accepted and loved by their own racial and ethnic communities. When queer people of color are rejected by their own communities, they experience a double exclusion. They feel they are not a part of the queer community, which is primarily white, nor do they fit into heterosexual communities of color. These dynamics are a psychological, emotional and social mountain that queer people of color must learn how to continuously climb (Perez, 2005). In addition, the queer community may symbolize another context of subjugation for queer people of color, and this may make identification with the queer community more challenging (Font, 1997; Morales, 1990). For instance, as queer African Americans experience homophobia and heterosexism from the African American community, they also experience racism and isolation from the predominately white queer community (Font, 1997; Morales, 1990).

In addition, there are major themes affecting the identity development of queer African Americans, Latino Americans, and Asian Americans. These themes include, but are not limited to discrimination, oppression, choosing between cultures, rejection, and social support. Discrimination and oppression for queers of color are prevalent; they are forced to deal with homophobia and heterosexism from members of their own racial group, as well as fight against racism and white privilege from the predominately white queer community (Akerlund & Cheung, 2000).

Cultural Victimization

Cultural beliefs informed by heterosexism and homophobia often undermine, critique and attack queer people's existence and dignity. Rotheram-Borus, Reid, & Rosario (1994) noted that many heterosexist and homophobic people argue that queer men are more like women. This ideology creates the mindset that being gay makes you less than a man and subtly justifies oppressive behavior that a queer person experiences for being the "wrong" orientation. This kind of attack is similar to the victimization and degradation that African Americans have experienced in terms of being told that they are "not Black enough" and/or "acting White." This is a form of cultural victimization that has been going on in the African American culture for centuries. Rotheram-Borus, Reid, & Rosario (1994) stated that heterosexism stymies individual growth and development in similar ways as it stymies individuals who have been sexually and /or physically abused. While the effects of cultural victimization and sexual or physical abuse are not the same, cultural victimization of homosexuals can sometimes be compared to the effects of sexual abuse, because of the immense valued place on silence and secrecy in their lived

experiences. For instance, secrecy is a factor that mirrors the dynamics of sexual abuse. Queer people get that message throughout their lives: 'Don't talk about it.' So when a queer person does come out, he must courageously risk personal attacks, psychological rejection, and all manners of discrimination (Rotheram-Borus, Reid, & Rosario, 1994).

African American Culture & Homosexuality

Homosexuality in African American culture is something that has been discussed since the Harlem Renaissance, where noted African American literary scholars such as Langston Hughes and Richard Bruce Nugent wrote short stories and poems about African American gay life in Harlem (Silberman, 1996). Over the years more and more scholarly writings have appeared illustrating the struggles of gay, African Americans experiencing homophobia, heterosexism, and racial injustice. In this section of the literature review I focus on the ways in which homophobia and heterosexism shape African American culture.

Homophobia & Heterosexism in the African American Community

Queer African Americans have to struggle against racial injustice from the predominately White queer community, as well as homophobia and heterosexism from the African American community. Fullilove and Fullilove (1999) hypothesized that homophobia and heterosexism are very common in the African American community. In addition, Newsman-Wagner (2004) wrote that the sting of homophobia and heterosexism is a lot more intense and cuts deeper when it's coming from individuals who look like you. "There's an old saying that 'a house divided against itself cannot stand'. I worry whether our divided house will provide shelter for all members of the Black community.

As a Black lesbian, I should not feel any less a part of the Black community than my straight sisters. The Black community is my house and home!" (Newman-Wagner, 2004, p. 30).

Homophobia and heterosexism in the African American community manifests itself in very deliberate terms. For example, a sense of tolerance or charity is given to the queer African Americans in the community as long as they do not disclose or display their sexual orientation (Savin-Williams, 1994). This gesture of acceptance may be viewed as disrespectful to queer African Americans who struggle to value both their sexual orientation and racial identity and want to be able to stay connected to a community in which they find value. For some queer African Americans, the tension between trying to value one's racial identity and sexual orientation lead to concealing their sexual orientation.

Choi, Han, Paul, & Ayala (2011) reported that queer men of color, including queer African American men, conceal their homosexuality to minimize stigmatization. African American men conceal their sexual orientation for self-preservation within their own community to minimize the homophobic reactions they fear from African American community members (Choi et al, 2011). Moreover, Rose (1998) noted that African Americans are believed to have significantly less tolerance of homosexuality in African American communities, resulting in more behavior that lead to being closeted and concealing one's sexual orientation. Some queer African American males that choose to conceal their sexual orientation lead to living on the down low.

The Phenomenon of being Closeted or on the Down Low

One of the ways in which homophobia and heterosexism is displayed in intrapersonal relationships in the African American culture is with queer African American men living a closeted or down low life. The down low is a term coined in the early 2000's for men who identified themselves as heterosexual; however have sex with other men. Specifically, Dr. Greg Millett, a behavioral scientist in the epidemiology branch of the U. S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) developed his own definition of down low as a man who is heterosexually identified and has sex with other men without the knowledge of his female partner (Boykin, 2004).

Boykin (2004) noted that the definition of down low is complex and cannot be defined in one or two statements, nor is responsibility limited to gay African American men. However, being closeted or living on the down low is an individual and community responsibility for which queer African American men and their community have to be more accountable. Living a life on the down low for gay African American men it is a way to validate their masculinity and allows them an opportunity to not deal with issues of shame. For example, Lisotta (2004) reported that Angela Dillard, assistant professor of history and politics at New York University theorized that, for many African Americans, the subject of homosexuality raises troubling questions around ideas of masculinity. She went on to add,

> "'for a community that has already suffered various forms of emasculation to have this is --- well, it's simply too troubling. And that along with the strange idea among African-Americans that it's really a white thing. I think it's something that says that homosexuality is necessarily alien, and it's yet another thing white people have poisoned our community with.' The struggle to balance community expectations with sexual desires has fostered the emergence of a subculture in which African-American men live on the down low, where straight

> public life and a private world of queer sex are never supposed to meet'" (Lisotta, 2004, p. 16).

On the other hand, the phenomenon of the down low is not limited to men or African Americans or the African American community. Boykin (2004) suggests that, for heterosexual African American women, the down low is a way to avoid the difficult issues of personal responsibility, and for white America a way to pathologize gay African American lives. Living on the down low is symptom of a larger struggle in African American culture that perpetuates shame along with beliefs that justify homophobia and heterosexism that lead to distress within self and relationships with others.

HIV

Homophobia and heterosexism also affects the ways in which queer African American males experience themselves in relationships to others. Due to homophobia and heterosexism that accompanies interpersonal and cultural relationships; many queer African American males participate in high risk sexual activities. The high risk sexual activities primary results in the distribution of HIV.

For example, Brooks, Etzel, Hinojos, Henry, & Perez (2005) noted that the manifestation of HIV related stigma and discrimination is closely linked to the pervasiveness of homophobia and heterosexism in communities of color. They indicate that for the African American culture specifically, homosexuality has been a taboo subject that clashes with their race, gender role expectations, definitions of masculinity, community norms relating to sexuality, and is perceived of as sinful and unnatural. These homophobic beliefs and attitudes toward homosexuality may contribute to the lack

of participation in HIV prevention services by gay, bisexual and heterosexual individuals (Brooks et al., 2005).

In addition, they added that the fear for many African American males of being viewed as gay or bisexual cause them to avoid expressing concerns about HIV or to avoid discussing condom use. For African American men, using a condom is seen as a threat to masculine prowess, or may be viewed as evidence of having sex outside their relationship or having a sexually transmitted infection. Moreover, these men who engage in sex with both males and females, but are not open about their sexual activity, may not use condoms with their male or female partners thus creating a bridge for HIV transmission between homosexual men and heterosexual women (Brooks et al., 2005). African American male youth who have sex with other males account for 48% of 13-29 year old HIV positive males in the country (Foster, Arnold, Rebchook & Kegeles, 2011).

The African American Church

The African American church is one of the ways in which homophobia and heterosexism effect cultural relationships in the African American community. Ward (2005) noted that the Black church constitutes a significant source of the homophobia that pervades the African American community. The African American church is one of the cornerstones and foundations of the African American community. Throughout slavery and Jim Crow, the African American church has been a great support and fosters a sense of empowerment to the Africa American culture. Unfortunately, it had also been a place that has furthered discrimination and homophobic and heterosexist rhetoric and actively blocked social justice for queer people.

For example, Kennamer, Honnold, Bradford, and Hendricks (2000) noted that homophobia and heterosexism appear to be a key element in the African American culture, most notably motivated by religious forces. Therefore, one of the ways in which a majority in the African American community marginalizes the queer African American community and perpetuates homophobia and heterosexism is through its relationship to religiosity, especially Christianity. Dyson (1996) indicated that both directly and indirectly, Black churches have been identified as fostering homophobia and heterosexism, playing an important role in its origin and weekly reinforcement in the African American community. Ward (2005) added that, theologically-driven homophobia supports a strong and exaggerated sense of masculinity within the African American community that, along with homophobia, takes a significant but generally unexamined psychic and social toll on people's lives. These forces adversely shape the lives not only of queer African American individuals but also those of African American heterosexual males and females.

Akerlund & Cheung (2000) added that queer African Americans may experience a conflict between their sexual orientation and their religious beliefs, creating pressure to choose between who they are and what they believe. Case in point, in the March, 2004 issue of Essence Magazine, a queer, African American man indicated that his growing confusion and hurt with the church increased as he began to recognize his ongoing struggle with his faith and his sexual orientation. He stated,

> "I could not escape my pastor's words, which seemed congruent with my sister's. One Sunday he talked about abominations that automatically equaled an eternity in hell. He started his sermon by stating that 'God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve…' I had a girlfriend, but that was just a front to mask my secret. I developed a deep loathing for homosexuals, not realizing that the chasm of hate

> that was forming beneath my skin would eventually be the one I would have to escape to reach my true self." (Walker, 2004, p.138)

Moreover, Greene (1994) indicated that Protestant forms of Christianity in the African American community and Catholicism in the Latino American community are strong cultural components, whose interpretation of the Bible have often been used to reinforce homophobia and heterosexism.

Coming Out Process

Cultural victimization, along with the disempowerment imposed by homophobia and heterosexism in the African American community as well as the larger society, lead to an ongoing pressure for queer people to not identify themselves as anything other than heterosexual. In addition, homophobia and heterosexism do not give them the freedom to view themselves as anything else. To avoid stigmatization, ostracism or physical assault; Weinberg & Williams (1974) concluded that queer men inhibit the public expression of their homosexual identity. Taylor (1999) added that even considering self-disclosure of one's homosexuality is a process of negotiation that takes place between an individual's personal and social identities. Queer individuals may have a constant struggle between private and public identities and be continually faced with the decision about whether or not to disclose their sexual identity to others (Taylor 1999).

Moreover, the stress and tension that develops when queer people do not disclose can be traumatic to themselves and their relationships. For instance, when the effect on the coming-out process was explored, Rosanio, Schrimshaw, & Hunter (2004) found direct associations with changes in both alcohol and marijuana use over time. In

particular, they found that initial involvement in queer-related activities was positively associated with increased substance use. However, substance use subsequently declined as involvement in these activities continued to increase (Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2004).

One of the processes that illustrate the effects of homophobia and heterosexism is the coming out process. It is the process by which individuals who identify themselves as queer or questioning, disclose to others about their non-traditional, non-heterosexual sexual orientation. Taylor (1999) noted that, when considering coming out as a life process, self-disclosure is only one of many phases through which an individual will pass. In addition, for many queer people there will be a constant tension between private and public identities. The queer person is continually faced with the decision whether or not to disclose their identity to others (Taylor, 1999).

The Social and Cultural Impact on the Coming Out Process

In exploring the coming out process for queer youth, one must consider the social, cultural, and familial environment. As debates on gay marriage and the validity of queer people's humanity in our society persist, queer youth may be the ones affected most by this ongoing oppression and stigma. Cassese (2000) suggested that, homophobia and heterosexism create a climate that permits and even encourages the exploitation of boys. The psychological and emotional effect on queer youth being forced to role play heterosexuality is a chronic assault on their sexual orientation.

Social Impact on the Coming Out Process

In considering the social environment and its impact on the coming out process, one way that homophobia is experienced by youth is through verbal cruelty by their peers. Rotheram-Borus, Reid, & Rosario (1994) indicated that male youth experienced consistent verbally abuse and anti-queer epithets from peers. This form of abuse perpetuates homophobia and heterosexism. It also indicates to heterosexual and homosexual youth that identifying as any of those derogatory names is wrong. In essence, those who do not conform to stereotypical gender roles are often shamed and punished for being different. (Rotheram-Borus, Reid, & Rosario, 1994)

For example, homophobia and heterosexism in schools are pervasive social problems that have manifested themselves in most communities. School-based homophobia and heterosexism take many forms ranging from the overt bashing of students perceived to be queer to the subtle resistance of administrators, teachers, and parents to include comprehensive sexuality education in health curricula. The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) (2001) reported that many national and regional studies conclude that the majority of high school students hear anti-gay epithets in their schools nearly every day and many have witnessed anti-gay harassment and violence. They also indicated that 84% of high school students hear the words "faggot" and "dyke" in the classroom frequently or often (GLSEN, 2001). However, the most recent GLSEN (2009) reported a slight decrease in the number of students that heard homophobic comments at school. They indicated that 72.4% of LGBT students heard homophobic remarks, such as "faggot" or "dyke" at school. They go on to report that 84.6% of LGBT students reported being verbally harassed, and 40% reported being

physically harassed. Increased levels of victimization were related to increased levels of depression and anxiety and deceased levels of self-esteem (GLSEN, 2009). The victimization that queer youth experience from continuous acts of homophobia and heterosexism is traumatizing. These effects are not just from the social environment; they also impact queer youth from the culture of homophobia and heterosexism that exist in the family.

Cultural Impact on the Coming Out Process

The cultural trauma that queer people have to experience is overwhelming. Youth in general are trying to define themselves on a daily basis. Hearing society's negative often hateful view of queer sexuality is an added burden for queer youth. Having to hide one's sexual orientation, core sense of self, and living with the fear that discovery might result in psychological and/or physical harm are the chronic traumas that queer youth may experience. For instance, elementary school children continue to use the word "queer "in pejorative ways and no one wants to be near the kid believed to be a "fag." It can also be traumatizing when youth attend church services, listening to messages that illustrate that they are bad, evil, and/ or wrong for being who they are. In addition, youth have to play heterosexual roles and suppress their natural desire to date, kiss, and love a member of their own gender. As a result, many queer youth grow up hyper-vigilant to make sure they are not noticed as different. For instance, attempting to be more masculine than his given nature can directly result in a queer male youth attempting to hide his more natural feminine tendencies as so not to appear "girl like" or queer. Thus, he is anxious and mistrusting of his environment, worrying that if he is found out he will be targeted as someone to be avoided and may be shunned by his community. In

addition, he develops a false self, passing as heterosexual to be accepted and loved. The internalized homophobic and heterosexist beliefs tell him that this behavior will make him a good citizen. He will develop defensive protection to shield himself from anyone seeing him as homosexual (Rotheram-Borus, Reid, & Rosario, 1994).

Unfortunately, most queer youth do not have the leadership and/or role models they need in order to guide them in a positive direction. For example, Morrow (1993) stated that positive support for queer youth is minimal, and many adults fear discrimination, job loss, and abuse if they openly support queer youth. Also, Ryan & Futterman (1998) remarked that many queer youth report relying on television to learn what it means to be gay. They went on to add that in one study, 80 percent of these youth ages 14 to 17 believed media stereotypes that depicted gay men as effeminate and lesbians as masculine. They continued to note that queer youth often internalize societal messages regarding sexual orientation and suffer from self-hatred as well as from asocial and emotional isolation. They may use substances to manage shame, to deny same-sex attraction, and/or as a defense against ridicule and violence (Ryan & Futterman, 1998).

They may seek out guidance from the streets and other queer youth in settings that might lead to drug use and prostitution. Marshal, Friedman, Stall, & Thompson (2009) reported that persistent psychological stress associated with homophobic and heterosexist discrimination and inequality is a significant underlying causal mechanism of life-long health disparities any queer individual face. For instance, Rotheram-Borus, Reid, & Rosario (1994) stated, “Gay males have multiple male partners, condom use is infrequent, 17% to 23% exchange sex for money or drugs, and younger gay men engage in more sexual risk acts than older gay men” (p. 1938). In addition, Garofalo (1998)

noted that high school students in California found that those who suffered harassment because of their real or perceived sexual orientation were more likely than non-harassed youth to use crack cocaine, cocaine, anabolic steroids, and inhalants. Moreover, Remafedi (1999) indicated that there is a link between attempting suicide and gender nonconformity, early awareness of sexual orientation, stress, violence, lack of support, school dropout, family problems, homelessness, and substance use. These dangerous activities may lead to sexually homophobic assaults on their developing selves. They can replay the trauma and victimization of the dangerous feelings of hiding ones' core orientation and when exposed be at risk to attack and rejection (Rotheram-Borus, Reid, & Rosario, 1994).

Due to the horrible effects of homophobia and heterosexism, along with the limited homosexual role models; queer youth are extremely vulnerable to many of the ills in our society, such as alcohol and drug abuse, prostitution, suicide, among others. Gochros and Bidwell (1996) indicated that the risks to an individual struggling with their sexual orientation in regards to their mental health included, isolation, depression, deliberate self-harm and suicide. In addition, Tremblay (1995) analyzed a variety of studies examining youth suicide and homosexuality, and recognized that homosexual males are involved in a fifth or more of male youth suicide.

Ritter & Terndrup (2002) suggested that homosexuality itself is not the single reason for high suicide risk. The other factors that contribute are feelings of isolation, homophobia and heterosexism, alienation, and name calling, as well as enforced role-play of heterosexuality. More reasons exist that contribute to suicidality for homosexual youth than for heterosexual youth, including family rejection, physical, sexual, emotional

abuse, verbal abuse, chronic depression, school problems, drug and alcohol problems, lower self-worth, and premature self-sufficiency (Halpert, 2002). Even more recent research suggest that queer youth are at elevated risk of suicidality, homelessness, school dropout, addiction, harassment and violence (Espilage, Aragon, & Schuster, 2009; Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009; Thompson, Safyer, & Polio, 2001).

Berger (2005) added that while this is the case for some, another segment of queer youth who are especially at risk are those who become involved with a department of social services and/or the juvenile justice system as a result of any number of factors --- school truancy, domestic violence, being a victim of neglect, substance abuse, the death of a parent, among others --- and then slip through the cracks in the system. Once again these are situations where queer youth are attempting to either hide from their sexual orientation or struggle with accepting it. While being homosexual is the common denominator of this group of youth, their sexual orientation is only one determining factor, other includes race, ethnicity, class, access to resources, and prior system involvement. These are all vulnerabilities that may determine whether queer youth find themselves in a safe and loving home or on the street (Berger, 2005).

Familial Impact on the Coming Out Process

Queer Youth Struggle in Families

The effects of homophobia and heterosexism are not immune from infiltrating the familial relationships of queer youth. Willoughby, Doty & Malik (2010) stated that victimization and family rejection of sexual orientation are significant stressors confronting queer youth. In addition, D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks (2008) added that

queer youth expected their unaware parents to have negative reactions to disclosure of their sexual orientation. For example, Savin-Williams (1994) noted that after coming out to their families, many queer youth are thrown out of their home, mistreated, or made the focus of their family's dysfunction. In the coming out process, queer youth struggle to gain self-worth and value with their sexual orientation. Furthermore, Ryan, Huebner, Diaz & Sanchez (2009) noted that queer youth who reported higher levels of family rejection during adolescence were 8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide, 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression, 3.4 times more likely to use illegal drugs, and 3.4 times more likely to report having engaged in unprotected sexual intercourse compared with queer youth from families that reported no or low levels of family rejection. Victimization and family rejection experiences are related to internalized homophobia and negative self-identity in queer youth (Willoughby et al, 2010). Along with dealing with the resistance to gain recognition from society, many queer people have yet to achieve understanding from their families of origin. Keren (1993) remarked that, within the family, queer youth struggle to establish a personal identity that differs from the family identity and family acculturation process in which they are rooted. As parents of queer youth deal with the struggles of parenting a queer child, they must also deal with what it means for them to be the parents of a queer child.

In addition, Berger (2005) noted that queer youth comprise a disproportionate number of at-risk youth across the U.S. They are substantially more likely than are heterosexual youth to experience homelessness, whether because they run away or because they are forced to leave home by their families because of their sexual orientation. Homophobia and heterosexism make for an intolerable home situation and

pave the path to homelessness for many queer youth. Rosario, Schrimshaw & Hunter (2011) noted that queer youth are over-represented in the homeless population. In their study of 156 queer youth, 48% reported ever running away or being evicted from home (Rosario et al, 2011). Those that live on the street have typically experienced homophobia and heterosexism in multiple environments and on many levels. In addition, Ryan & Futterman (1998) stated that unlike racial stereotypes that family members and racial minority communities can positively reframe, many racial minority communities reinforce negative cultural perceptions of homosexuality. The GLSEN (2004) reported that in a nationwide survey of queer youth, up to 46 percent of queer youth of color reported experiencing physical violence related to their sexual orientation. Having grown up in a family and community that rejected them and caused damage to their self-esteem, they are often made to endure homophobia and heterosexism from adults who are meant to provide care (Berger, 2005).

Parent's Awareness of having Queer Youth

Self-disclosure is a difficult experience for adults and even more difficult for youth. In addition, as queer youth decide to self-disclose their sexual orientation, this not only affects them, it also has a profound effect on their parents and the familial relationship. The fear of negative parental reactions to the disclosure of one's queerness has been found to be a major reason queer youth do not tell their families (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; D'Augelli, Hershberg, & Pilkington, 1998).

Parents who suspect that they have a queer child may learn about their child's sexual minority identity by making homophobic or heterosexist comments (D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2005). Those comments may lead to their child disclosing his

sexual orientation. Gender atypical youth may provoke more negative parental victimization which may precede parents' awareness. In addition, cultural and interpersonal victimization on the basis of sexual orientation can follow parents' awareness. Youth with aware parents showed less internalized homophobia and heterosexism, which may reflect the longer period of time that they were aware of their sexual orientation, as well as the greater family support they report (D'Augelli, et al, 2005).

On the other hand, parental awareness may be unlikely, which may lead to their children having to deal with the stress and pressure of their struggle alone. D'Augelli et al (2005) study of parents' awareness of queer youth's sexual orientation indicated that over one third of the youth had parents who did not know they were queer. Those whose parents were unaware were less gender atypical in childhood. They have a variety of reasons for not telling their parents, including general fears of any possible consequences and of being disconnected from their parents. For some youth continued silence and secrecy was their only option. They went on to note that nearly half of those whose fathers were unaware, said they would never tell their fathers, because of their father son relationship. In addition, because these youth were living with their parents who raised them, they had considerable time to develop an accurate prediction of parents' reactions, so their reluctance and fear may be well warranted.

Parent's Identity of Queer Youth

Heterosexual mothers and fathers may find that on their sons' and daughters' coming out, they can no longer claim simply to be parents; instead, they become the parents of a queer person. Some parents believe that their child's sexual orientations

compromises the value associated with their parenting (Fields, 2001). In addition, in a study of seven Caucasian parents of gay and/or lesbian children, Saltzburg (2004) indicated that all of the parents spoke of their deep sadness and disappointment that their son or daughter would not live out the life that they had imagined for them. Some of the major themes of her research focused on the parental experience of having a gay or lesbian child were their emotional detachment and fears of estrangement. It also seemed that an essential aspect of their own personhood had been cut out of their lives, leaving them feeling intense emptiness and sadness.

Moreover, the homophobic and heterosexist views that parents have may be as disheartening as their queer youth. For example, Saltzburg (2004) indicated that the distress produced by their child being queer is an emotionally disorganizing process that caused parents to withdraw socially and disengage from parenting functions; this disconnection may produce a state of dysphoria and depression. Whereas, guilt and self-blame were the predominant feelings associated with parents of adult queer children, it was their detachment in the midst of child rearing that evoked feelings of parenting failure with parents of youth (Saltzburg, 2004).

Unfortunately, the Saltzburg study did not include parents of color. In her limitations section, she noted that there was no racial diversity among the parents. She goes on to add that, "The inability to secure participants of parents of minority racial and ethnic groups may be related to the reporting by many gay and lesbian minority ethnic and racial group youth that they are not 'out' to their parents because of cultural restraints and sanctions" (Saltzburg, 2004). Saltzburg's lack of parents of color in her research accompanies with her disclosures that many queer youth of color struggle or do not come

out to their parents illustrate the importance of exploring the coming out process for queer youth of color.

In addition, Savin-Williams (2001) reported that in one study Asian American parents of lesbian daughters and gay sons were aware, yet chose to ignore gay issues until their children disclosed to them their sexual orientation. The parents went on to add that, "… their attitudes were not positive and they worried about what neighbors and community members would think of them" (Savin-Williams, 2001, p. 51).

Intersection between Race and Sexual Orientation

Many queer African Americans facing the threat of social and emotional abandonment are compelled to maintain a dual existence, which means leading a compartmentalized existence (Greene, 1994). Loiacano (1993) remarked that some queer African Americans feel a lack of support from the predominately heterosexual African American community because of their queer identity. He went on to note that many expressed the need to integrate and find simultaneous validation for one's various identities (Loiacano, 1993). This dual existence not only affects issues of abandonment, it also affects their ability to have proportionally more negative life experiences. For example, the combined effect of men being both queer and African American, often lead to increased likelihood of loss of employment, home, or child custody; antigay violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or racial identity.

Moreover, Crawford, Allison, Zamboni, & Soto (2002) noted the importance of considering the interface between racial-ethnicity and sexual identity among African American gay and bisexual men. Crawford et al. (2002) state that some of the important

factors were higher rates of heavy substance use by queer African American men in comparison to their heterosexual counterparts, elevated levels of depressive mood and anxiety disorder, and minimal decreases among HIV/AIDS among these same men compared to their White counterparts. Jerome & Halkitis (2009) added that queer African American men are disproportionately affected by HIV. Some of the factors that account for this elevated risk include heterosexist and racial distress (Crawford, et al., 2002). These elevated aspects and potential life struggles are factors that are unique because of the duality of these men being both in a sexual and racial minority. Crawford et al., (2002) concluded, "When the life experiences of African American gay and bisexual men are closely examined, it becomes apparent these individuals must contend with the challenges of managing dual minority status (i.e., being African American and gay or bisexual) (p. 180).

Queer African American Youth

The sense of dual lives and attempting to find a balance is not limited to adults. African American youth are also trying to find their balance in two worlds, both rejecting some parts of who they are. However, Pittman (1992) indicated that queer African American youth often felt rejection by both the white queer community and the African American community.

For example, Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter (2004) conducted a study with 156 racially and ethnically diverse gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth over a twelve month period. They indicated that the study assessed for psychosexual development milestones, socio-sexual development milestones, recent sexual behaviors, current sexual orientation, and sexual identity using the Sexual Risk Behavior Assessment – Youth. They also

assessed involvement in gay related activities by using a 28 item checklist they developed. In addition, they assessed for positive attitudes toward homosexuality and comfort with others knowing about their homosexuality. They also assessed for self-disclosure of sexuality to others, and certainty about, comfort with, and self-acceptance. They found that there were two main reasons that queer African Americans are not as far along in their coming out process as their white counterparts. They suggested that racial prejudice and discrimination in the predominately white queer community alienated racial minority individuals from the one community that consistently validates a queer identity and provides resources and supportive settings to queer individuals. Racial prejudice accompanied with homophobia within the African American community highlights the importance of studying and exploring the coming out process specific to African American youth. If they are unable to receive a sense of community from the gay community, not the African American community, where do they find connection and support? Is it from parents and family?

Families of Color and the Coming Out Process

The final section of this review of literature focuses on the ways in which homophobia and heterosexism are perpetuated in African Americans families. There is a paucity of information regarding the extent of homophobia and heterosexism in families of color, particularly the African American family, thus limited information on the coming out process of queer African American male youth to their parents. However, Merighi and Grimes (2000) studied the coming out process of 57 African American, European American, Mexican American, and Vietnamese American gay males between the ages of 18-24. For these men of color the coming out process served as an important

means of affirming a core aspect of their overall identity and creating new, and potentially difficult, dialogues with their families.

In addition, Merighi and Grimes (2000) stated that the men described the importance of preserving and upholding strong family relations as a salient factor in their decision to come out. More specifically, concern for the ways in which their families of origin would be perceived by others about their sexual orientation was a key factor in them initially avoiding disclosure to their family members. The youth suggested that the influence of culture made their decision to disclose more difficult. "Many of the study respondents shared highly personal accounts of coming out that included being blatantly rejected, scorned, and even ignored by at least one family member" (Merighi and Grimes, 2000, p.39). Even though, Merighi and Grimes eloquently articulated the commonalities that many families of color experience when their gay son or grandson comes out, they did not speak to the differences based on race or ethnicity. Based on the cultural and familial experiences of African Americans, the question still remains about their unique experience.

Homophobia and heterosexism have adverse and traumatizing effects on queer youth. It is clear that these youth are oppressed and discriminated against in various ways and at multiple levels from overt social discrimination to more subtle internal forms. But there is a paucity of information about the specifics of how homophobia and heterosexism are experienced by queer African American youth and their families. There is limited evidence which suggests that African American queer youth likely have similar experiences as do all queer youth but they also have unique factors , liabilities and perhaps strengths which have not been researched or documented well. Based on the

limited research on queer families of color, in particular African American families, I explore the coming out process for queer, African American youth and how this process affects their relationships with their parents. Thus, the main research question is how do queer African American youth experience and understand their own coming out process and its impact on their relationships with their parents, paying particular attention to the interface between race and sexual orientation.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOOLOGY

Phenomenology

This study was conducted using qualitative research methods, which Creswell (1998) identified as essential in research that is exploratory in nature. Due to the paucity of research and theory regarding the impact of the coming out process for queer African American male youth an investigation into their experience was a valuable focus. I began with a broad research question, how does the coming out process affect queer African American male youth? In addition, what has their experience been like in disclosing their sexual orientation to their parents? Also, in what ways do they believe that the intersection of race and homophobia and heterosexism impact their specific coming out process? Creswell (1998) believed that how and what questions should begin the process of exploring an under researched topic. Therefore in this research, I used a phenomenological approach to explore the experience and meaning made of the experience that center around the coming out process for queer African American male youth.

Definition

Seamon (2000) defined phenomenology as the exploration and description of phenomena, where phenomena refer to things or experiences human beings experience. Any object, event, situation, or experience that a person can see, hear, touch, smell, taste,

feel, intuit, know, understand, or live through is a valid topic of phenomenological investigation.

History

Seamon (2000) noted that the history of phenomenology is one of complexities and ongoing changes. Phenomenology is rooted in the philosophy and ideology of Edmund Husserl who believed in the validity of the search for wisdom, which cannot be separated from one's consciousness. Moustakas (1994) remarked that Husserl realized that one's ideas, beliefs, thoughts, and meanings were equally real and affect reality. His style of phenomenology came to be known as transcendental. Seamon (2000) added that other phenomenological thinkers such as German philosopher Martin Heidegger and French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Pony were reactive to Husserl's transcendental structures of consciousness. Thus, phenomenological researchers seek to understand what it is to experience something in order to understand its reality. Creswell (1998) concluded, to understand one's experience and the meaning they make of it, research must focus on the lived experience and the meaning made out of that lived experience.

Phenomenology is an essential methodology for researching the coming out process of queer African American male youth, because it allows the participants to answer the questions of how and what form their own realities. It requires the researcher to be a part of the lived experience and have an open and naïve viewpoint (Boss, Dahl, and Kaplan, 1996). In the following section, I summarized the fundamental assumptions of phenomenology especially as these relate to the design of this research, including reality, intentionality, role of the researchers, epoch, self of the researcher, validity and

reliability, as well as procedures, selection of participants, and collection and analysis of data.

Fundamental Concepts of Phenomenology

Reality

Bogen & Biklen (1998) indicated that reality is socially constructed. Therefore, one's truth and reality is subjective and evolving. In this study each participant discussed and defined their own truth regarding their coming out process, inclusive of their familial relationships and internal feelings.

Intentionality

Intentionality refers to one's ability to guide one's thoughts toward the consideration of particular experiences and become conscious of them. This process was important because it helped individuals better ascertain the meaning of their lived experience. In this study, I asked each participant to intentionally consider his experiences in coming out as an African American male. As each participant disclosed his experiences, we engaged in a dialogue about their experiences to better understand the phenomenon of the coming out process for queer African American male youth.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in phenomenology is to "gain entry into the conceptual world of their subjects in order to understand how and what meaning they construct around events in their daily lives" (Bogden & Biklen, 1998, p. 23). Holstein and Gubrium (1995) added that interviews are dialogues created to evoke meanings. They go on to note that the role of the researcher is to assist, guide and encourage the participants

meaning making through an active, spontaneous, and focused manner. In addition, phenomenological researchers are an essential aspect of the research they conduct (Boss et al., 1996). Therefore, decisions must be made regarding how to utilize the researcher's presence and acknowledge inevitable bias rather than attempting to eliminate it.

One of the basic premises of phenomenology is that participants are the experts on their own experiences. To build on this premise I attempted to empower the participants to be the experts, as well as the seeing them as the experts myself. I initiated dialogue designed to encourage a conversation so that I could learn from their perspective regarding their experiences of the coming out process. I explained to participants that I wanted to learn from them about what they thought was important and interesting about coming out as a queer African American male. I mirrored the language participant's used particularly when describing their experiences coming out, relational realities, and their view of the intersection between being queer and African American in order to better inform other interview questions.

Epoch

Epoch is critical in phenomenology, because it helps the researcher better understand and hold the experience of the participants. It requires that the researcher to learn to see what stands in front of him, what he can distinguish, and then describe (Moustakas, 1994). He stated that in the epoch, the everyday understanding, judgment, and knowing are set aside, and phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively in an open sense, from the vantage point of a transcendental ego (Moustaka, 1994). It is an evolving process that engages the researcher to set aside his own judgment to be more open to the participant's experience.

While epoch is vital in phenomenological research, it was also just as important to be aware of my own emotional reactions to experiences of subjection, identifying as both African American and queer. While these feelings were bracketed to objectively conduct this research, it was omnipresent throughout the tone the project.

Self of the Researcher

Similarly to the MCP, phenomenology allows for the researcher/clinician to explore his/her own judgment and biases. Patton (2002) indicated that the researcher should look inside himself to become aware of his own biases, to eliminate personal involvement with the subject material, and gain clarity about preconceptions. Furthermore, Moustakas (1994) added that the researcher needs to begin gaining clarity through describing his own experience with the phenomenon. Therefore, I reflected on my personal connection to the research, exploring my own interest and experience living as a queer African American male, as well as coming out to my parents. From there I began thinking through what attachments I have to the research and what topics might challenge me. Boss et al.,(1996) suggested that using a journal will be crucial to assist in this process. As a result, after each interview, I wrote about my experiences conducting the interview in a journal (Appendix D), and had discussions with trusted colleagues as another way of clarifying and challenging my own beliefs and values.

In this section, I briefly summarized the ways in which I found myself in relation to the phenomenon. Perhaps most significantly, I saw the work through the perspective of multiculturalism. Questioning, exploring, clarifying, challenging my experience in regards to my sexual orientation and race is something that comes naturally to me growing up in a racist and homophobia culture.

Growing up being both, gay and African American in Mississippi influenced me on social, interpersonal, and intrapersonal levels. I was born in 1977, so growing up in the 80's and 90's was a very empowering and disempowering time for me. Socially, I grew up listening to the hip hop group Public Enemy, rapping songs like, "Fight the Power" and my parents listening to old James Brown songs like, "I'm Black and I'm Proud". Those songs were powerful messages of valuing my Blackness. I also remember watching television shows like, The Jeffersons, The Cosby Show, A Different World, among others that illustrated this same kind of encouraging and uplifting message of Black empowerment. As well, I remember my father's excitement that major cities across this nation were electing African American mayors and state officials, one of which was my mother. I definitely remember a lot of talk about the greatness of the possibility of the first African American female legislator in the state of Mississippi. These messages were coming from my family and family friends, as well as local media and community leaders. Moreover, I would receive very powerful messages from church (Baptist) about Black empowerment.

However, those same church leaders and family members displayed a lot of antigay rhetoric. I remember people in the media and the news making comments about HIV and AIDS, and its connection to the gay community and gay men specifically. I recall asking my father what gay meant and he, in a very dismissive and annoyed tone said, "Men who have sex with other men." I still was not clear on what that meant, but I was clear, by my father's attitude, that it was not a positive thing. In addition, I remember me and my parents watching an old television show called "Fame," and my parents making comments about a male character that was feminine. I did not completely

understand what feminine meant, but what was clear to me was that he was acting in a way that they did not approve. Moreover, I remember watching a television show called, "In Living Color" with my parents. In this episode, there were two characters playing gay movie critics by acting feminine or like women, and my father immediately turning the channel with that same look of distain and dismissal. So, I learned early in life that acting feminine and being gay was not approved of by my parents. Even though, there were social and familial influences, I think that my primary influence was on the ways in which I internalized those messages. Those messages, not only shaped my view of gay people and African Americans, but also shaped my view of myself.

I believe that the internalized messages were the most powerful, pervasive and perplexing. Due to all of these internalized messages, I shaped my life in accordance to them. I did everything I knew to extricate any femininity from my being, I attempted to become very masculine by playing football in middle school and I objectified girls. In addition, I distanced myself and engaged in gossip about boys that others identified as a faggot, punk, or sissy; all names used to demean and humiliate them. At the same time, in middle and high schools, I focused a lot on my education and political activism. My assumptions were that gay people did not participate in activities that uplifted African Americans and African Americans did not participate in activities that uplifted gay people. I marched for equal rights for Historically Black Colleges and Universities, helped reelect my mother to state legislature, among others. In addition, I became a part of a very rigorous and advanced high school curriculum, called the International Baccalaureate Program.

Throughout middle and high schools, I also dated and had long term relationship with girls. I understood my attraction to boys, but because I internalized my parents' antigay beliefs, I had to do whatever it took to distance myself from any possible gay comments referring to me. For example, I befriended a senior in high school who my parents suspected was gay. He actually came to my house one day and my father was very nice and polite, however once my friend left the first thing my father asked me was if my friend was gay and if I was gay. I immediately, without hesitation, told him that I was not gay and quickly started demeaning my friend. The fear of my parents finding out that I was gay was insurmountable for me at that time. I would pray to God to take away the sexual feelings I have about boys. I would pray almost every day not to be gay anymore. It got so bad for me that my freshman year of high school, I tried to take my life. Now that I look back on it, I thank God that I was unsuccessful.

I felt tremendous fear and hopelessness about my relationships. I struggled with the possibility of the African American community disowning me, my parents rejecting me, and most importantly me struggling to love myself. With all of that despair, I went on as usual and did what I was supposed to do as an educated Black man. I went to undergraduate and graduate school doing the same thing, having girlfriends and joining a fraternity, all to distance myself from any notions of me being gay.

Just before, beginning the doctoral program at Syracuse University, I began to look at my sexual orientation and my race differently. During the interview process, I met and stayed with an African American woman that opened her home to me and disclosed to me that she was bisexual. I was shocked, amazed, and honored that she was open and honest with me about her sexual orientation. Accepting myself as a queer,

African American was the beginning of a long process of loving, my Blackness and my gayness. However, it was not until I moved to Chicago for my doctoral internship and my father got sick that I seriously thought about telling my parents. With immense angst, I finally told my parents that I was gay. They both struggled with it for a while. My father indicated to me that he could not support me being with another man, and died with those same feelings. On the other hand, my mother's stance has evolved over the years, due to consistent and intense conversation along with her endless love for me. My deciding to disclose to my parents about my sexual orientation, was not the end of a process, it was just the beginning.

As a family therapist, I am always thinking about the ways in which what we do and who we are affects our relationships. So, as I thought about the coming out process for myself and the evolution of my relationship with my mother, I realized that this struggle must extend beyond our relationship. As I began to explore research on queer youth and the coming out process, I realized that there was very limited information regarding the coming out process for queer African American youth, as well as the effect that disclosure has on the relationship between parent and child. Therefore, I have become more interested in exploring this area of research, and continue to ask myself pertinent questions along the way. For example, what would my relationships with my parents have been like if I had come out earlier in life? How might my coming out process look different if I decided to never disclose to them? How would I view myself if I had not disclosed to them? What had the disclosure been like for them? These questions intrigued me, and I soon realized that it was impossible to imagine this process without coming out to my parents.

The culmination of my personal and professional experiences has directly influenced the current research. A major personal assumption underlying this study is that African American family systems are being torn apart due to the culture of homophobia and heterosexism within the Africa American community. In particular, I believe that the coming out process for queer African American male youth is extremely limited and causes extreme anxiety and depression, hence the reason I am interested in this study.

Trustworthiness (Reliability)

To ensure that the qualitative research produced by the researcher is trustworthy the researcher must persuade his audience that the findings are worth paying attention to (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). Furthermore, Seamon (2000) added that "reliability can only be had through what he calls inter subjective corroboration --- in other words, can other interested parties find in their own life and experience, either directly or vicariously, what phenomenologists find in their own work? To further the exploration of reality, Lincoln and Guba (2000) have developed the analogous concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability for use in qualitative research.

Credibility

Hoepfl (1997) stated that qualitative researchers assume multiple realities. Credibility refers to whether the findings adequately represent the phenomenological experiences of the participants. Triangulation is the main method used to ensure credibility in qualitative studies, meaning that researchers strengthen credibility by using multiple techniques to corroborate their findings. One method of triangulation that I utilized was member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Following each of the interviews, I gave each participant a copy of the transcript of the interview along with a short summary

I wrote on the tone and major themes. I let the participants know that it is important that I represent their views accurately, so they could then add, clarify or make corrections as they saw fit.

In addition, prolonged engagement and persistent observation (Lincoln and Guba, 2000) were techniques also used in this study to increase credibility. My professional experiences working with African Americans as well as sexual minorities and their families, coupled with my personal experiences with being a queer African American male and coming out to my own parents, increases the credibility of the study as these elements strengthen my long term engagement with and observation of these topics.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research refers to whether findings are generalizable. Gobo (2004) indicated that quantitative generalizations are statements about a specific group of people; however qualitative generalizations are about the nature of the process. Based on the size of this study, transferability is limited. When focused on illuminating a process rather than making generalizations about people, transferability can be reinforced by providing rich, descriptive data of the participants lived experiences.

Dependability

Dependability refers to whether data remains stable over time. This was addressed partly through member checks where participants were given transcripts following interviews giving them an opportunity to edit or clarify their responses. Each participant in the study was given an opportunity to edit or clarify their responses, and no one made any edits or clarifying comments. Lincoln and Guba (2000) indicated that establishing

credibility is acceptable for also establishing dependability, because a study cannot be credible if it is not also dependable.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to how well the researcher can demonstrate that his/her findings are neutral and others would find similar outcomes (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). As indicated in credibility, triangulation was used to ensure confirmability. This occurred as a result of member check as noted earlier and utilizing the research advisor. I gave each participant a copy of the transcript of the interview along with a short summary I wrote on the tone and major themes. In addition, the research advisor was a member of the committee and an experienced qualitative researcher. She read through each transcription in its entirety and provided feedback about various themes. She was in continuous contact with me throughout the duration of the research including the interview, transcription, and coding phases of the project.

Data Collection and Analysis

Recruitment of Participants

In phenomenological research participants must have experienced the specific phenomenon being explored in the study (Creswell, 1998). Criterion sampling was used to self-identify participants who met specific criteria for this research. For this study, all participants identified themselves as youth, therefore be in the age range of 18 – 22 years old. Participants identified themselves as African American and grew up and currently live in the United States. I recruited two participants who lived in Western Pennsylvania; four participants were students at a large university located in central Pennsylvania; and

five participants who lived in central Mississippi. In addition, they had to have come out to their parents or parental figures for recruitment purposes.

I chose to focus on African American male youth due to the complexities I experienced in defining myself in terms of race and sexual orientation. The participants of the study were individuals I recruited from other clinicians, therapeutic agencies, and queer and queer friendly organizations. In addition, I attended Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) meetings as well as GLBTQ organizations at colleges and universities. Snowball recruiting also occurred in that I asked participants if they know others who fit my criteria who may be willing to participate. I recruited one participant by attending a meeting at a GLBTQ organization, two from other mental health colleagues, and eight by word of mouth.

The Interview Process

The primary method of data collection was in-depth interviews. I arranged with participants to meet them in a place and time that was convenient for them. This was consistent with the spirit of phenomenological research, which values engaging participants in a natural setting (Boss et. al., 1996). At the start of each interview, I explained the study in my own words and then had the participants read and sign the consent form. Each participant was given a copy of the consent form and told that if at any point he had questions or concerns they could contact me through the information on the consent form (Appendix A). Participants were then asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire (Appendix B), which collected information on age, gender, religion, and the number of years it had been since the original disclosure had occurred.

The interviews were audio-taped, and each lasted approximately one hour. I began by telling participants that I had a few general questions, but that I was primarily interested in their stories and experiences in coming out to their parents as a queer African American male, how homophobia and heterosexism affected their relationships, as well as what they thought was important and interesting about their experience. The interview questions were created by the researcher, and guided by questions I wished were asked to me as a young adult reflecting on my coming out experience. I had nine open-ended questions (Appendix C) that I used to guide the interviews. As experts in their own lives, latitude was given to participants to question, construct, and change topics as they saw fit. Interviews were conducted until saturation of domains and themes were achieved. When no new information emerged I stopped conducting interviews. After the process of interviewing participants and transcribing those interviews, I then analyzed and code the transcripts.

Coding Data

Developing a coding system involved searching through data for regularities and patterns as well as topics covered by the data. Then I wrote down words and phrases that represented these topics and patters. These words and phrases are coding categories. For this study, I used what Bogdan & Biklen (1998) identified as Definition of the Situation Codes. The purpose of this form of coding was to place units of data that tell the researcher how the participants defined the setting or particular topics. In using definition of situation coding, I was interested in the participants' world view and how they saw themselves in relation to the setting or topic (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Therefore,

participants in this study discussed and defined their disclosure experience, their relationship with their parents, as well as their experience of homophobia and heterosexism in the African American community

For the purposes of this research, in a taped interview, participants were asked to discuss their view of homophobia and heterosexism in the African American community, their relationship with their parents, as well as discuss their coming out process. Each interview was transcribed and coded based on the emerging domains related to their experience in the coming out process. For example, while transcribing the interviews, I recognized three emerging domains of Pre-disclosure, which were colored highlighted in red; Disclosure Event, which were highlighted in yellow; and Experience after Disclosure, which were highlighted in blue. Therefore, after each participant's interviews were transcribed, I highlighted their quote in one of the three aforementioned preliminary stages of coming out. Once the domains emerged and were identified, the statements were extracted. The statements were grouped with comparable statements from all other interviews and created into categories. Each domain or preliminary stage of the coming out process was then broken down further into categories. For example, within the Pre-disclosure stage, participants' experiences were color highlighted and categorized based on common language and experience as discussed earlier. Saturation occurred in the Pre-disclosure stage and two categories emerged, the intersection of being African American and queer and the participants' internal awareness of their sexual orientation. Therefore, each category produced themes that were also color highlighted and separated. For example, participants who discussed their internal awareness of their sexual orientation either reported a denial of self and/or a denial to others, which emerged as themes in this

study. These themes were used to explore the effects that homophobia and heterosexism have in the African American community, their relationship with their parents, as well as their discussion of their coming out process. Please see Appendix F for a detailed table illustrating the domains, categories and themes of this study.

What follows in the next chapter is an in depth report of the emerging domains, categories, and themes with descriptive examples from the interview data to support each of them.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter clarifies the essential structure of how homophobia and heterosexism affect the disclosure experience for this group of queer, African American, male youth and their relationship with their parents, as gathered through their interviews. Demographic information for each participant is introduced first. Then using Definition of Situation Coding as discussed earlier, where participants discussed their disclosure experience as well as their experience of homophobia and heterosexism in the African American community, interviews were analyzed and areas of commonality between participants emerged. These areas of commonality established an overarching structure intrinsic to all the disclosures. This structure was broken down into three distinct stages or 'domains,' which are further broken down into categories and themes. Each domain, category, and theme is defined below, followed by an introduction to the participants and summary of their interview. Finally, the shared structure of the interviews is explored using descriptive examples via detailed participant quotes. For a complete list of participant demographic information see Appendix E.

Participants Demographics

Eleven African American young male participated in this study. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 22 with the average being 20 years. These participants are young men reflecting on their coming outing experiences as youth. Eight participants

identified themselves as gay, two identified themselves as bisexual, and one identified himself as male who has sex with other males. I interviewed two participants who lived in Western Pennsylvania, and those interviews were held at the participants' homes. Four participants were students at a large university in the northeastern section of the country, and their interviews were help in a small conference room at the campus cultural center. Another five participants lived in central Mississippi, and were interviewed at a nonprofit organization that helps empower gay, minority youth. Based on my desire to protect the identity of the participants, I have chosen to change the names and other identifying information of the participants.

Eight participants identified themselves as Christian, while two identified themselves as not having a religious affiliation, and one participant left the answer blank. Of the eight who identified themselves as Christian, four indicated they were Baptist, one indicated Methodist, one Catholic, and the other two just noted Christian. Of the participants who identified themselves as having a religious affiliation, one identified as being highly religious, three identified as being moderately religious, three identified as being mildly religious, and one identified as not religious.

Five participants indicated that they grew up in a two parent household with a mother and father. Another five participants indicated that they grew up in a single parent household, headed by a mother. One participant noted that he grew up in a household headed by extended family, which included grandmother, grandfather, aunt, uncle, etc. In addition, two participants indicated that they disclosed their sexual orientation to their parents/caregivers over five years ago, five disclosed two to five years ago, three

disclosed one to two years ago, and one indicated that he came out to his parents about six months before the interview occurred.

Participants

Ahmad

Ahmad is a 22 year old African American male who identifies as gay. He grew up in a single parent household, headed by his mother. He disclosed to her a few years prior to our interview. Even though his father did not live with him, he noted that they had a "good" relationship. He has always identified as a highly religious Christian (Baptist). He grew up in a small metropolitan city, works two jobs, and is living in a one bedroom apartment in a housing project in the intercity. He dropped out of high school and identifies himself as a hustler, someone who will work various jobs to make a living for himself.

When asked about the intersection of him being both gay and African American, Ahmad indicated that his experience was a difficult one. He gave an example of frequently passing African American males and females on the street and receiving strange looks which made him feel uncomfortable. He also remembered a time of being spit on and called "faggot" by a group of peers while walking home from the store. He interpreted those messages as disdain for him being gay and effeminate. In spite of his examples of his struggle of being African American and gay, he noted that with a strong support system he has been able to persevere.

Ahmad stated that his disclosure to his parents was accidental. He and his father took a drive, when his father stopped the car at the top of the hill and looked over to him

and said that he knew that he was gay. Ahmad's father went on to say that he knew everything and loved him anyway. He indicated that his father was very supportive. On the other hand, his mother struggled and was not accepting of him being gay, initially. However, over time, both of his parents have become two of his greatest supporters.

Brian

Brian is a 22 year old African American male who identifies his sexual orientation as gay. He grew up in a two parent household, and he disclosed to them a few years prior to the interview. He has always identified as a mildly religious Christian. He grew up in a large metropolitan city; and at the time of the interview, was in college working on a BS in Criminal Justice.

When asked about the connection with being both gay and African American, Brian noted that growing up in the African American community and being gay is challenging. He went on to add that in the African American community homosexuality is taboo. He stated that people do not talk about being gay or discuss knowing gay people. He added that when he heard people talking about gay people it was derogatory. Growing up he learned that he needed to hide his sexual orientation to stay safe.

Brian's disclosure to his parents was unintentional. His parents found out because his boyfriend accidently left him a sexually explicit message on his parent's home voice mailbox instead of his cell phone. His parents received the message and confronted him about having a sexual experience with another guy. His parents were so angry that his father began physically abusing him. Brian believes that this altercation made it impossible to have a healthy relationship with his father.

Over the years, he and his mother's relationship have strengthened. They have been able to talk about Brian being gay. She has also been more open to his friends and boyfriends. On the other hand, his father still struggles with him being gay. He noted that, over the years, his father's abuse shifted from physical abuse to verbal abuse to physical and emotional distance.

Cameron

Cameron is a 20 year old African American male who identifies his sexual orientation as gay. He grew up in a two parent household, and he disclosed to his mother about a year before our interview. He has always identified himself as a mildly religious Catholic. He grew up in a small metropolitan city. At the time of our interview, he was working on his BA in Social Work.

During the beginning of the interview, Cameron indicated that being African American and gay is hard. He went on to say that it is difficult being two minorities. He added that the stereotype of African American men is that they are strong and macho; however, he is self-identified as effeminate. He remarked that when you do not live up to the stereotype of a typical African American male, you are teased and bullied.

When asked about his disclosure of his sexual orientation to his parents, he remarked that it was deliberate. He intentionally told his mother over dinner but did not disclose to his father. His mother actually told his father, and at the date of the interview, they had never talked about it. He added that nothing between him and his father changed after the initial disclosure. He indicated that he has a good relationship with his father, even though they do not discuss his sexual orientation.

Cameron went on to say, that even though he and his father have not talked specifically about him being gay, he feels he is able to talk to his father about anything. He continued saying that disclosing his sexual orientation helped his relationship with his parents because he no longer had to hide his sexual orientation from them which was a relief. He went on to say that he hopes, by disclosing, his relationship with his parents will strengthen.

DeAndre'

DeAndre' is a 19 year old African American male who identifies his sexual orientation as gay. He grew up in a two parent household, and he disclosed to his parents a few years before our interview. He has always identified himself as a moderately religious Christian (Methodist). He grew up in a small metropolitan city. At the time of our interview, he was working on his B.S. in Chemistry.

When asked about the intersection of being African American and gay, he remarked that it is painful to think about the stares people gave him walking down the street or going to and from class. He also noted that it is painful because other African Americans make assumptions about him because he is gay. He stated that they assume because he is gay and African American that he has been on the "down low" (DL) or that he is HIV positive. They also assume that because someone is gay and African American that they are effeminate and gave examples of African American guys in the African American church choir, African American hair dressers, etc.

DeAndre' indicated that his disclosure was accidental. He noted that his parents found images of nude men on his computer and confronted him about the pictures. After two weeks of asking him if he was sure he was gay, his parents went years without saying

anything about it. Over the years his relationship with his parents has shifted. While he feels closer to his father, he and his mother are distant and at times, have a strained relationship.

Elton

Elton is a 19 year old African American male who identifies his sexual orientation as bisexual. He grew up in a single parent household, headed by his mother, and he disclosed to her a few years prior to our interview. Growing up he identified himself as a Christian; however, currently he identifies himself as not religious. He grew up in a large metropolitan city. At the time of our interview, he was working on his B.A. in Theater.

At the beginning of the interview, he talked about it being challenging for him to value being a bisexual African American male. He indicated that he felt pressure in the African American community to fit into the stereotypes of masculinity. He added that there are times he wished he were a female because the pressure to be masculine was too difficult. He went on to add that he identifies as bisexual because he believes that heterosexual couples have it easier in society than gay couples. When discussing the pressure he experiences in being bisexual, he stated that his mother directly and indirectly pressures him to have sex with African American women. The pressure to please his mother not only has him defining himself as bisexual, but also has him considering living on the DL.

After continuous pressure from the community and his mother, he decided to disclose to his mother that he was bisexual. Once he disclosed to his mother, she began to cry and spew bible scripture to him. He remarked that she was disappointed and sad that he was bisexual. However, after her initial reaction, she has become more comfortable

with him being bisexual. However, she continuously pressures him to have sex with African American women so they will have African American children. He ended the interview saying that he still struggles to not disappoint his mother.

Fredrick

Fredrick is a 22 year old African American male who identifies his sexual orientation as gay. He grew up in a single parent household, headed by his mother, and he disclosed to her approximately three years before our interview. He has always identified himself as a mildly religious Christian (Baptist). He grew up in a small metropolitan city, and has completed some college courses. He also considers himself a gay rights activist.

He stated that being gay was complicated because homosexuality is taboo in the African American community. He gave an example of going into a predominately African American barber shop and self-identified heterosexual African American men would stare at him in disgust and make homophobic comments about him. He added that those same men who were making homophobic comments would ask him for his phone number if he saw them later that night. He noted that early on in his coming out, he dated numerous guys who would make derogatory comments in public, but would want to spend time with him at night.

Frederick impulsively decided to disclose to his parents. He was at a friend's house one day and decided to disclose to his mother that he was gay. Initially, his mother thought he was joking and struggled with him being gay. In the same impulsive manner, he called and disclosed to his father as well. His father was fine with it, mainly due to his father being gay himself.

Over the years, his relationship with his father has strengthened and he is supportive of his son. On the other hand, his mother still struggles with him being gay. He noted that she loves his boyfriend but would much rather he identify as heterosexual. He and his mother's relationship is tenuous due to her struggle with his being gay, as well as her struggles with alcohol and drugs.

Gavin

Gavin is a 19 year old African American male who identifies his sexual orientation as gay. He grew up in a two parent household and he disclosed to them a year ago. He has always identified himself as a moderately religious Christian (Baptist). He grew in a small, rural area, and he is currently in college working on his B.A. in Psychology.

During the beginning of the interview, Gavin talked about the difficulty of being gay in the African American community primarily based on the messages he received from the African American church. He stated that even though he grew up in a moderately religious household, his extended family is extremely religious. He received messages of Bible scripture from family members that homosexuality was wrong.

Even though his parents were not very religious, he did not intentionally disclose to them his sexual orientation. Disclosure was forced on him from an ex-boyfriend. His ex-boyfriend outed him to his mother after their relationship dissolved. His mother confronted him about what his ex-boyfriend told her and he acknowledged that he was gay. She immediately got angry; however, a few days later she told him that she loved him. He stated that as the years went by, his relationship with his parents felt more connected.

Harold

Harold is a 20 year old African American male who identifies his sexual orientation as gay. He grew up in a single parent household, headed by his mother, and he disclosed to her about three years before the interview took place. Harold identified himself as a moderately religious Christian (Baptist). He grew up in a large metropolitan city and he is currently working on his B.S. in Computer Science.

He talked about the intersection of being gay and African American as being a struggle to be himself in the African American community. He remarked that he did not fit into the hyper-masculine stereotypes that the African American community has of African American males. He gave an example of gay African American males being seen as "overly-dramatic" and/or effeminate. Due to the stereotypes, he stated that he finds it difficult to own his homosexuality without feeling as though he will be seen by others and himself negatively.

When asked about his disclosure to his mother, he indicated that he told his mother he was gay after a fight with his ex-boyfriend. She noticed that he had been in a fight and asked him about it. He then disclosed that he had been in a fight with his boyfriend. She indicated that she had a feeling he was gay but did not want to acknowledge it. She was initially worried about his physical and emotional safety. She is currently still worried about his safety; however, they have a loving relationship with one another.

Ian

Ian is a 20 year old African American male who identifies his sexual orientation as bisexual. He grew up in a household headed by his grandmother and he disclosed to

her about a year before I interviewed him. Growing up he identified himself as Christian; however, currently he identifies as not religious. He grew up in a small metropolitan city. He has taken a few college courses and is currently a club promoter for drag king and queen shows.

When asked about the connection of his race and sexual orientation, Ian discussed the internal hardship growing up bisexual and African American. He talked about learning early in life the importance of him hiding who he was sexually. He stated that he lived on the DL for years because it was easy for him to hide.

Eventually, he disclosed to his grandmother because she asked him. He stated that one night she asked him about his relationship with another guy that she thought he spent too much time with and he told her that he was his boyfriend. She became angry, resulting in her becoming physically and verbally abusive toward him. It ultimately resulted in her kicking him out of the house. However, her position has changed over the years. She has become more welcoming and supportive of him and his boyfriend.

Jamal

Jamal is a 20 year old African American male who identifies his sexual orientation as gay. He grew up in a two parent household and disclosed to his parents about four years prior to the interview. Growing up he identified as Christian; however, currently he does not identify as religious. He grew up in a small metropolitan city and is currently working as an administrative assistant at a law office.

During the beginning of the interview, Jamal noted that growing up he struggled being secure in both his racial identity and sexual orientation, so it was difficult for him to make the connection between the two.

He went on to say that he was forced to disclose to his mother that he was gay. She picked up his phone one day when it was ringing to find a male picture, and in place of the guy's name, it said "boyfriend". She along with his father and brother confronted him about being gay. They became verbally abusive toward him and threw him out of the house. His relationship with his parents has not changed. He has not communicated with them since they threw him out.

Keith

Keith is a 19 year old African American male who identifies his sexual orientation as a male who has sex with other males. He grew up in a single parent household, headed by his mother, and he disclosed to her a couple of years before our interview. Growing up he identified as a mildly religious Christian; however, at the time of the interview, he did not have a religious affiliation. He grew up in a small, rural area and is currently working on his B.S. in Political Science.

He noted that at an early age he learned that being gay was not okay. He indicated that he mainly received those messages from church, family, friends, and men at the local barber shop. He added that part of the difficulty is assumptions that other African Americans make regarding gay African Americans. They presume that they are HIV positive, attracted to heterosexual guys, and/or evil.

When asked about his disclosure to his mother, he stated that his mother asked if he was gay, and he confirmed it. Initially, she was upset and wondering if she failed as a parent. Over the years she has grown to accept her son being gay and loves him.

After interviewing the participants, the interviews were transcribed and then analyzed for emerging domains, categories, and themes.

Process of Analysis

During the process of analyzing the transcripts, I extracted significant statements from each description, phrase, and sentence that illustrated the meaning the participants gave to the experience of disclosing. I extracted these significant statements from each participant and compared these statements across all the participants and the duplicate statements were eliminated. This process allowed the emergence of clusters of themes that were organized into domains, categories, and themes. For example, when I asked the participants about their disclosure experience, there were statements such as, "before I disclosed to my parents, I experienced…" or "when I disclosed, it felt like…" or "after I disclosed my family, I…" The statements became part of the emerging domains, pre-disclosure context, disclosure event, and experience after disclosure. All of the domains include categories and themes.

Domains

As research progressed, it became evident that, for the participants in this study, disclosure is best understood as a chronologically unfolding process divided into time periods of before, during, and after disclosure.

Three key domains emerge from the analysis of interview data: pre-disclosure context, disclosure event, and experience after disclosure. Some of these domains have categories and themes associated with them.

Pre-disclosure

The Pre-disclosure Context is defined as any context or event prior to disclosure that impacts how disclosure is experienced. It is further broken down into the following categories: Intersection of being African American and queer, as well as Internal Awareness. The importance of the pre-disclosure context for how the participants make meaning of their experiences became apparent during interviews and subsequent analysis.

Disclosure Event

The Disclosure Event is defined as a distinct period during which the participant acknowledges same sex attraction to his parents/caregivers. It is further broken down into the following categories: actual events, specific descriptions of the disclosure event; parent's immediate reaction, specific description of parent's response to the disclosure; and internal reaction to parent's immediate reaction, specific description of the participant's immediate internal reaction to their parent's reaction of their disclosure.

Experience after Disclosure

Experience after disclosure refers to insight, meaning, experiences or understanding of relationships that developed after the disclosure. Experience after the disclosure was broken down into intersection of being African American and queer, relationship with parents, relationships with family members/friends, and internal thoughts of self.

Pre-disclosure Context

As previously mentioned, the categories were developed based on significant statements from each description, phrase, and sentence that illustrated the meaning the

participants gave to their experience. Beginning with pre-disclosure, the following sections will discuss each domain using quotes from various interviews to support and articulate each domain, as well as categories and themes identified within them.

Intersection of being African American and queer

During pre-disclosure, the following elements of identifying as both African American and queer were most influential to the participants: Teasing/Verbal Harassment from African Americans, as well as Messages from the Church (further divided into Bible/Scripture and Christian Influence).

Teasing/Verbal Harassment from African Americans. Four participants talked about how difficult it was growing up identifying as both African American and queer, or African American and questioning their sexual orientation when people in the community would tease and harass them. For example, Brian said, "when I was growing up, I was always teased and being made fun of by you know, my aunts, my uncles, cousins…" He went on to add that they called him "faggot," and would yell at him in a condescending manner and told him, "You're gay!"

Messages from the Church

Christian Influence. Three participants discussed the ancillary influence of Christianity in their experience. For instance, Frederick stated:

> …the church is a really big institution, and so connected to the Black community - I mean, it just is - I mean - you know, when I was younger I used to go to church, my mom and some other people in the neighborhood would take me. And when you grow up in the church, or you know, you're brought up in a religion, and you hear the pastor, or whoever's leading that church, tell you that you are wrong because you are gay, then you know, you start to feel like that - you may feel that God may not love you.

Pastor/Biblical Scripture. While three participants talked about the ancillary influence of Christianity, two participants discussed the direct influence of their pastor and/or biblical scripture had on their pre-disclosure experience. For example, Jamal remarked that it took him a while to disclose because of his grandmother's religious convictions. He said, "…my grandma is the reason why I was scared to come out. She's so into her religion and we were made to go to church. She would also preach the Bible verses to me. She would say stuff like men are not for men, and all that stuff, and she was like that all the time."

Internal Awareness

Four participants talked about their awareness of being queer prior to disclosure of their sexual orientation to their parents. During pre-disclosure, the following elements of internal awareness were most influential to the participants: Denial to self and Denial to others. Two participants focused on denial to self, while two other participants spotlighted their denial to others. It should be noted that denial to self includes denial to self as well as others.

Denial to self. One example of denial to self would be Jamal. He talked about knowing that he was gay but struggling to be honest with himself. He commented:

> I knew I was gay already, but on top of that, I knew how people treated gay folks so - I put it in the back in my head and tried to hide it from myself… I was sleeping with a lot of women at that time. I mean a lot - over forty women - …I'd be trying to hide it, trying to see if I could get myself you know, away from it.

Denial to others. While two participants were discussing denial to themselves, two other participants focused on their denial to others. DeAndre' is a good example of hiding his sexual orientation. He indicated that he worked extremely hard at hiding his sexual orientation to family members and friends. He mentioned:

> I was trying to hide everything about me. I wore the baggy clothes, I wore the fitted hats, I wore you know the boyish things, the only thing I didn't do was - sleep with a girl. I felt it was all in the appearance… I thought who I am, isn't acceptable in a lot of eyes…

He went on to say:

> I was a very impressionable person, when I was little. I took everyone's opinion into great consideration and I shaped myself on that. Sadly, I wasn't being myself… I was sad you know before, I was depressed before, um - you know I did nothing but stay in my room for hours. All I did was go to school. I think around - elementary school was when I started to realize that I wasn't accepted by a lot of people - so - I didn't go outside and play. I didn't have any friends - I didn't have any friends at all , when I say I didn't have any friends I didn't have any friends AT ALL! …I looked to my family for comfort, and - even that, I wasn't too sure about, because I was still lying to them too, I wasn't being myself, so they were liking - the straight DeAndre'.

Disclosure Event

Actual Event

Actual disclosure is broken down into direct disclosure (spontaneous conversation and planned conversation) and Outed.

Direct Disclosure

Spontaneous Conversation. Six participants indicated that disclosure to their parent(s) just happened. An ideal example of this is Harold. The following conversation

is a dialogue Harold and I had about the first time he disclosed to his mom that he was gay.

> Harold: My first time telling my mother, I think, I was 18, and - the night before I had gone out with my cousin, and me and my ex-boyfriend had got into a fight.
>
> Interviewer: Physically?
>
> Harold: It was physical. We had broke up and it was just - and I came in and my mother was sitting on the couch and I didn't have my shirt on, because my shirt was all muddy and nasty, and my shoes - my shoes were muddy and nasty and I didn't have my shoes on, I had on some sandals, it must have been a scene, and - I came in, and she was like, where've you been, and I was like it's a long story, and she was like, I got plenty of time. Why don't you come and sit down and talk to me. So I came and told her, it was like, I got in a fight, and she was like, what do you mean, got in a fight, and I was like I got in a fight and she was like, why? And I was like it was with my ex, somebody else was with my ex, and - they put their hands on me and so we got into a fight - and she said, "What you mean, you and your EX got in a fight?" and I said, "He got mad because I didn't want to be with him." She was like, HE, and I was like, yeah…

Planned Conversation. While six participants' direct disclosures were spontaneous, two were planned conversations. For example, when I asked Gavin about his disclosure to his mother, he stated:

> I took my mom out for dinner, I didn't know how she'd react, I took her out to dinner and I just told her. I was like, mom, I have something to tell you, and she was like, What do you have to tell me? I was like, well, you promise you're gonna love me forever? She was like, of course I'm going to love you forever. What did you do – like kill somebody or something? I was like, no, but I'm gay.

Outed. While eight participants were able to directly disclose to their parent(s), three of them were outed. For instance, when I asked Brian about his initial disclosure to his parent(s), he said:

> I was going to start my junior year of high school at Clarke Memorial High School. I was getting ready to start my junior year there. It was in the summer and I was coming from SoHo, which is like this really gay area in the city, very gay-friendly. I was shopping there and it was the first time I ever gave out my

> number. I usually give out my cell phone number, but I made a mistake, and got the numbers confused, and gave out my house number. And so the individual called my house and he was like yeah, can I speak to Michael? And my father's name is Michael too, and my father knew that it wasn't one of his friends calling for him, so he played like as if he was me. Yeah, this is he, and the guy was like, so I have some big dick waiting for you in Queens... I came home from shopping and I just heard like Sade playing in the background, the lights in my house are dim, and I walked into the kitchen to get something to drink because it was a really hot summer day, and I was thirsty and sweaty. My parents were at the kitchen table with a bottle of like, uh, hard liquor on the table, asking me what's going on? Some man called the house saying he had some big dick, you-know-waiting for you. I really think you know when they said that to me, you know like, I thought there's no way I can deny this, and you know, I felt like ok I'm confronted, and I just told them like yes, you know I mean I'm gay and I think I like men.

Parent's Immediate Reaction

Parent's immediate reaction is broken down into Accepting/Supportive, Questioning/Self-Blame, and Disappointed/Unsupportive.

Accepting/Supportive. Six participants experienced that their parent(s) were accepting and/or supportive of them immediately after their disclosure. For instance, after Ahmad told his father, his was very supportive of him. He noted that his dad remarked, "I want you to know it's okay, I want to meet your friends, I want to know your boyfriend. I'm your parent - you know, and I'm here to help you in whatever way possible."

Questioning/Self-Blame. While six parent(s) were accepting and supportive, two others had questions and became self-blaming of their parenting. For example, after Brian disclosed to his parents that he was gay, his father began to blame himself. Brian noted,

> My father felt like - what went wrong? What did I do wrong? You know, although I don't necessarily want to say I blame it on him, because although he could have been a better father, it's just who I am – and I felt it at a very young age. But I feel my father feels like it's his fault.

He goes on to say:

> … I guess you can say, based on society, I wasn't a typical boy to my father - because I was an atypical - you know - that's something he didn't want to be associate with - or have as a son. I don't know.

Disappointed/Unsupportive. While eight participants' parent(s) were either accepting or self-blaming, there were three other parent(s) whose immediate reaction was disappointed and unsupportive. For example, Elton noted that his mother's immediate response was one of disappointment. Elton said:

> She reacted I guess in a sad way like, 'Oh my God, my baby's gay; oh no, what am I supposed to do?' Like, you know, like it's just, it's one of those emotional things like, 'Oh, I lost another Black one, another Black brother.' Brothers are lost, like, to jail, or to like white women or he's gay or something like that. And she's lost another one…

Elton started crying when talking about his mother's disappointment with him. However, he went on to note:

> I guess like the first stages of me coming out stuff, her crying and not understanding and just saying you know, God doesn't really accept that and, you know, her preaching to me about how you're not living the life by God and how you know, your soul's that sick, all you need to do is just get saved; homosexuality is just a stage…

Internal Reaction to Parent's Immediate Reaction

Internal reaction to Parent(s)' Immediate Reaction is broken down into Relieved and Disappointed.

Relieved. After the disclosure of their sexual orientation to their parent(s), two participants indicated that their immediate reaction was one of relief. For example, Harold commented, "Really it's like the don't ask, don't tell policy - she don't really ask me questions, she's not going to say, "Well son, do you have a boyfriend?" She's not

like that. But at the same time, she knows, which makes me feel relieved that I told her and a lot more comfortable…"

Disappointed. While two of the participants felt some sense of relief, three participants indicated that they were disappointed with their parent(s) immediate reaction. For instance, Keith talked about his disappointment that his mother blamed herself on his attraction to other males. He stated:

> I felt bad and was disappointed like, um, she probably felt that she failed. She asked me, was it something that she did wrong, and I was like, no. So in my back of my head, I felt like she thought that she felt she was a failure as a mom, because she felt she raised me the way she did. It was my decision.

Experience after Disclosure

Intersection of being African American and queer

Intersection of being African American and queer is broken down into assumption about queer, African American males and Physical/Verbal Harassment from other African American males.

Assumptions about queer, African American males. Seven participants remarked that many heterosexual African American males make assumptions about queer, African American males. For example, DeAndre' noted, "There are stereotypes in being gay in the Black community, we're whores, take women's men, go around and get AIDS, go out to night clubs…"

Physical/Verbal Harassment from other African American males. Two participants also discussed their experience of being physically and/or verbally harassed by other African Americans. For example, Fredrick talked about an experience. He said,

> I had an experience one time that kind of confirmed how some Black people feel about gay people - this was right around the time that I was just really opening up

> about being gay. I was at a football game. I was like near the football field and I was on my cell phone talking to my friend, and I had seen someone who had lived in Clarke with me, out in the suburbs where I used to live, and I was like, Hey, - and he was like, Hey! And then one of his friends, he looked like a football player who had come from football practice; he had asked me what time it was. And I looked over and told him. And right when I told him what time it was, he like hit me in the head with his football helmet. Just like, Boom! Like Crack!

Another example, Elton talked about an experience of being followed home from school and verbally harassed by four African American boys from his neighborhood. He said,

> I saw them and I was like coming down the street toward them and I turned the corner to go to my house; I only saw one of them, and he was really close to me, because they were like three feet away from me, maybe four or five feet away from me, then when I turned my head I only saw three of them, and I didn't know where the other one was, so I thought I'm going to get ambushed from them and then one of them called me, and it was just like "Yeah" and he was like, "Are you from here, faggot?" and I was just like, "Yeah," and then he was like, "Go home then bitch boy, homo!" The guy steps in front of me and I just kept walking. I was scared of hell.

Relationship with Parents

Relationships with Parents is broken down into Positive (Accepting and More Connected) and Negative (Distant/Disconnected and Not Accepting).

Positive

Accepting. Three participants talked about how accepting their parent(s) are currently. For instance, when Elton reflected on his current relationship with his mother he remarked,

> …when she got to understand a little bit more about my sexuality, she came to terms that this is how her son really is, and that she has to accept me for that. I guess the first stage is how she was reacting, she was being a Black mom and I'm her Black son; that's how she was reacting then, but later on down the line, she just started to accept it a little bit more and be ok with it.

More Connected. Even though three participants talked about supportive parent(s), three other participants felt more connected to their parent(s). For instance,

Ahmad noted that his relationship has gotten a lot stronger since he initially disclosed to his parents. When discussing his current relationship with his parents since disclosing to them, he said, "It's made it better. It's made both relationships stronger. We still go through things - but we're stronger - we talk more - you know, it's not paining anybody any more. Just - this is what it is - it's what happened - it's so much better, and I love it."

Negative.

Distant/Disconnected. After disclosure, three participants indicated that their current relationships with their parent(s) were distance or disconnected. For instance, Ian talked candidly about his disconnected relationship with his parent(s) since his disclosure. Following is the dialogue regarding his current relationship with his parents. When talking about his parents, he said:

> Ian: It's got to this point where I don't care if I see them anywhere, I won't even speak, and vice versa. I see my parents many times in the mall. It hurt at first, but at the same time I was like, oh well.
>
> Researcher: Your parents would see you in the mall
> Ian: And would not speak to me. Would - not – speak to me. Which is fine [*spoken in a small/weak voice*] Which is totally fine… Not having my parents join me – that's the only thing I could think of. That's the only thing. I mean being a gay African American male, of course – life is hard – who don't know this, but with the challenge, I wish my parents could have been with me. (teared up)
>
> Researcher: So, what's going on right now? Because when you said that, you kind of "teared up" and your voice changed some.
>
> Ian: No, I just needed my parents this year. My baby had two seizures and – it hurt me so bad, not to have someone there to help me with it. Now, don't get me wrong. My baby's mama's parents trust me a whole lot, as far as keeping her, being around, stuff like that. But – how does it look, when her parents are there, and my parents aren't? How does it look, everybody's at graduation, and my parents are not there? How does it look, when it comes time to come home from school – I'm going to a friend's house, my parents don't come get me. How does it look on campus, or getting class schedules, everybody's parents are there and mine aren't around.

Not Understanding. Two participants noted that their parent(s) are currently not understanding of their sexual orientation. For example, DeAndre' said:

> With my mom, she is still like, "Why are you like this? People can change. You're not, you're not sure who you are; take those pictures off the internet; stop wearing those clothes; why do you talk to boys?" She's coming around, but she's still not understanding; she's still confused… She says, "I'm not ashamed of you," and her main thing is, she doesn't want the public to scold me - or stigmatize me - and I can understand that - I'm her baby - I'm her first-born; I'm the closest to her, and she doesn't want people to look at me that way; she doesn't want people to do certain things or for me to get hurt, but that's her argument. Because I'm gay, and because people don't accept it - that means bad things are going to happen to me. I'm guessing, too, that she's read, she knows what's in the Bible, and she doesn't want me to go to hell.

Relationship with Family Members and Friends

Relation with family members and friends is broken down into Accepting/Connected (More Connected and Gay Family) and Struggling (Difficult to Accept and Not Accepting).

Accepting/Connected

More Connected. Five participants felt a more connected relationship with family members and friends. For instance, Ian stated:

> My older sister was more mad that I didn't tell her sooner. She told me that she wanted to ask, she told me that she tried to write a letter one time, to ask me if I was, but her boyfriend told her, 'Don't do that; it's rude.' So she didn't do it. But now we're fine. She's cool with it, she's never had problems with it, she says, 'You know, you're my heart; I love you; nothing has changed.'

Gay Family. While five participants felt more a more connected relationship with family and friends, two participants became part of a gay family. For instance, Jamal talked about his relationship with his gay family. He remarked:

> Jamal: I'm in a gay family, my stage name, and my gay name, is Bright and Shine Diamond. I'm in the Diamond family - and what a family is about, is

> basically you have a gay father and a gay mother, keeping yourself safe. And if you do shows and everything - they help you with that as well, it's just like a real family. The only difference is - you're gay.
>
> Researcher: So. Why do you have a gay family?
>
> Jamal: I have a gay family because when I did come out, I needed some kind of help, because I wasn't really out in the community like that. They've helped me out, through emotional times, financial problems, they help you with anything you need - clothes - and food - a place to stay - and on top of that, that's another thing too, if you don't have any a family or anywhere to go - they help you, like when you have a family real life, you have a mother and a father. They are the gay ones, they are there for you, like they're there to help you as far as they can teach about the gay community if you're just coming out.

Struggling

Difficult to Accept. Even though five participants felt connected to family and friends and two other became part of a gay family, two participants felt as though it was difficult for their family and friends to accept them. For instance, DeAndre' talked about his brother's struggle with him being gay. He said,

> My brother is younger, he's 15. I think he already knew. My dad brought it up to him. After me and my dad had talked, sometime last semester, and he was like, 'well - what do you know about your brother?' and he was like, 'What do you mean - that he's gay?' and my dad was like, 'Yeah.' And he was like, 'I don't really like it - I mean, he's my brother and I still love him, but I don't like that he's gay. He's still my brother.'

Not Accepting. While two participants' family members and friends struggle but eventually accept the participants' sexual orientation, three participants found that their family and friend still are not accepting of it. For example, Gavin remarked:

> Gavin: I don't go nowhere around my family. I don't take like my gay friends, or the person I'm seeing…
>
> Researcher: Why don't you bring them around your family?

> Gavin: I guess it's a respect thing. I guess - I don't - I don't know - just respect - I'm comfortable around my mom, even though I know my family knows, she told my uncles and whatever - and again it was like - I guess it's just a respect thing I guess, I won't do.
>
> Researcher: So how is it disrespectful to bring them around?
>
> Gavin: Well again - You know they be judging but it's - I really don't care, but - I don't bring them around. I think its disrespectful - I don't know! I don't know, I don't know [long pause - sigh] Because my family is very religious. They're very religious. I grew up in the church; we had a home in the church. So it's like I guess, you know, they don't condone it. So I guess that's why I said that it's about disrespect…

Internal Thoughts of Self

More like Myself. Five participants indicated they feel more like themselves, after disclosure. For instance, Elton mentioned:

> I can be whoever I want to be on any given day, I can DO that! I can do what I feel like doing, like I don't have to be put in the stereotype, in the stereotype, of what they, of what they expect a male or a Black male to be. Like, it's just me. You know, I can smile, I can laugh, I can jump rope if I want to, I can play football; these are all the things that I can do just by me coming out, and it's wonderful. It's just … I love it, I wouldn't trade it for the world. …my style has gotten better; I feel more confident with how I look, and I found a passion for dance, where I probably wouldn't have if all straight males didn't dance, I have an appreciation for the arts, like – all kinds of things. I don't think I would have experienced if I was straight, because I am Black, you know, I think it's the Black male experience to not really get into that kind of stuff, but you know, I don't know…

Elton went on to say:

> Oh yeah, and the big thing like – pretending to like females and that and stuff like that, and actually going out and approaching females, I think it's very time-consuming, and I really don't see myself doing that right so, I think, I think me coming out has just made my life a little bit more easier, a little bit more easier…

Relieved. While five participants felt more like themselves, four participants felt a sense of relief. For example, Ian commented, “I don’t have to hide it, and it’s not stressing me to keep something away from my parents, so I mean that’s a positive thing.”

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Summary of the Study

The goal of this study was to understand the experience of the disclosure of queer, African American, male youth and their coming out process. Results of the study support and expand on previous research and begin to address a gap in the literature pertaining to the experience of disclosure and the intersection of sexual orientation and race among queer African American male youth. This chapter begins with a summary of the findings as they relate to research questions which guided this project, and includes an integration of the findings with previous literature in the field. This is followed by a discussion of the limitations of the study, as well as implications for the field of family therapy, and implications for future research.

Summary of the Findings

The findings related how queer African American male youth understand their experience of disclosure and its impact on their relationship with their parents, paying particular attention to the interface between race and sexual orientation. A preliminary stage model was produced through which clinicians and researchers may begin to understand the effects that homophobia and heterosexism have on the disclosure process for these participants. It became apparent during the data collection that in order to make sense of the experience of queer African American males it is initially helpful to fit the disclosure process into stages. The disclosure process was divided into three stages of

change. The Pre-disclosure Context included how the participants conceptualized the conflict in identifying as both queer and African American. This experience was marked by much conflict as will be discussed below. The Disclosure Event marked the immediate events which served as the catalyst for disclosure including how the event came about and unfolded. Parents' immediate reaction and response to the event, as well as participants' internal reaction to their parents' responses were included. The Experience after the Disclosure Event included the participants' experience of identifying as both queer and African American, their current relationships with their parents, along with other family and friends, as well as their internal thoughts of themselves.

Pre-Disclosure Context

Pre-disclosure Context was defined as any context or event prior to disclosure that impacts how disclosure was experienced. As mentioned earlier, this stage was further divided into the following domains: Intersection of being African American and queer, as well as Internal Awareness. The importance of the pre-disclosure context was to explore how the participants made meaning of their experiences prior to disclosure. Participants discussed the intersection of being African American and queer, highlighting their experiences of verbal harassment from African Americans, as well as hearing negative messages from the church in the form of biblical scripture and Christian influence which degrade queerness. In addition, in this stage participants discussed their internal awareness of being queer, which participants separated into denial to self and denial to others.

Intersection of being African American and queer

Due to the intersection of race, gender, and sexual orientation, African American youth are being socialized to appear heterosexual and perform in stereotypically masculine ways. The goal is to deny, shame away, and make invisible any traces of being gay or effeminate. This intersection not only perpetuates homophobia in the black community, it also enables a culture of sexism.

Teasing/Verbal Harassment form African Americans.

When thinking about the intersection of being African American and queer, the participants highlighted their experiences of being verbally harassed by other African Americans. This research affirmed previous research which indicated that for many male youth this abuse comes in the form of name calling such as, "faggot," "sissy," "punk," "mama's boy," "girly boy," "little bitch," among other anti-queer epithets (Rotheram-Borus, Reid, & Rosario, 1994). Participants in this research recounted various times when other African Americans verbally taunted, harassed, and called them names to intimidate and bully them. These messages of intimidation came from classmates, friends, as well as family members.

Messages from the Church

In addition to hearing messages from African Americans, they also heard negative messages from the church in the form of clergy preaching biblical scripture. This study affirmed previous literature which suggests that homophobia and heterosexism are frequently preached from the pulpit. For example, Dyson (1996) indicated that both directly and indirectly, Black churches have been identified as fostering homophobia and

heterosexism, playing an important role in its origin and weekly reinforcement in the African American community. Moreover, Greene (1994) indicated that Protestant forms of Christianity in the African American community and Catholicism in the Latino American community are strong cultural components, whose interpretation of the Bible have often been used to reinforce homophobia and heterosexism. Participants in this study supported the idea that they also received homophobic messages from biblical scripture. For example, participants remembered times when their parent(s)/caregiver(s) would quote bible verses indicating that homosexuality was an abomination. In addition, participants recalled hearing their pastors discuss gay men and lesbian women in deplorable terms.

The current study's participants further affirmed the literature when they talked about homophobic messages from the pulpit not only influencing them, but also influencing their community**.** Dyson (1996) indicated both directly and indirectly, Black churches have been identified as fostering homophobia and heterosexism, playing an important role in its origin and weekly reinforcement in the African American community. Kennamer et al (2000) added that homophobia and heterosexism appear to be a key element in the African American culture, most notably motivated by religious forces Moreover, Greene (1994) noted Protestant forms of Christianity in the African American community are strong cultural components, whose interpretation of the Bible have often been used to reinforce homophobia and heterosexism. Participants in this study agreed and communicated about the direct and influential impact that the African American church has on the African American community. The participants noted when they heard their family and friends discuss anything remotely connected to

homosexuality, they would simultaneously bring up Bible scriptures and sermons they heard from their pastors. Akerlund & Cheung (2000) note that queer African Americans experience conflict between their sexual orientation and their religious beliefs, creating pressure to choose between who they are and what they believe. True to past research literature, participants in this study indicated they believed something was "wrong" with them because they were queer or "God may not love you". Participants remarked that these kinds of messages were pervasive in their lives.

Based on previous research, the participants lived experiences and my own identifying as both queer and African American is challenging because of the Black church. Miller (2007) noted that the Black church has a legacy of social justice. Many African Americans who attend predominately Black churches experience the church as a refuge that feeds them spiritually and racially. When discussing the impact of the Black church, Lincoln & Mamiya (1990) indicated that

> "During slavery it meant release from bondage; after emancipation it meant the right to be educated, to be employed, and to move about freely from place to place. In the twentieth century freedom means social, political, and economic justice. From the beginning of the Black experience in America, one critical denotation of freedom has remained constant: freedom has always meant the absence of any restraint, which might compromise one's responsibility to God. The notion has persisted that if God calls you to discipleship, God calls you to freedom" (p.4).

For decades the Black church has been a haven and shelter through times of racial inequality and injustice, the church was a place where African Americans could go for spiritual and physical safety. In addition, a vast number of Civil Rights leaders, who were guided by a spiritual and biblical identity, began with lessons of empowerment in the

Black church. While racial discomfort and strife existed outside of the church, inside was a message of self-worth and pride of racial and spiritual identity.

The predominant interpretation of biblical scripture is omnipresent in Black churches, and seems to create limited space for clergy and the community to be open and accepting of its queer brothers and sisters. The limited space for acceptance in the Black Church manifests itself in messages of intolerance. These messages of intolerance directly affect many queer African Americans. As Ward (2005) stated theologically-driven homophobia supports a strong and exaggerated sense of masculinity and homophobia, which have a significant effect on the psyche of people's lives. This is more than evident in the experience of many of the queer African American males interviewed for this study. Because of the participants' spiritual beliefs, most of which were influenced from messages in the church, they believed that being queer was a sin and wrong. They and I grew up believing that identifying as queer would result in "going to hell" or living a life that was unpleasing to God. Therefore, many queer African American males hide and/or do not accept their sexual orientation, which results in denial to self and others. This ultimately means they either must suppress their sexuality or face losing a support system that nurtures their racial identity.

Queer African American youth feel protected by the African American community and Black church on issues of race, however denigrated for their sexual orientation due to the residuals of slavery. These residuals perpetuate a false sense of self-worth, self-esteem, and pride resulting in hyper masculinity in African American males. The hyper masculinity is based on White slaves owners stripping Black slaves of their dignity, self-worth and manhood. So today, many African American males attempt

to overcompensate for a lack of self-worth by conditioning themselves and others to value hyper masculinity as a threat of maleness. As a result, African American youth that do not adhere to those same hyper masculine characteristics are devalued, disrespected and shamed because of it.

Internal Awareness

In this phase participants also discussed their internal awareness of being queer, which participants separated into denial to self and denial to others. Akin to other research, participants in this study noted they had substantial internalized struggles with being queer. Hodges and Parkes (2005) described internalized homophobia as the self-loathing or denial of one's own sexual orientation as part of an identity struggle linked with an affirmation of queer identity more commonly referred to as coming out. Participants in this study indicated that they knew they were queer, however due to their internal struggles, denied that their attractions to males existed. One participant even remarked that he would sleep with numerous women in hopes that this very act would "take away" his same sex attractions.

The self-loathing and denial to self also resulted in denial to others. Participants indicated they would "wear baggy clothes," "play sports," "have sex with women," all to distract friends and family from assuming they were queer. One participant talked about having sex with numerous women, and living "a straight life style" so others would not assume he was queer. The intentional nondisclosure of a queer person's sexual orientation has for years been identified as "being on the dl or down low."

The down low is a social construct that has been going on for years, and is not limited to the queer African American experience. It is brought about from societal, community and familial expectations and assumptions, along with an internalized shame of being queer. The internalized shame is developed from societal, community, and familial expectations and a lack of support. Lisotta (2004) noted, "The struggle to balance community expectations with sexual desires has fostered the emergence of a subculture in which African American men live on the down low, where public life and a private world of queer sex are never supposed to meet" (p.16). Participants indicated that due to their experience of community and familial marginalization, being on the down low was the only space they could occupy without being further marginalized. It was the only space where they could be queer without alienating their community or family. It was also a space that perpetuated their shame of being queer. Being on the down low, for many of them, forced them to live a lie and be someone they knew they were not.

Disclosure Event

Earlier research suggested that African American males may not disclose their sexual orientation to their parents as often as White males did. For example, Saltzburg (2004) indicated "the inability to secure participants of parents of minority racial and ethnic groups may be related to the reporting by many gay and lesbian minority ethnic and racial group youth that they are not 'out' to their parents because of cultural restraints and sanctions." In this study I interviewed African American youth who had disclosed

their sexual orientation to their parents. I did not interview the participants' parents, but I learned of the disclosure event and their parents' reactions from the participants.

The stage following the pre-disclosure context was the disclosure event itself. The Disclosure Event was further separated into the following domains: actual events, specific descriptions of the disclosure event; parent's immediate reaction, specific description of parent's response to the disclosure; and internal reaction to parent's immediate reaction, specific description of parent's immediate internal reaction to parent's reaction to their disclosure. During this stage participants discussed the actual disclosure event which was broken down into participants either being outed or participating in a direct disclosure. The direct disclosure was further broken down into participants having either a spontaneous or a planned conversation with their parent(s)/caregiver(s).

Spontaneous Conversation.

Due to internal struggles of guilt and shame, accompanied by external messages of non-acceptance and loathing, some of my participants chose not to disclose their sexual orientation, which led to spontaneous conversations and/or being outed. Some participants in this study were outed and did not have the opportunity to have a conversation with their parent(s)/caregiver(s) before another person disclosed their sexual orientation to them. For instance, one participant noted he was outed by a guy he recently met. His parents were surprised and angered by the news. He did not have an opportunity to negotiate with himself or his parents prior to the disclosure.

Planned Conversation

Even though some of the participants in the present study were outed, because they decided to hide their sexual orientation, others chose to have discussions with loved ones. These participants discussed the importance of having planned discussions with their parents, despite their intense internal conflict between their racial and sexual identities. Similar to previous research, (e.g. Taylor, 1999) my participants discussed their internal struggles considering self-disclosure of their homosexuality as a process of negotiation that took place between their personal and social identities. Queer individuals may have a constant struggle between private and public identities and be continually faced with the decision about whether or not to disclose their sexual identity to others (Taylor 1999). Moreover, Choi et al (2011) noted that the reason some queer African American men would be more likely to conceal their sexual orientation was due to self-preservation within the African American community. Participants in this study who planned their disclosure struggled with how their disclosure would affect their relationships with their parents. Some participants also negotiated with their parent(s)/caregiver(s) before disclosing. For example, one participant in this study made his mother promise she would love him forever before he would disclosure to her his sexual orientation. While another participant asked his father if there was anything he could say that would cause him to not love him anymore. Before disclosing his sexual orientation, he wanted to confirm that his father would love him.

The continuous struggle for queer African American males is that their internal struggle of being queer makes them experience themselves as inferior. In addition many struggle with the notion that identifying as queer is a betrayal of their familial and

community values, which understandably lead many to not disclose. However, in spite of the continuous struggle some decide they must be honest and genuine with people they love about who they are. They make the difficult step to disclose their sexual orientations in the relationships that are the most trusting to them.

Internal Reaction to Parent's Immediate Reaction

In addition to the actual event, participants discussed their parent's immediate reactions and their internal reaction to their parents' immediate reaction. The immediate reactions of the participants' parents were divided into themes of self-blame, disappointing, and accepting/supportive.

To expand the current research, this study also includes the participants' internal reaction to their parents' immediate reaction. The reaction from some participants was relief, while others felt disappointed. Those participants who were disappointed in their parents' reactions did not expand on that disappointment. I wonder, however, if some of that disappointment led to problems that may have been highlighted by other research. For example, Crawford et al. (2002) stated that some of the important factors associated with queer African American experiences were higher rates of heavy substance use, and elevated levels of depressive mood and anxiety disorder in comparison to their heterosexual counterparts. This could perhaps explain why Crawford et al (2002) found that the contraction rate for HIV/AIDS among the gay African American males has not decreased as it has for gay White men. While participants in this study did not disclose depressive or anxiety disorders, some talked about feelings of disappointment that permeated their shame and experience of self. They overwhelmingly felt they let their parents down. For example, one participant remarked, "I felt like she thought that she felt

she was a failure as a mom." When talking about feeling like he had let his mother down. Another participant said, "I'm willing to change. I'm willing to meet her half-way. I really am… I really just want to make her happy, I really do… So, I don't want to see her sad or disappointed. That I failed or something." These participants took on their parents feelings of disappointment, and internalized it as their reality.

For participants in the study, the disappointment they felt was a direct correlation to how they made their parents feel. In other words, they were disappointing to their parents. For some queer African American male youth, then not disclosing their sexual orientation is or may be seen as a form of protecting their parents from disappointment and heartache. They protect and care take of their parents by taking on their parents' guilt and shame of having a queer African American son, so their parents will not have to deal with what it means to them to have a queer child. For example, when discussing with one participant how he felt as though, he protected his mother from his sexual orientation. He noted that before he disclosed to her, he would not date or develop strong relationships with guys in fear his mother would find out he was gay and struggle with his sexual orientation. The transference of guilt and shame from parents to son at times may result in the aforementioned depressive mood and anxiety disorders we read about in the literature.

Relieved.

While some queer African American male youth experience feelings of disappointment, in this study a few participants felt relief at disclosing to their parents. The overwhelming consensus was they no longer had to "keep a secret". They began to feel more comfortable with themselves, because they were being honest about who they

were. For instance, one participant noted, “she knows, which makes me feel relieved that I told her and a lot more comfortable….” This participant’s relief was based on his ability to disclose to his mother, and not own her reaction, because his mother’s immediate reaction was distance.

After some queer African American male youth disclosed, many had the experience of a huge weight being lifted. At the time of the interview, five participants no longer felt a sense of relief, and begin to accept themselves. Also, they can work on being more of themselves with family and friends. For instance, one participant remarked, “I feel relieved. I’m stress free.” While another added, “…when I came out, I felt relieved.” Another participant said, “…you get to be a real person, not invisible.”

Experience after Disclosure

The final stage was identified as the participant’s experience after disclosure. The experience after disclosure referred to insight, meaning, experiences or understanding of the relationships that developed after the disclosure. Experience after the disclosure was divided into intersection of being African American and queer, current relationship with parents, relationships with family members/friends, and internal thoughts of self.

Intersection of being African American and queer

Assumptions and Harassment from other African Americans.

When discussing the intersection of being African American and queer, participants talked about their own assumptions about queer and African American, and they talked about harassment from other African American males. Similar to previous research, participants in this study indicated that members of the African American community made negative assumptions about them. For instance, Rotheram-Borus, Reid, & Rosario (1994) noted that many heterosexist and homophobic people argue that queer men are more like women. Ryan & Futterman (1998) stated that unlike racial stereotypes that family members and racial minority communities can positively reframe, many racial minority communities reinforce negative cultural perceptions of homosexuality. Likewise, participants in this study echoed similar remarks. They noted that the African American community assumes since they are queer, they are whores, pursue heterosexual males, engage in high risk sexual encounters, etc.

In addition to assumptions the African American community perpetuates, two participants also received physical and verbal harassment from other African American males. For example, one participant indicated that while at work there would be notes left on his desk with homophobia epithets. He added that because he was an effeminate male that wore long, straight hair, African American women would also make derogatory, homophobic comments. Another participant talked about his experience going to the barber shop. He indicated that when he would go into the barber shop, the atmosphere in

the room would change. He said, "… it would instantly change… People would tense me, and they would be like oh, this faggot."

Consistent with past research, participants in this study also experienced verbal and physical harassment. For example, Brooks, (1981); Icard, (1986); Loicano, (1993) noted that queer and African American experienced events such as loss of employment, home, or child custody; antigay violence and discrimination because of their sexual orientation and/or racial identity; as well as chronic antigay or anti-Black jokes, or being threatened verbally or physically. However, in this study, only two of eleven participants reported verbal and/or physical harassment. One of the two participants reported an incident that happened when he was struck on the head with a football helmet and blacked out. While stories of harassment are horrifying, the fact that only two of eleven participants disclosed are hopefully signs that gay bashing is on the decline, particularly in the African American community. It may also be that the participants in this study may be a non-representative sample of queer African American youth. This possible limitation will be discussed below.

The negative and degrading assumptions, along with the physical and verbal harassment that goes unspoken, perpetuate homophobia and heterosexism in the African American community. These insidious forms of oppression continue to divide and fracture an already marginalized community. I believe that the homophobia that is a part of the African American community continues to be in part responsible for the degradation, guilt, and shame many queer African American male youth experience on a daily basis.

Relationship with Parents

In this study, participants not only discussed the intersection between being African American and queer, they also explored their current relationships with their parents. When discussing their relationships with their parents, participants divided their relationships into negative and positive. Even though five of the eleven participants reported growing up in a two parent household with a mother and father, only two actually mention their father in the interview. In this study, if the father was not mentioned it is because the participant chose not to discuss him.

Negative

Some participants discussed negative relationships they currently had with their parents. Savin-Williams (1994) indicated that after coming out to their families, many queer youth are thrown out of their home, mistreated, or made a focus of their family's dysfunction. Some participants in this study indicated that their current relationships were distant or disconnected. They specified that their relationships were not where they wanted them to be, and added that they were distant, detached, and disconnected. For instance, one participant remarked that he had not talked with his parents since he disclosed approximately a year before he interviewed with me. When discussing the distance between him and his parents, he talked about seeing them out in public after his disclosure and them not acknowledging him. He added, "It's gotten to the point where I don't care if I see them anywhere, I won't speak and vice versa." During the interview, when talking about the disconnection between him and his parents, he began to cry. He talked about how he needed his parents, because it had been an extremely difficult year

for him. He went on to add that he needed their support, and they were not around for him. Another participant indicated that his relationship with his mother became strained after he disclosed is sexual orientation to her. When discussing their relationship, he said, "With my mother, distance. A lot of distance." He added that before he disclosed to her, his mother saw him as a friend, "A very close friend."

Due to the value many African American families have on familial ties, disconnection for queer African American male youth can be devastating. If the disconnect continues over time, it can take an emotional and psychological toll on both the youth and his family. While not being in connection with one's family of origin may have devastating effects on young adults, it may also be detrimental to those adults who are marginalized by the larger community, such as African American males. This would certainly be worthy of future research.

Positive

Even though some participants in this study noted that they had a negative relationship with their parents, many discussed positive relationships with their parents. Participants' experiences were divided into feelings of accepted and being connected. Some participants noted that their parents were not overly joyful about them being queer; however, they acknowledged the reality of their son and were open to their new relationship with him. For example, one participant remarked initially his mother was disappointed, but over time "she came to terms that this is how her son really is, and that she has accepted me for that." While he would have liked her to be more accepting of him, he appreciated where she was at that moment in time.

Furthermore, some participants discussed their parents' acceptance of them being queer, others added that their relationships have felt more connected. Participants indicated that they feel more of a sense of connection and familial bonds with their parents since disclosure. One participant mentioned, "We still go through things, but we're stronger – we talk more…" He added that his current relationship with his parents is stronger now than before he disclosed.

For parents of queer African American male youth, it is a gift they give their children to be accepting, and this gift leads to a more intimate and connected relationship with their children. The youth are then able to have in-depth and more genuine conversations with their parents, which may lead to deeper rational dialogue and interactions with their parents. These more in-depth dialogues can only happen when African American parents are willing to work on their own parental expectations of who their African American sons should be, and begin to value who their sons are. When African American parents are able to accept and develop a connection with their children because of their sexual orientation, it fosters a deeper and more connected bond.

Relationship with Family Members/Friends

While Merighi and Grimes (2000) noted that many gay youth of color reported being blatantly rejected, scorned, and even ignored by at least family members, some participants in this research also reported positive interactions with family members and friends. During this phase of the study, some participants discussed feelings of not being accepted, while others noted feeling connected to family members and friends.

Connected/Accepting

Six participants indicated that after disclosure, their relationships with family member and friends felt accepted and more connected than prior to disclosure. For example, one participant stated that his sister was more upset that he did not disclose to her sooner. In the interview, he added that his sister said, 'You know, you're my heart; I love you; nothing has changed.' Furthermore, another participant indicated that he and his sister's relationship has "gotten closer" since he disclosed to her.

Similar to African American parents of queer African American male youth, when family members and friends are able to connect to their queer family member, it is gift to them. When African American family members and friends are able to accept and develop a connection with their children because of their sexual orientation, it fosters a deeper and more connected bond. These messages of acceptance and love help fight against others messages of homophobia and heterosexism.

While some participants talked about positive relationships with their current relationship with their biological families, two talked about their gay families. Participants indicated that after disclosure they connected with other men in their community and became part of a gay family. One participant noted that he had a gay mother and gay father. When asked the purpose of belonging to a gay family, he added, "They've helped me out through emotional times, financial problems; they help you with anything you need – clothes – food – a place to stay…" Belonging to a gay family has been a great support to some of the participants. Another participant talked about belonged to the Diamond family, also known as the House of Diamond. His house and

other local, regional, and national houses would compete in ball competitions for money to support to the house. Balls are competitions various houses have to raise money to support their particular house or family. The competitions consist of drag queens and king shows, vogue dances, male and female image competitions, etc. In talking with participants who belong to gay families, these families give them support and strength to be themselves, and the ball competitions create a space for them to honor and give voice to their queerness.

Internal Thoughts of Their Experience after Disclosure

Five participants discussed their own experiences with themselves following disclosure. These thoughts were categorized as a sense of relief and also as an experience of feeling more like themselves. Those who experienced themselves as more like themselves stated, some for the first time, they were truly being themselves. For example, one participant remarked, "I can smile, I can laugh, I can jump rope if I want to, I can play football; these are all the things that I can do just by me coming out, and it's wonderful." When this participant was being interviewed and talking about him feeling more like himself, he was proud and elated. Another participant said, "I feel more comfortable with myself." While another participant said, "I like being gay. I like being Black. I like being male… I love everything about being Black and gay."

While some participants felt more like themselves, five other participants felt relieved. For instance, one participate remarked that he felt good that he did not have to hide being himself. While another participant said, "I felt relieved, like I got this off my chest…" Another participant noted that since disclosing his sexual orientation, he was

"more able to socialize and mingle and not care about the characteristic of stereotypes…" Another participant indicated that he can be "a human being, a person." These participants felt a sense of comfort and thankfulness.

Many participants in this study currently felt a sense of relief and more connected to themselves. They felt a greater sense of pride and self-value, along with a greater sense of purpose and meaning, because they no longer had to live a life that is incongruent with who they are. Openly identifying as queer African American males and disclosing their sexual orientation to their parents was liberating and empowering.

Limitations and Implications of the Study

Limitations

In this section, limitations of the study will be explored followed by a discussion of the final research question regarding clinical and research implications.

In exploring the limitations to the study, it is important to explore the demographic limitations of the study. The demographic characteristics were also limited to those individuals who openly identified as African American and queer. They were also limited to individuals who were between the ages of 18 – 22 years of age, as well as participants located in the Northeastern, Appalachian, and Southern regions of the United States. Therefore, this study could be considered an exploration of a subsection of the overall number of queer African American male youth who have experienced disclosure.

Another limitation of this study was confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). To ensure others would find similar outcomes and neutral findings to the research, I would have liked more triangulation. Even though triangulation occurred, the study may have included multiple internal and external auditors to evaluate the interviews, transcripts, and coding phases of the project.

Similar to other studies, this study was further limited by relying on participants' recall of events that oftentimes happened years prior. The participants were recalling events that had occurred in the past and therefore were limited by their ability to accurately recall the events. The majority of the participants experienced disclosure over two years ago. The length of time between initial disclosure and the interview is also limiting to this study. One participant was recalling from 6 months to a year ago, three participants were recalling from one to two years ago, five participants were recalling

from two to five years ago, and two participants were recalling from over five years ago. As such, there are recalling events that occurred in the past and therefore were limited by their ability to accurately recall the events.

Finally, another serious limitation of this study is its relationship to the researcher. As a gay, African American male that was raised in the African American community, this study brought up many of my own life struggles. Early in the interview process, it became important for me, as the researcher, to take care of myself through journaling (Appendix D) my reactions to the participants' story. Journaling provided me an outlet to bracket my own reactions to the life experiences of some of the participants. It also allowed me the space to discuss my own experiences of homophobia and heterosexism in the African American community that came up as a result of this study. In addition, it was important for me, as the researcher, to stay as removed as possible from my own assumption by not presuming that the participants' experience was similar to my own disclosure experience. Even though, I worked diligently to be as removed as possible from the study, my own relationship to the research is a limitation because some of my own beliefs and values may have influenced the study. Because of my experience, I have some preconceived notions of the experience of other queer African American males.

Clinical Implications

I have developed clinical implications for clinicians, regardless of their ethnic background, gender, or sexual orientation, based on this study's findings along with the findings from research that has been highlighted in this dissertation.

When considering clinical implications, it is vital to explore the theoretical orientation underpinning this research, the Multicultural Perspective (MCP) (Hardy & Laszloffy, 2000). It suggests that institutionalized oppression negatively affect the self-value oppressed individuals have on themselves. One of the ways this happens is by internalizing the philosophy of the privileged position. When this happens those in oppressed positions learn to subjugate and devalue their own positions. Another product of this institutionalized oppression is when subjugated populations oppress one another to feel gratification from the power of the privileged position.

Hardy and Laszloffy (2000) explain that race and racism have a profound effect on our daily lives and the practice of family therapy. Whether individual or institutional level, overt or covert, intentional or unintentional, there are a variety of ways in which racism can infiltrate the therapeutic process. Before therapists can take steps to address racism effectively within the context of family therapy, it is important to attend to the development of their racial awareness and racial sensitivity.

Therefore, it is essential to explore the implications to this study based on my position as an out, queer, African American male therapist. This means that I take the stance in therapy that being out, queer and African American are both legitimate, healthy variations of sexual orientation and race, and problematic only in that they are oppressed by the culture at large. I believe that therapists who think otherwise run the risk of reinforcing oppressive views of sexuality and race, which may lead to them manipulating their clients.

Therapists must continuously work on their own views and beliefs, because any beliefs that are congruent with clinicians believing that identifying as African American

or queer is wrong, can be changed, is a phase, among others will perpetuate further internal self-loathing in these individuals. Therapists that believe that homosexuality is anything other than a healthy variation of sexual orientation will unconsciously send similar messages of homophobia and heterosexism that indicate that there is an abnormality in identifying as queer. Continuous messages of being abnormal may result in psychological and emotional distress in queer, African American male youth.

Based on this study and the research literature in which it is embedded, it is important that family therapists who work with queer African American male youth are aware of their overall disclosure experience. Family therapists should explore their client's pre-disclosure experience, the disclosure event, and their current relationships with their families. Previous research indicated that many queer youth of color shared highly personal accounts of coming out that included being blatantly rejected, scorned, and even ignored by at least one family member (Merighi and Grimes, 2000). This study indicated that even though pre-disclosure experiences may be similar, the disclosure event and current relationship with family may differ on a case by case basis. Furthermore, due to community, familial, and internal struggles queer African American male youth experience, it is important for family therapists to support and nurture these clients and their families.

Nurturing queer African American male youth

In this study, some participants indicated that violence and volatility were present in their lives. . They reported incidents of emotional and physical abuse from other African Americans in the community, as well as parental figures. Therefore, it is

imperative that clinicians assess for all form of abuse. If safety is a potential concern, clinicians, along with their clients, must create a safety plan that will ensure both their client's physical and emotional protection.

This study indicated that the influence of the African American community, specifically individual African Americans in the community and the African American church are substantial, and affect the ways queer African American male youth see themselves and how their families see them. Based on this study, participants noted that their experience with homophobia in the African American community helped them deny their sexual orientation to others and themselves. I agree with Stone Fish and Harvey (2005) in that family therapists working with these clients should validate their experience, while nurturing and supporting them to be honest about their sexual orientation.

In addition to nurturing clients to be genuine about their sexual orientation, and in spite of subjugation from the African American community, family therapists should also be curious about their client's disclosure event. Participants in this study indicated that the disclosure event was a vital part of their coming out process. It also showed the idea that everyone's disclosure event should be explored on a case by case basis.

In addition to being curious about the disclosure event of queer African American male youth, family therapists should also explore their client's parents' immediate reaction and current relationships. In this study, participants remarked that their parents' immediate reaction for some varied dramatically. Family therapists should discuss and explore with their clients the possible familial growth between the time of initial

disclosure and current relationships. In the event that familial growth is short to nonexistent, family therapists should discuss other avenues of support for their clients. One avenue that was discussed in this study was developing familial ties with a gay family. These families were emotionally, intellectually, and financially supportive to queer African American male youth. In addition, these families were helpful in assisting queer African American male youth in their coming out process.

In addition to nurturing clients to own their sexual orientation in spite of homophobia prior to disclosure, family therapist should also explore and understand the internalization of their parents' reaction to disclosure. Participants in this study felt "more like themselves" or "relieved" about disclosure and their ability to inform their parents about their sexual orientation. So, family therapists should be curious and explore their clients' internal thoughts about their current relationships with their families and themselves, because similarly to the disclosure event, participants' internal beliefs of themselves may vary on a case by case basis.

Nurturing parents of queer African American male youth

In addition to nurturing queer African American male youth clients, family therapists should also validate and nurture their families. Ryan, Huebner, Diaz & Sanchez (2009) recommended that parents of queer white and Latino youth need access to positive parental role models to help decrease rejection and increase family support for their queer children. In addition, they indicated that it would be important to advise parents that negative reactions to their adolescent's queer identity may negatively influence their

children's health. Parent and caregivers should modify rejecting behaviors that gave the most negative influence on health concerns (Ryan et al, 2009).

Some participants in this study reported feelings of distance and disconnection from parents. Therefore, similar to recommendation from Ryan et al (2009) of white and Latino youth, clinicians should help provide African American parents of queer male youth access to positive parental role models to help decrease parental distance and increase parental support. In addition, clinicians should inform African American parents that distance, disconnection, or any perceived negative reactions to their child's queer identity may negatively influence their internal health (Ryan et al, 2009).

In addition to not distancing or disconnection, clinician should help African American parents learn to accept their children's sexual orientation. Padilla, Crisp & Rew (2010) noted that parent's ability to accept their children's sexual orientation significantly reduced the impact of life stress on drug. Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz & Sanchez (2010) added that family acceptance in adolescence is associated with young adult positive outcomes in self-esteem, social support, and general health, and is protective for negative health outcomes, i.e. depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation and attempts.

In this study, participants discussed the struggles their families also experienced, through homophobic beliefs perpetuated by the African American community, as well as developing a newfound relationship with their son. Similar to nurturing queer African American male youth on the potential for familial growth of their parents accepting their sexual orientation, parents should also explore the possible evolution of their feelings about homosexuality. In addition to exploring with parents their potential in being more

accepting of their queer African American sons, family therapists should also explore the potential feelings of loss, hurt, and sadness parents may have in learning their son does not identify as heterosexual.

In addition to validating and nurturing queer African American male youth and their families, family therapists must also discuss the importance of creating a safe and supportive environment that will also nurture them. Family therapists should have conversations with their clients about their religious and/or spiritual values, and begin having discussions about how to create a safe religious experience for everyone. For example, family therapists should have discussions regarding belonging to a church community that is accepting of homosexuality. Families can also have a conversation with their current religious/spiritual leader about his/her beliefs regarding homosexuality. These conversations with families will give them permission to explore other alternatives of religious fellowship, as well as remind them that they have control over making their religious/spiritual environment safe for their queer child. Finally, it will illustrate to the queer African American youth that he is valued and loved, because his parents are choosing to protect him from a toxic and unsafe environment.

Overall, it is vital that clinicians are able to nurture and help African American parents learn how to raise a healthy queer African American man. Clinicians are urged to encourage parents to stay connected with their adolescents and young adults, regardless of their sexual identities. They then must help African American parents learn to accept their children's sexual orientation. Clinicians can be curious with parents about how their religious beliefs about homosexuality negatively influence their relationships with their children. In addition, parents can be educated about their own developmental trajectory

and be encouraged to understand that there may be an evolution of their beliefs regarding homosexuality. I would also recommend that clinicians patiently explain to parents that they be careful with their reactions, and that any spontaneous derogatory comments about their child's sexual orientation may unwittingly leave lasting emotional scars on their children.

Implications for Future Research

The findings of the current study provide some preliminary insights into understanding the disclosure process for queer African American male youth and their families. This study was broadly conceived and raised many questions with a variety of implications for further research. In this way it can be seen as a starting point requiring further research, more data and larger sample sizes to validate and expand on these preliminary findings. As described in the earlier section on limitations future research suggested by this study would include research that is aimed at demographics variables like geographical location and age of disclosure.

In this study participants lived in the South, Appalachian, and Northeastern regions of the United States. Therefore the research did not effectively capture the experience of queer African American in other regions of the United States. Future research targeted at more geographical regions of the country may provide a more holistic view of the queer African American male youth experience.

In addition to geographical location, age of disclosure should also be explored. Participants in this study were interviewed between the ages of 18-22, and disclosed from 6 months to 5 years prior. Therefore, the researcher did not interview youth under the age

of 18. Future research aimed at queer youth may interview youth that are under the age of 18 and living with their parents.

In addition to age of the participants, familial relationships specific to gender may be important to future research. In this study very few participants who indicated they grew up in a two parent household, with a mother and father, specifically discussed their relationships with their fathers. Future research should explore the relational dynamics of African American mothers and fathers, and the similarities and difference in their relational dynamics with their queer children.

Other future research may include the disclosure process for queer African American male youth that were not reared in the African American community. How does their experience of disclosure mimic and differ from participants in this study. In addition, future researcher may want to influence whole families so that they can explore the disclosure process for parents' of a queer African American son. Researchers may want to ask parents the following questions: How do they understand their beliefs about homosexuality? How did their beliefs about homosexuality consciously or unconsciously shape how they reared their sons? How did they feel when their son disclosed to them about his sexual orientation?

Future research may also include the direct effects of more external messages of homophobia and heterosexism. Researchers may want to ask queer African American youth the following questions: How did your family's religious faith affect your ability to disclose your sexual orientation? How did receiving homophobic and heterosexists messages from parents, family, church, etc. contribute to hiding your sexual orientation?

In addition to external messages of homophobia and heterosexism, future researchers may want to explore the internal effects of homophobia and heterosexism on queer African American youth. Researchers may want to ask queer African American youth the following questions: How did you initially learn that being queer was abnormal? How did accepting your sexual orientation promote feelings of self-validation? How did hiding your sexual orientation manifest itself in your behavior with others and yourself?

Conclusion

This research was gratifying and enjoyable to me on a number of levels. As a clinician and researcher I believe this study gathers important information that addresses a gap in the existing literature and has the potential to advance the field of Marriage and Family Therapy. As a queer African American male it was a pleasure to hear other stories both similar and different from my own. The stories were filled with moments of love, anger, hurt, joy, and pain.

As a qualitative researcher who both bracketed but shares a perspective similar to the participants in this study, I am struck by the omnipresent stories of tragedy and of love in the intersection of sexual and racial identity in the black community. Shame seems to puncture gay youth's experiences of themselves growing up in the black community and the black church. The church has been and continues to be a place where African Americans find comfort, joy, acceptance, love, grace, and community. It has not,

however, been a place where queer people feel these positive emotions, in fact, it is quite the contrary.

I experience a loyalty conflict when I critique the African American community and its relationship with the church. True to my systemic orientation, however, I prefer to take a both/and perspective. The community is strengthened when it can hear and incorporate all perspectives. Rather than cut ties, disengage, and find new homes, I challenge African American queer people to stay connected to the community and find ways to build bridges so that the community nurtures all of its participants. I hope that these interviews and this dissertation is a step towards this dialogue.

At the end of each interview I thanked the participants for participating and asked them what it was like to share their experience. One of the most consistence responses I received was that they felt a sense of relief and joy being asked to share their stories and discuss their experience. In addition, participants noted that in this study they were able to continuously heal from experiences of homophobia by telling their stories and dialoging about their pain and joys.

Homophobia and heterosexism in the African American community and the disclosure process have a powerful effect on queer African American male youth and their relationships with their parents. The findings of this study point toward a relational stage process with specific themes integral to the experience of the participants interviewed. The study demonstrates ways in which family therapists might utilize the research in their clinical sessions to empower and nurture their queer African American male clients and their parents.

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Appendix A

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
Department of Marriage and Family Therapy

My name is DeMarquis Clarke and I am a doctoral student at Syracuse University. I am inviting you to participate in a research study. Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not. This sheet will explain the study to you. Please feel free to ask questions about the research if you have any. I will be happy to explain anything in greater detail if you wish.

The title of the study is: ***Growing Up Black, Male & Gay in Black America: The Affects that the Coming Out Process has on Queer African American Male Youth.*** I am interested in learning about what has happened when an African American male youth tells his parents that he is gay, bisexual or queer. I am also interested in talking with them about their coming out experience, as well as how they experience the interface of their racial identity and sexual orientation.

You will be asked to fill out a short demographic form and then to participate in an interview to answer some questions about how you have experienced your coming out process, how this experience has influenced family relationships, and the how you understand the connection between your race and sexual orientation. This will take approximately 60 minutes of your time.

I am also requesting that you allow me to audio record our conversation so that I can best learn from you. Your confidentiality will be protected in the following ways: The demographic form and the audiotape will be marked with numbers and will not be labeled with any identifying information. The recordings themselves will be kept in a secure place where only I, the faculty advisor, and the transcriber will have access to them. At the conclusion of my research the recordings will be destroyed. In any publications I write or any presentations that I make, I will use a made-up name for you, and I will change identifying information about you.

The benefit of this research is that you will be helping us to understand how African American families communicate with each other about gay issues and how these issues affect the coming out process for African American male youth. This information should help family therapists better support these individuals as well as their families.

The risks to you of participating in this study are the inconvenience of having to attend an interview for 60 minutes which I will try to minimize by scheduling at times that are most

convenient for you. There is also a risk that in discussing sexuality that you may become uncomfortable or embarrassed. I hope to minimize these risks by being open to discussing these feelings as they come up. However, if a question or situation during the interview makes you uncomfortable you are free to pass on any question at any time. If you feel like you would like additional help with whatever feelings might come up I would be happy to provide referrals to mental health clinicians in the area.

If you no longer wish to continue, you have the right to withdraw from the study, without penalty, at any time.

A signed copy of each consent form will be given to each participant.

If participants have questions or concerns regarding their rights as a participant, or if the participant has questions, concerns or complaints he or she wishes to address to someone other than the investigator or faculty advisor, or if the participant cannot reach the investigator, you may contact Syracuse University's Institutional Review Board at (315) 443-3013.

Appendix B
Demographic Questionnaire

Please indicate the appropriate responses to the following questions:

1. Your age_____

2. How would you describe your sexual orientation? (Please circle one)

Bisexual
Gay
Queer
Questioning
Male who has sex w/other males
Other_____

3. Did you primarily grow up in (please circle one)?

A single parent household, headed by mom
A single parent household, headed by dad
A two parent household
A household headed by extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles…)

4. What (if any) is your religious affiliation? _____

5. How religious do you consider yourself? (please circle one)

Not Religious
Mildly Religious
Moderately Religious
Highly Religious

6. How long ago did you disclose to your parents about your same sex attraction? (Please circle one)

0-5 months ago
6 months to a year ago
A year to 2 years ago
2 years to 5 years ago
Over 5 years ago

Appendix C

Original Interview Questions

1. How does being African American affect the ways in which you view your sexual orientation?
2. What are some of the ways you see your race and sexual orientation intersecting?
3. How does being queer, African American, and male affect how you see yourself?
4. Tell me about when you first disclosed to your parent(s)?
5. How has disclosure affected your relationship with your parents?
6. How has it changed over time?
7. How has it affected your family?
8. What negative effects came out of disclosure?
9. What positive effects came out of disclosure?

Appendix D

Sample Journal Entry

4/17/09

5th Interviewed Participant

The participant was nervous at first. He initially struggled to make eye contact and playing with his hands for the 10 – 15 minutes of the interview. After about 15 minutes or so, the participant became more relaxed and freely talked about being gay and his complicated relationships with his mother.

This interview probably triggered me the most thus far. The thing that was most triggering for me was the way he was sacrificing himself for his mother. In some ways, his sacrifice felt like a noble gesture, but in others ways, it felt like a murder. On more than one occasion, he talked about wanting to please his mother to the point of denying his sexual orientation, and having a child with a female because that is what she wanted from him. I think I struggle with this the most, because he was clearly struggling with having to even make a decision like that. When he started talking about it, he began crying and talking about how much his mother means to him.

I know that we all have to live our lived the best way we know how, but my hope is that living our best life also means living it with honesty and integrity for yourself and people you are in relationship with. So, I guess, I believe that if he gets married and lives a heterosexual lifestyle because his mother wants him to, he will not be living his best life.

After this interview, I called my mom to thank her for being such a supportive parent in my coming out process. In spite all the ways we struggle, she has been a champion in allowing me to be who I am and have my own voice.

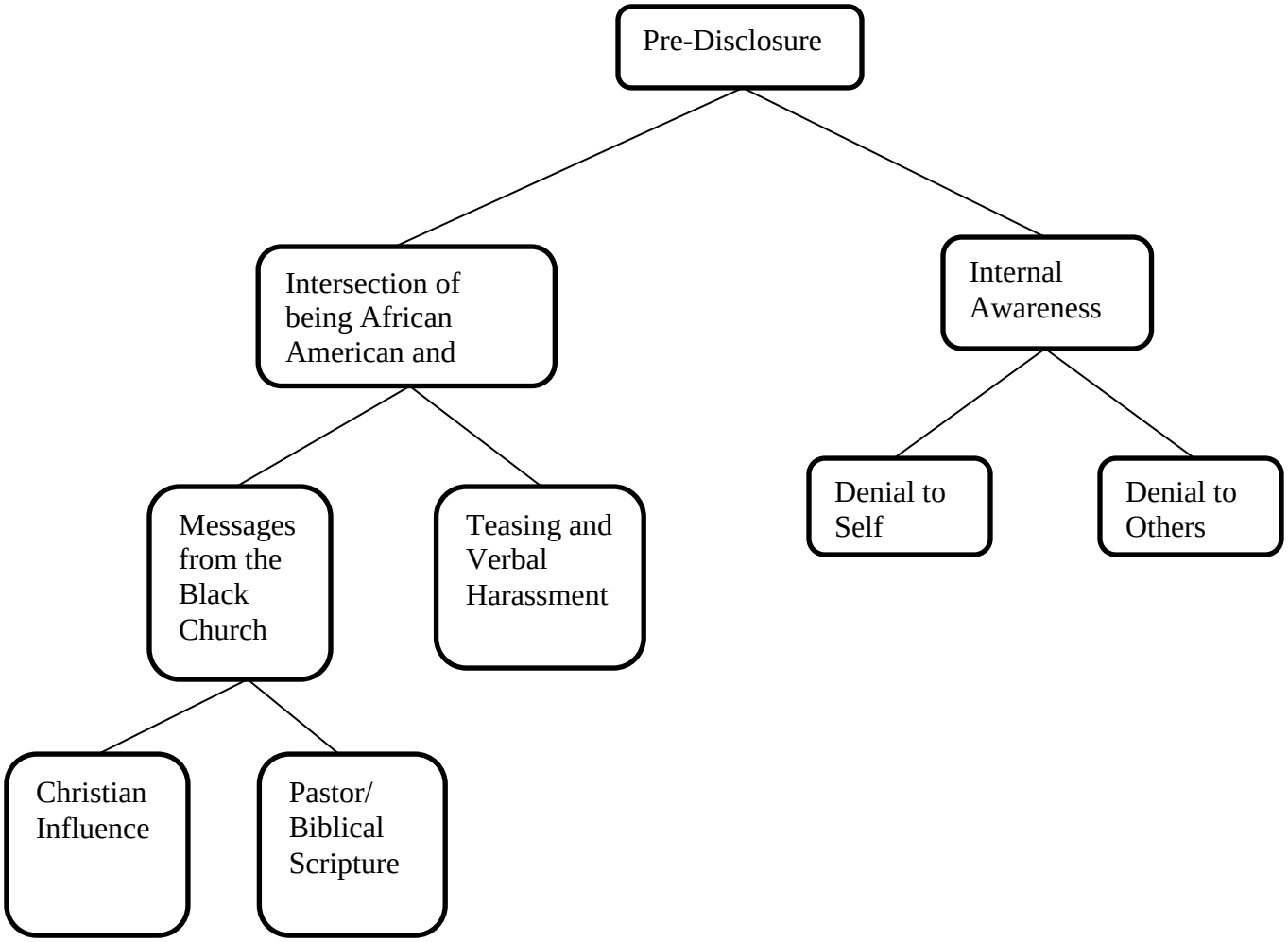
Appendix E

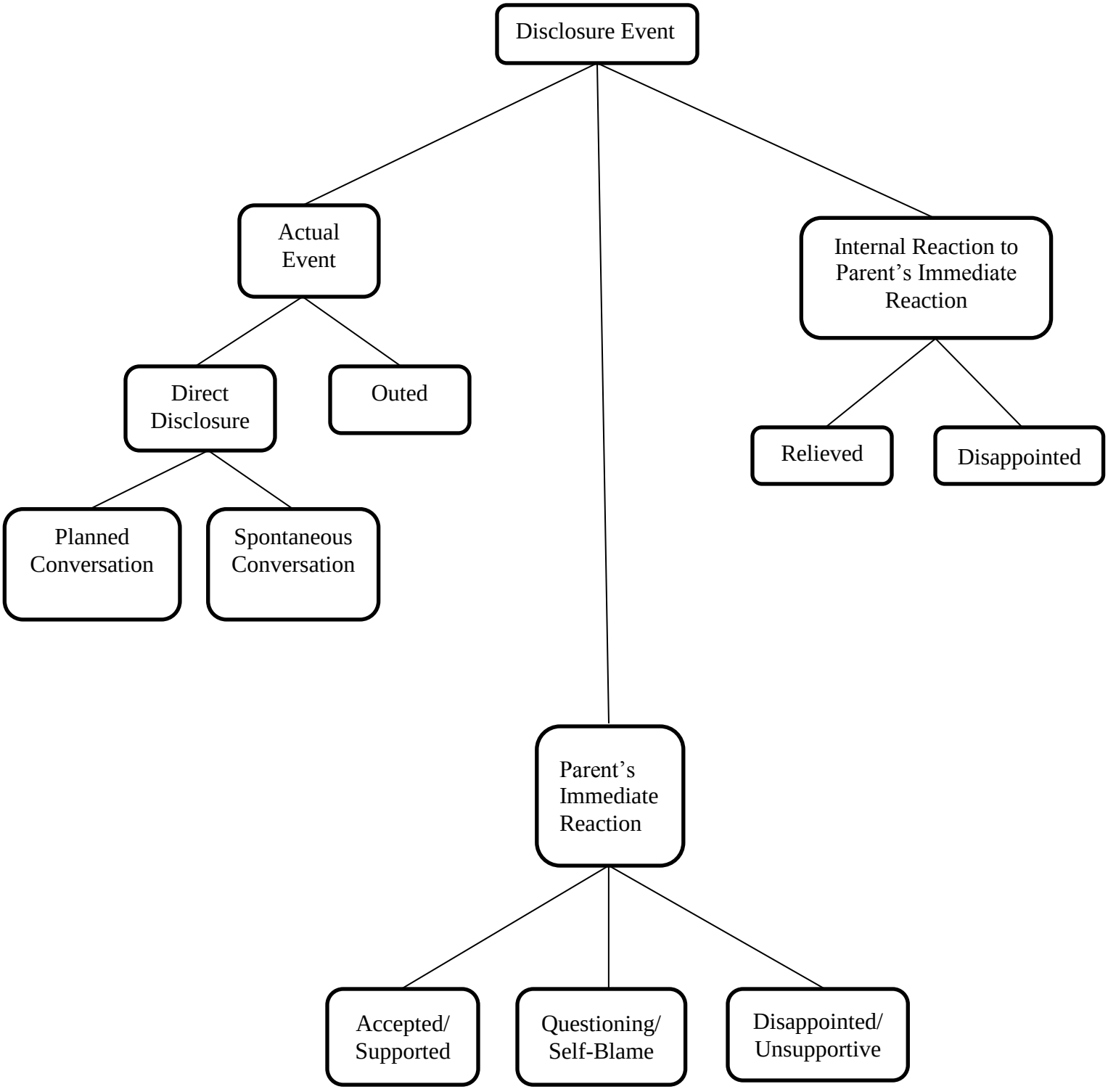
Participant Demographics

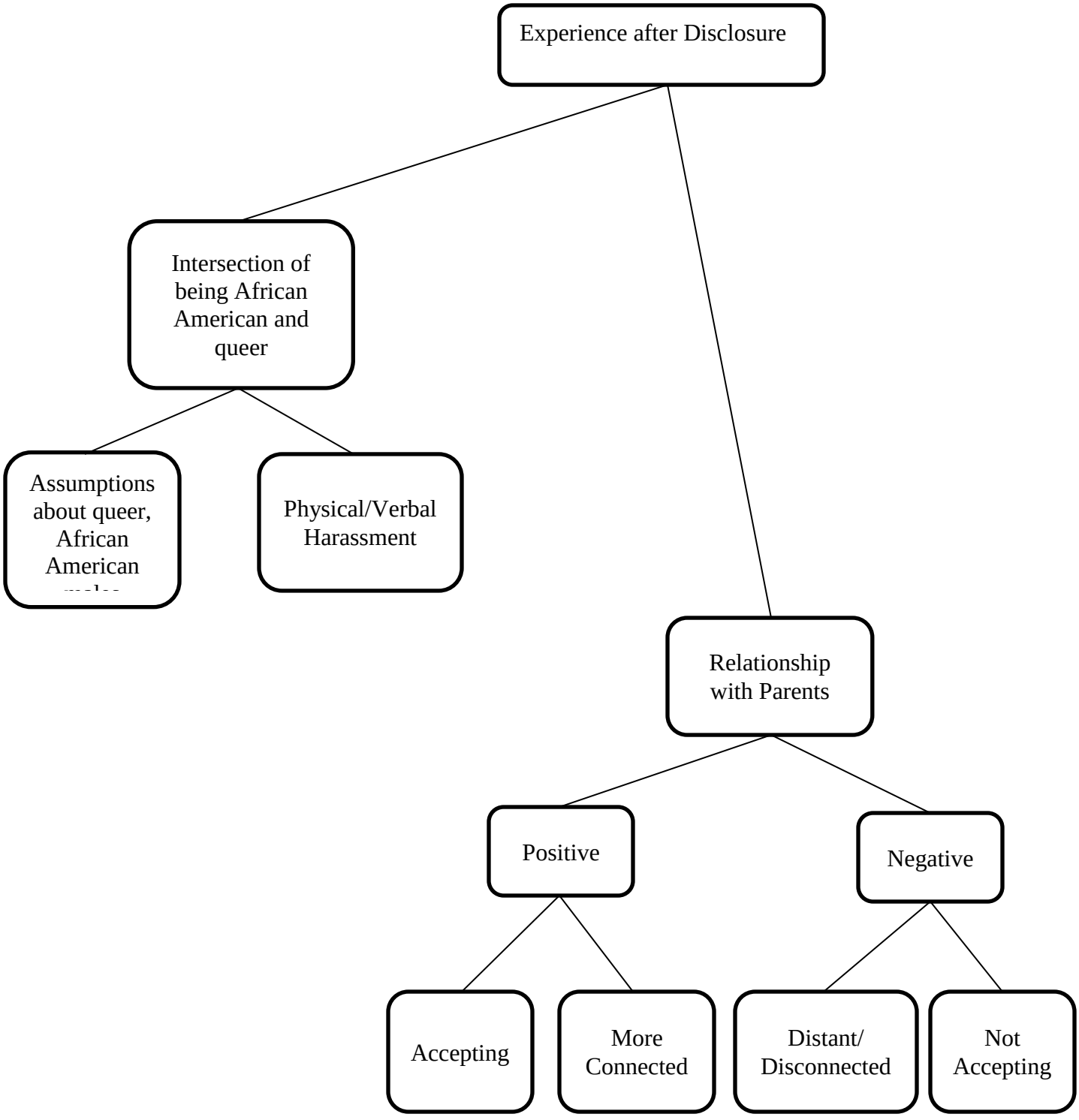
	Age	Sexual Orientation	Parental Household	Times after Disclosure to Parents	Religious Affiliation
Ahmad	22	Gay	Single parent household (mother)	2 – 5 years ago	Baptist (Highly Religious)
Brian	22	Gay	Two parent household (mother and father)	Over 5 years ago	Christian (Mildly Religious)
Cameron	20	Gay	Two parent household (mother and father)	6 months – 1 year ago	Catholic (Mildly Religious)
DeAndre’	19	Gay	Two parent household (mother and father)	Over 5 years ago	Methodist (Moderately Religious)
Elton	19	Bi-sexual	Single parent household (mother)	2 – 5 years ago	Not Religious
Fredrick	22	Gay	Single parent household (mother)	2 – 5 years ago	Baptist (Mildly Religious)
Gavin	19	Gay	Two parent household (mother and father)	1 – 2 years ago	Baptist (Moderately Religious)
Harold	20	Gay	Single parent household (mother)	2 – 5 years ago	Baptist (Moderately Religious)
Jamal	20	Bi-sexual	Single parent household (grandmother)	1 – 2 years ago	Not Religious
Isiah	20	Gay	Two parent household (mother and father)	2 - 5	Christian
Keith	19	Male who has sex with other males	Single parent household (mother)	1 – 2 years ago	Christian (Mildly Religious)

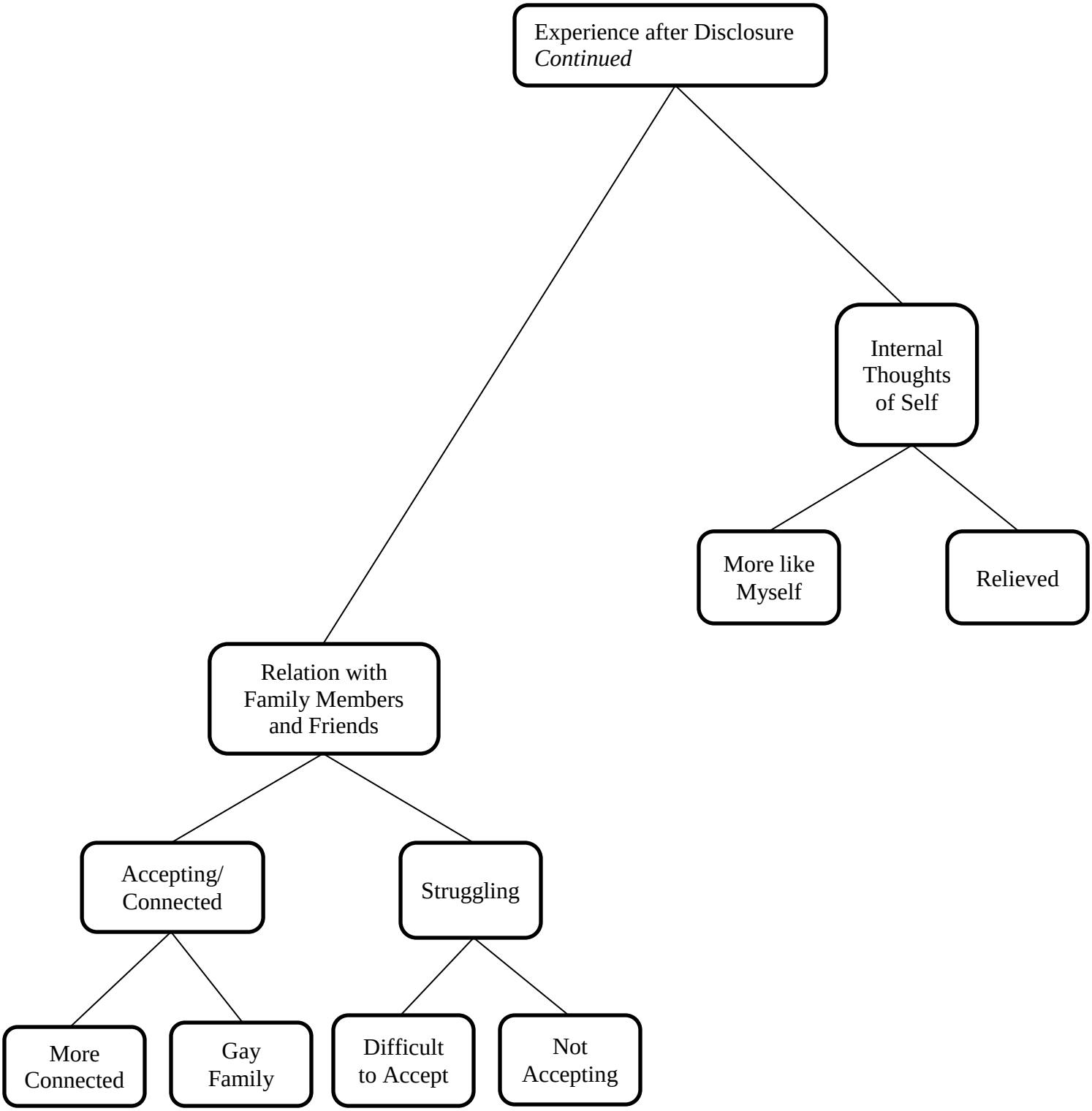
Appendix F

Definition of Situation Coding Table




Disclosure Event
Actual Event
Internal Reaction to Parent's Immediate Reaction
Direct Disclosure
Outed
Relieved
Disappointed
Planned Conversation
Spontaneous Conversation
Parent's Immediate Reaction
Accepted/ Supported
Questioning/ Self-Blame
Disappointed/ Unsupportive


Experience after Disclosure
Intersection of being African American and queer
Assumptions about queer, African American
Physical/Verbal Harassment
Relationship with Parents
Positive
Negative
Accepting
More Connected
Distant/ Disconnected
Not Accepting


Experience after Disclosure
Continued
Internal Thoughts of Self
More like Myself
Relieved
Relation with Family Members and Friends
Accepting/ Connected
Struggling
More Connected
Gay Family
Difficult to Accept
Not Accepting

Biography

NAME OF AUTHOR: DeMarquis Clarke

PLACE OF BIRTH: Jackson, Mississippi

UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:
Tougaloo College
University of Southern Mississippi

DEGREES AWARDED:
Master of Science in Marriage and Family Therapy, 2001, University of Southern Mississippi

Bachelors of Arts Psychology, 1999, Tougaloo College

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:
Director of Clinical Training, Seton Hill University Marriage and Family Therapy Program, 2008 – Present.

DeMarquis Clarke

231 Oakview Ave.
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15218
DeMarquisClarke@gmail.com

Objective:

To secure a tenured track position, training clinicians at an accurate MFT program

Professional Profile:

- Committed to work that promotes an understanding and tolerance for social change in relation to areas of race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, and physical ability
- Deeply committed to the high quality of education for students
- Committed to work that is relationally focused and systemically based
- Committed to work that evokes change and growth in individuals both educationally and therapeutically

Education:

Doctorate of Philosophy, Marriage and Family Therapy
Anticipated Graduation Date - December 2011
Syracuse University - Syracuse, New York

Master of Science, Marriage and Family Therapy, August 2001
University of Southern Mississippi – Hattiesburg, Mississippi

Bachelor of Arts, Psychology, May 1999
Tougaloo College – Tougaloo, Mississippi

Experience:

Clinical Experience:

Family Therapist, November 2008 – present
Center for Family Therapy, Seton Hill University, Greensburg, Pennsylvania
Provide therapy and psycho-educational training to children, adolescents, and adults. Conduct individual, couple, family, and/or group therapy sessions with clients who have issues of communication, depression, family and couple violence, anxiety, anger, relational conflict, self-esteem, and parent-child conflict, as well as issues centered on societal oppression. In addition, I have a strength and passion in working with clients of color and GLBTQ clients and families.

Family Therapist, July 2003 – October 2008
The Center for Contextual Change, LTD., Chicago, Illinois
Provide therapy and psycho-educational training to children, adolescents, and adults who have experienced trauma and/or abuse. Conduct individual, couple, family, and/or group sessions for male survivors and offenders of sexual abuse and trauma, as well as violent traumatic experiences. I also provide individual, couple, and family therapy with clients who have issues of communication, depression, family and couple violence, anxiety, anger, relational conflict, self-esteem, and parent-child conflict, as well as issues centered on societal oppression. In addition, I have a strength and passion in working with clients of color and GLBTQ clients and families.

Family Therapist, Clinical Internship, Fall 2001 – Summer 2003
Catholic Charities of Syracuse, New York
Provide therapy and psycho-educational training to clients that are not traditionally serviced at Catholic Charities, Brighton Family Center and Job Connections, which are all affiliates of Catholic Charities. Conduct group sessions with at-risk adolescents focusing on self-esteem, depression, anxiety, parents-child conflict, conflict resolution, and job readiness training.

Family Therapist, Clinical Internship, Fall 2001 – Summer 2003
Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School, Syracuse, New York
Provide therapy to at-risk males ranging from 5 to 12 year of age. Conduct sessions focusing on conflict resolution, self-esteem, and anger management.

Family Therapist Clinical Internship, Fall 2001 – Summer 2003
The Goldberg Couple and Family Therapy Center – Syracuse, New York
Provide individual, couple, and family therapy to a diverse population. Assist clients with issues of relational conflict, depression, communication skills, anxiety, self-esteem, and parent-child conflict.

Family Therapist, Clinical Internship, Spring 2001 – Summer 2001
Pine Grove Child and Adolescent Outpatient Services – Hattiesburg, Mississippi

Provide therapy and psycho-education to at-risk adolescents and children. Conduct group sessions with adolescent males focusing on anger, depression, anxiety, self-esteem, conflict resolution, and societal barriers.

MFT Therapist-in-Training, Spring 2000 – Summer 2001
U.S.M. Clinic for Family Therapy – Hattiesburg, Mississippi
Provide individual, couple, and family therapy to a diverse population. Perform intake sessions, determine presenting issues, discuss family history, set goals for therapy, and provide clinical assessments using the DSM IV.

Supervision Experience:

Clinical Supervisor, November 2008 – present
The Center for Family Therapy, Seton Hill University, Greensburg, Pennsylvania
Provide marriage and family therapy students with a variety of modalities, ongoing clinical experience, didactic presentations, video examples, live session observations, and regular processing of case material through individual and group supervision.

Internship Supervisor, January 2006 – October 2008
Center for Contextual Change, LTD., Chicago, Illinois
Supervise and developed a training program in which interns learn through a variety of modalities, ongoing clinical experience, didactic presentations, video examples, live session observations, and regular processing of case material through individual and group supervision.

Administrative Experience:

Director of Clinical Training, November 2008 – present
The Center for Family Therapy, Seton Hill University, Greensburg, Pennsylvania
Responsible for quality assurance of clinical services provided by all subordinate staff, including licensed therapists, registered interns and trainees. Quality of services is determined by professionally accepted standards as identified by the AAMFT guidelines and practices, and emerging best practices in the field. Provide ongoing outreach program development, clinical supervision, direction, training, auditing charts, assuring compliance with quality assurance programs, or other supervisory activities. Provide professional counseling services, including individual, family and group sessions for clients, testing, assessment and evaluations within the scope of individual expertise and practice. Also, provide direct client services. Clientele may include victims of trauma and abuse, perpetrators of abuse, abuse reactive youth, non-offending parents and partners, grief and loss issues, marital and family counseling, developmentally delayed, autism and other community based therapy services. In addition, manage an office manager and a $55,000.00 budget.

Intake Coordinator, January 2005 – October 2008
The Center for Contextual Change, LTD., Chicago, Illinois
Facilitated the initial calls from potential clients and coordinated the therapeutic appropriateness between clients' needs and therapist expertise.

Intern Program Coordinator, January 2006 – October 2008
The Center for Contextual Change, LTD., Chicago, Illinois
Coordinated interns and internship training opportunities with field liaisons at various colleges and universities in the Greater Chicagoland area.

Teaching Experience:

Assistant Professor: Family Therapy (FT 552). Marriage and Family Therapy Program, Seton Hill University, Spring 2010, Spring 2011
This Pre-Practicum course is a study of methods & strategies in Marriage & Family Therapy. This course is designed to prepare students for entry into the actual practice of Marriage and Family Therapy. Students will learn application of theory as they learn the basic skills of being a family therapist. This course builds knowledge and skills from PY520, FT 550 and creates a foundation for Practicum FT 600/610/620. Marriage and Family Therapy is different from other mental health disciplines because of the systemic way family therapists think about human behavior and change. The purpose of this course is to help you practice systemic thinking as it pertains to the lives of individuals, couples, families, as well as the communities and societies in which we all live. This course will also help you begin to integrate various systemic ideas into your own unique way of practicing family therapy. Role Plays, videotapes, and case review are utilized to demonstrate method and techniques.

Assistant Professor: Group Dynamics (FT 530): Marriage and Family Therapy Program, Seton Hill University, Fall 2009, Summer 2010, Fall 2010, Fall 2011
This course is designed to provide students with academic knowledge, as well as the experience of group process. It will provide a solid understanding of the process of group dynamics through experiential exposure so that students will be able to understand group process and dynamics, as well as develop and lead a variety of groups. It will also provide therapeutic concepts that underlie group dynamics. The overarching goal of the course is to assist students in becoming more effective group leaders through class lectures, rigorous self of the therapy work, and group process. By the end of this course, my goal is that students will be able to understand principles, concepts, and techniques of group leadership; comprehend group dynamics which will be observed and processed in interpersonal and intrapersonal interactions; recognize and develop group leadership skills; and appreciate group process through relational group dynamics.

Assistant Professor: Multicultural Therapy (FT 540). Marriage and Family Therapy Program, Seton Hill University, Spring 2009, Spring 2011.
The course is designed to provide students with a theoretical and experiential learning regarding multicultural issues. During the course of study, students will address issues and trends of our multicultural and diverse society, including characteristics and concerns of diverse groups, and societal attitudes and behaviors based on race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, disability status, age, religion, among others, especially from the counseling perspective. The students will be challenged to examine their own prejudices and biases toward groups that are culturally different from their own. This course will provide the necessary counseling skills to sensitively and successfully respond to culturally diverse individuals, couples, and families.

Assistant Professor: Couples Therapy (FT 551). Marriage and Family Therapy Program, Seton Hill University, Spring 2009.
Theories and techniques of couples therapy are explored in FT 551. A range of therapeutic modalities will be surveyed. It will examine major schools of couples therapy including cognitive-behavioral, object relations, experiential, narrative, structural-strategic, emotionally focused, and solution focused. Common presenting problems are studied with emphasis on treatment strategies. Role-plays, video-tapes, and case review are utilized to demonstrate method and techniques. This course also explores specific developmental issues as well as social and political factors affecting couples.

Adjunct Professor: Multicultural Counseling: Worldview and Systems Orientation (COUN 430). Department of Counseling Education, Northeastern Illinois University, Summer 2005 - Summer 2006.
The course is designed to educate students to the training model for multicultural competency, which includes awareness of cultural assumptions, knowledge of cultural diversity and racial/ethnic issues, and skills for cross-cultural counseling.

Adjunct Professor: Group Counseling (COUN 406). Department of Counseling Education, Northeastern Illinois University, Fall 2005.
The course is designated to educate students to the group dynamics, group theory and leadership skills. In addition, it provides group sessions to help group leaders develop self-awareness, interpersonal skills, and leadership ability.

Co-Professor: Family Therapy Perspective and Cultural Diversity (MFT 684) COAMFTE accredited Masters Program, Department of Marriage and Family Therapy, Syracuse University, Spring 2003.
The course is designed to expose therapist-in-training to different dimensions of diversity and its interface with the practice and profession of marriage and family therapy.

Professional Presentations:

Clarke, D. (2007, May).
Helping Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse Work Through Issus of Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Shame. All Day Institute. Presented at the YWCA of Metropolitan Chicago

Clarke, D. & Underwood, K. (2005, June).
Hide and Seek: The Complexities of Trauma and Abuse in the GLBT Community. 3 Hour Presentation. Presented at the YWCA of Metropolitan Chicago

Clarke, D. & Manley, A. (2005, April & 2006, April).
Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the African American Experience. All Day Institute. Presented at the YWCA of Metropolitan Chicago

Stone Fish, L., Clarke, D., Harvey, R., Brown, M., Sandberg, J., & Hardy, K. (2003, October).
Doing Relationships: A Pathway to Clinical Developments. All Day Institute Presented at the 61st Annual American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy Conference, Long Beach, California.

Clarke, D. & Hunter, T. (2003, October).
Doing Relationships with African American Males in Therapy. 2 Hour Presentation. Presented at the 61st Annual American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy Conference, Long Beach, California.

Clarke, D. & Brown, M. (2002, October).
An Unbreakable Attraction: The African-American Couplehood. Roundtable Discussion. Presented at the 60th Annual American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy Conference, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Research Experience:

"Men Matter," Spring 2001 – Summer 2001
Research Assistant to Mary Ann Adams, Professor in the Marriage and Family Therapy Program at the University of Southern Mississippi

- researched literature review developed 14 week intervention program for inter-city fathers
- conducted pre and post test interviews
- conducted individual, couple, family and group therapy with participants

Professional Membership:

- American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, 2000 – present

Honors:

- Awarded the 2003 Marriage and Family Therapy Social Justice Award
- Highlighted in the Spring 2002 Issue of "Insights," a Syracuse University magazine
- Carrie Norton Herring Bennett Scholarship, Spring 2000
- Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. Leadership Scholarship, Spring 2000

References Available Upon Request