

**HOW BLACK MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN LEARN TO COPE WITH
HOMOPHOBIA AND RACISM**

by

LAWRENCE OLIVER BRYANT

(Under the Direction of Talmadge C. Guy)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand how Black men who have sex with men (BMSM) learn to cope with homophobia and racism. Research questions that guided this study are:

1. How have BMSM experienced homophobia and racism?
2. How have BMSM coped with issues such as homophobia and racism?
3. How have BMSM learned their coping strategies in dealing with homophobia and racism?

A qualitative study was conducted with thirteen BMSM in Atlanta, Georgia using semi-structured interview protocols in one-on-one interviews. A purposeful sampling strategy was employed and participants were selected using the following criteria: 1) self-identify as Black or African American; 2) between 21 and 55 years, 3) self-identify as gay. Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data were analyzed employing constant comparative methods and yielded eight themes: BMSM face oppression within their own communities; BMSM experience real life racism; BMSM realization of same sex attraction; BMSM

challenge homophobia and racism; BMSM use social networks as a coping strategy; BMSM learn to teach acceptance; BMSM learn to accept their sexual orientation, and BMSM learn to define masculinity on their own terms. Participant profiles were used as additional data to help provide a more personal perspective on the participants.

Three conclusions were drawn from this study. They are (1) many of the coping strategies used by BMSM are achieved through nonformal channels of learning; (2) there is a substantial congruency between BMSM's spirituality and their sexual orientation; and (3) BMSM incorporated emancipatory learning through consciousness raising regarding their sexual orientation and outlook on life.

INDEX WORDS: Adult education, Adult learning, Black men who have sex with men, Critical race theory, Coping, Emancipatory learning, Gay, Qualitative research

HOW BLACK MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN LEARN TO COPE WITH
HOMOPHOBIA AND RACISM

By

LAWRENCE OLIVER BRYANT
B.S.W., Temple University, 1995
M.P.H., Emory University, 2001

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2008

© 2008

Lawrence Oliver Bryant

All Rights Reserved

(SPIRIT IN THE DARK)

HOW BLACK MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN LEARN TO COPE WITH
HOMOPHOBIA AND RACISM

By

LAWRENCE OLIVER BRYANT

Major Professor: Talmadge C. Guy

Committee: Juanita Johnson-Bailey

Derrick Alridge

Robert Hill

Electronic Version Approved:
Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
August, 2008

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of three very special people who influenced my life tremendously. These three individuals' lives served as a catalyst for me achieving this doctoral degree.

First, I dedicate this work to my father, Glenn Francis Bryant Sr. (February 17, 1932 – December 11, 1994) who inspired my life mantra, “I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13, KJV). Although this journey called life wasn't always easy for us we learned through unconditional love that we are more alike than we are different.

Second, I dedicate this work to my mother Evelma Glover (May 8, 1932 – December 7, 2003). Thank you mother for the unconditional love, acceptance, and encouragement you gave me, even when I couldn't give it to myself. Your unwavering dedication and commitment have helped me fulfill a lifelong dream of becoming an educator, a philosopher, and a lifelong learner. Most importantly you gave me the capacity to love myself and others.

Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to my beloved grandmother, Anna W. Bryant (June 14, 1914 – August 16, 2000) who once asked me a very vital question: “Is there any thing too hard for God?” (Genesis 18:13, KJV). Although the answers weren't always easy, she encouraged me to press toward the mark for the prize of the higher calling (Philippians 3:14 KJV). It is because of this

hope, encouragement, and wisdom that I now stand at the threshold of life's infinite possibilities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were; any man's [sic] death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.”

(Donne, 1624). These powerful words written centuries ago underscore the prosperity inherent in the principles of compassion and love. I could never have walked this journey alone and been successful. I undertook this dissertation because my loving father told me that I could do anything I put my mind to, as long as I did the work. Somehow in his infinite wisdom he knew that Faith without works is dead. It was this strong backbone of support that gave me the discipline and the resolve to complete this dissertation.

I am deeply grateful to my committee chair, Dr. Talmadge Guy, for his belief in me and for empowering me to achieve greater heights. He took my shortcomings and turned them into stepping stones. I am privileged and honored to have worked with one of the leading adult educators of our time. Dr. Guy respected my opinions and always encouraged me to think critically in carrying out this research

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	viii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Effects of Homophobia and Racism on BMSM	2
The Black Church	4
Learning to Live With Oppression.....	11
Statement of the Problem	14
Purpose Statement	16
Definition of Terms.....	18
2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	20
Multiple Systems of Oppression	21
Internalized Homophobia and Racism	26
Informal and Non-Formal Learning	58
Summary of Literature Review	63
3. METHODOLOGY	66
Theoretical Framework	69
Design of the Study	71
Data Analysis.....	78
Insider/Outsider Considerations.....	80

Validity and Reliability	84
Conclusion	87
4 PARTICIPANT PROFILES	88
Chapter Summary.....	100
5 FINDINGS	102
Themes and Sub-Themes	104
Findings Related to Research Question One: How Have BMSM Experienced Homophobia and Racism:.....	106
Findings Related to Research Question Two: How do SMSM Cope With Issues Such as Homophobia and Racism?	121
Findings Related to Research Question Three: How have BMSM Learn Their Coping Strategies in dealing with Homophobia and Racism?.....	128
Chapter Summary.....	142
6 CONCLUSION.....	145
Discussion of Conclusions	148
Conclusion One	149
Conclusion Two	158
Conclusion Three.....	162
Implications for Theory	169
Implications for Practice.....	170
Recommendations for Future Research	173
Personal Reflections.....	175

Comments	175
REFERENCES.....	180
APPENDICES	
A INTERVIEW GUIDE	202
B INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE.....	204
C INFORMATION SHEET	207

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 5.1: Themes Related to Research Questions	105

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

What the American dream has become for African Americans is a question under constant debate (Truslow, 1931). Some Black men face many challenges in their attempt to fulfill that often illusive Dream; that is, a big house with a white picket fence, children, decent wages, and a decent paying job (Guy, 2004; Malebranche, Fields, Bryant & Harper, 2007). The myth of meritocracy is the idea that through hard work, determination, and persistence one can achieve prosperity and fulfillment. These values were held by many early European settlers, and have been passed on to subsequent generations in efforts to fulfill the American dream. Martin Luther King (1965) delivered a poignant sermon describing his perspective on the American dream:

But now more than ever before, America is challenged to realize its dream, for the shape of the world today does not permit our nation the luxury of an anemic democracy. And the price that America must pay for the continued oppression of the Negro and other minority groups is the price of its own destruction. For the hour is late and the clock of destiny is striking out; we must act now before it is too late. (¶ 6)

For many African Americans oppression, racism, discrimination and homophobia have turned this dream into nightmare (Boykin, 2005).

Oppression in its many forms is so ingrained in the fabric of the legal, social, economic, educational, religious and political systems in America that it often goes unrecognized (Delgado, 1989). For many Black men, conflict and confusion often occur when they attempt to enjoy values such as individuality and freedom of expression but are denied the opportunity to do so (Boyd, 1996; Bush, 1999; Whitehead, 1997). Moreover, because homophobia is so prevalent in the Black community many Black men who have sex with men (BMSM) have a much more extensive maze to navigate regarding their sexuality and sexual orientation.

Effects of Homophobia and Racism on BMSM

Homosexuality was first introduced as a medical term in the second half of the 19th century. The term itself describes an erotic desire for persons of the same sex (Drescher, 1998). The prevalence of homosexual relationships in the Black community has given rise to homophobia, a term used in this dissertation to identify an irrational fear of homosexuals (Fone, 2000). Homophobia occurs not only in heterosexuals, but manifests itself in homosexuals who have been conditioned by their socio-cultural affiliations to hate themselves as a result of their sexual practices, Dyson (as cited in Byrd & Guy-Sheftall, 2001).

While homosexual relationships are frowned upon throughout American society, they are especially derided by the Black community (Boykin, 1996). The very organizations designed to support Blacks, particularly the Black church, may actually give rise to much of the internalized homophobia many BMSM experience on a day-to-day basis (West, 2001). The church's position on homosexuality has been one of condemnation. However, if it chose to do so, the

Black church could play a central role in providing a safe space for BMSM to deal with such compelling social issues as HIV/AIDS and racism. As a result of these strong environmental influences against homosexuality, many Black men find themselves hiding their true sexuality (King, 2004).

Discrimination and racism do not exist in the abstract. They come with distinctive historical idiosyncrasies, practices, and beliefs. African Americans recognize prejudices based on color but may fail to recognize other prejudices such as sexism, classism, and homophobia. Constantine-Simms (2001) makes the following salient point about homophobia in the Black community:

It will only change when more Black men realize that Black gay bashing will win no brownie points with White conservatives and will certainly not make them anymore sympathetic to Black causes. Former Nation of Islam national spokesperson Khalid Muhammad found that out. In a widely publicized speech in 1993, he made one of the most devastating and disgusting public assaults ever on gays. Yet he is still one of the most vilified Black men in America. (p. 5)

What many African Americans fail to realize when they side with homophobic conservative Whites against homosexuality is that many of these people are also racist, classist, and sexist (Boykin, 1996; Constantine-Simms, 2001). Given this backdrop, BMSM must learn ways to cope with and develop strategies to deal with this societal reality. A logical place to provide support and safety for BMSM would seem to be the Black church.

Researchers (Delgado, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Solórzano, 1998; Tate, 1997; Taylor, 1997) admit that racism in the United States is persistent, tenacious and intractable. The literature is rich with definitions and constructs related to racism; however, for the purpose of this review, Audre Lorde (1992), (a Black lesbian) provides the most concise definition “the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance” (p. 496). In his breakthrough study, *Critical Race Methodology*, Solórzano & Yosso (2002) describes how storytelling can be used as a tool to work toward social justice and provides a liberatory and transformative solution to racial oppression (Solórzano, 2002).

This methodology uses qualitative research as a social movement. Although critical race theory (CRT) challenges racism, it only vaguely references groups such as gays and lesbians. This is an inherent weakness in this perspective. For example, scholars such as (Matsuda, 1993) recognize that many experience racial oppression in tandem with oppression on grounds of gender, class, or sexual orientation.

The Black Church

Many Black churches vehemently argue that homosexuality is unnatural and that gays should not practice or engage in homosexual behavior, even though some ministers admit that homosexuality may be beyond one's control and that some are born this way (Giordano, 1999). Additionally, many Blacks do not believe that gays should be placed in the same categories as other minorities such as themselves when it comes to oppression (Boykin, 2005).

Many Black religious, political, and social leaders believe it is their responsibility to deliver BMSM from homosexuality through prayer and conversion therapies (Grace, 2001); however, the American Psychological Association has denounced therapies aimed at attempting to change one's sexual orientation (Helminiak, 1995). In contrast, the feminist writer hooks (2001) make a sweeping proclamation about affirming Blackness in her groundbreaking article *Salvation*. She posits the following:

Loving Blackness means that we love all of who we are, and that includes gay Black People. In recent years, I have been asked by young Black heterosexual militants who still wrongly cling to the homophobic Black power condoned idea regarding whether or not we "should accept gays." I remind them that gay Black people are here to stay and are not looking to heterosexuals to validate their reality, their worth, or their authenticity. (pp. 196-197)

The Black church was formed as an act of resistance against second-class status accorded to African Americans in White churches (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). The role of resistance continued throughout the years of slavery as the growing number of African American churches articulated a liberation theology that stood in distinct contrast to the dominant interpretation of the Bible. While slave owners cited Black skin as the curse of Ham and a justification of enslavement, slaves were inspired by Moses who led the Jews out of slavery (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

In the past, institutions such as the Black church have participated in helping the Black community by lending support, providing care, and being actively involved in the health and social welfare of its members (Baker, 1999). However, many believe that the Black church may be the primary instigator of homophobia in the Black community (Constantine-Sims, 2001).

For many Black gay men the only seemingly viable solution to the discrimination and isolation brought on by homophobia is to keep their sexual desires secret slipping into the abyss of invisibility, imperceptibility, denial, and for some---self-hatred (Beam, 1986). Boykin (1996) gives an insightful critique of this kind of internalized homophobia. He posits that:

One of the most enduring qualities of oppression is not only that it teaches the oppressed to hate themselves but it also teaches them to hate one another, pitting minority against minority in a senseless contest to replicate the oppressor. Remarkably, the oppressed absorb and accept the values of the oppressor. (p.57)

This scenario may explain why many Black gay men and women seek to consciously change their appearance from anything that might call attention to their sexual orientation to a more heterosexual appearance. This includes altering their personality, sexual behavior, and sexual identity in an attempt to conform to the norms of the larger society.

However, as Boykin's quote asserts, BMSM do not need to define themselves solely by membership in the Black community. They must begin to embrace not only their color, but their sexuality as well. Conversely, not all

members of the Black community are homophobic; many leaders believe freedom based on sexual orientation is just as important as freedom based on race, gender, class, religion, or creed.

Powerful political and civil rights figures support BMSM and their right to equality and freedom of expression. Examples of African American leaders who support equal rights for gays and lesbians include: Civil rights leaders such as Jesse Jackson (presidential candidate), Al Sharpton (presidential candidate), Carol Moseley Brawn (Ambassador to New Zealand), Michael Eric Dyson (author and professor), Jocelyn Elders (former surgeon general), Henry Louis Gates (Harvard professor), Reverend Peter Gomes (Harvard chaplain), Rep. John Lewis (Congressman from Georgia), Reverend Joseph Lowery (civil rights leader), Reverend William Sinkford (president, Unitarian Universalist Church), and the late Coretta Scott King (civil rights icon and wife of the Reverend Martin Luther King).

These leaders have expressed disapproval of homophobia and urged support of gay rights. They note that conservative extremists such as Pat Buchanan and the late Jerry Falwell, who were relentless against gays, were just as vociferous against civil rights in past generations (Constantine-Simms, 2001). *Race, Gender and Sexual Orientation: The Matrix of Domination*

Historically, homosexuality was viewed as a criminal act. According to Bederman (1995) after the 1880s attitudes changed and physicians began to look at homosexuality as an aberrant deficiency in the male sexual identity. They considered it “a case of the male body gone wrong through disease or congenital

deformity.” This categorization was one way that the medical establishment sought to investigate, medicalize and contain those external forces that threatened the virility of the white middle class manhood (p. 15).

Black gay men face multiple oppressions; they are Black, gay, and male. They live at the nexus of intersecting systems of domination—race, gender and sexual orientation. Many are rejected by their own community and barely tolerated by White gays. Many spend endless hours trying to figure out how to repress, deny, and keep their sexuality closeted from family, peers, and society (Constantine-Simms, 2001). Although the term homophobia means an irrational fear and disdain of homosexuality and those who practice it, this term is not always relegated to heterosexuals who loathe homosexuals.

This research is an opportunity to explore this understudied phenomenon in Black gay men and potentially provide information on how they develop strategies to cope with multiple oppressions. Ultimately, it may help promote a greater sense of self-acceptance and self-actualization among BMSM and provide an opportunity for the larger community to view these men through a more compassionate, empathetic and understanding lens. This is especially important given the recent attention in the Black community to the phenomenon known as the “down-low.” The down-low (DL) is a term coined to identify an inconspicuous population who secretly engages in same sex behavior but identify and present themselves to the world as heterosexual.

In terms of social construct, Black masculinity is an especially ambiguous and misunderstood subject in the Black community, especially as it relates to

gender role conflict. Behavioral scientist and sociologists have pointed to America's historical legacy of slavery, with its identification of Black masculinity with physical labor, breeding, servitude, and physical endowment (all Black men have large penises) (Malebranche, Fields, Bryant, & Harper, 2007). The internalization of these roles is often cited as the reason for the focus on these stereotypical attributes of masculinity among Black men today (Harris 1992; Whitehead 1997). Scholars such as Chunnell, Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, (1998) posit that, White supremacists perpetuate these stereotypes by suggesting that because Black men are over-sexed and well-hung, they pose a significant threat to the future of the "White race."

In an attempt for Black heterosexual men to assert their virility, they oftentimes mirror America's traditional contempt for homosexuality. They employ the John Wayne fallacy that "real men" don't show emotions. When BMSM break this standard, they are taunted and ridiculed as less than masculine (Constantine-Simms, 2001).

In a recent study, Blazina (2001) describes the impact of gender role conflict. He concludes that Black men may experience a loss of psychological well-being when trying to achieve these traditional standards of masculine behavior. These maladaptive psychological effects may be due in part to the restrictive nature of traditional gender roles to which men attempt to adhere, as well as the psychological strain felt when there is a failure to achieve these masculine role ideals.

Socialization in the Black community has traditionally focused on physical and heterosexual prowess (reflecting slavery), with expectations of hard labor and pro-creation. This is in contrast to the more White patriarchal profile with attributes such as individualism and competition; which, because of institutional racism may be denied to Black men (Malebranche et al. 2007). As a result, Black men are oftentimes confounded in defining their sexuality and masculinity. They often resort to the one variable they can fully control - their sexual lives (Harris, 1992; Jackson, 1997; Malebranche, et. al.). According to some, many Black heterosexual men rely on female conquests, fathering children, domination, and having sex without a condom as sexual indicators of masculinity (Franklin 1994; Whitehead 1997).

Black Masculinity and the Down-Low

Further demonizing and stigmatizing Black men is the phenomena known as the down-low. The media's insatiable appetite for sensationalism and drama has catapulted the down-low to a frenzied new height (King, 2004). This phenomenon is defined as follows: a Black man who is married or has a girlfriend and has sexual relations with men on the side without telling her. Usually this man does not identify himself as being gay or homosexual (Boykin, 2005; King, 2004). The problem is men on the down-low have been accused of passing HIV to Black women by having unprotected sex with infected male partners; however, no current scientific studies support this accusation (Boykin 2005; Carrns 2002; Edwards 2001; Millet 2005; Steinhauer 2001; Wright, 1993).

Boykin (2005) discusses this very volatile issue. He claims that reporters began contacting him several years ago about men on the down-low who were in relationships with women but were secretly having sex with men. Some of these men were HIV infected and were passing the disease on to their wives and girl friends or other female sex partners (Boykin 2005; Carns 2002; Edwards 2001; Steinhauer 2001; Wright 1993). Many believe that it is this behavior that is responsible for the dramatic increase in HIV/AIDS among Black women (King, 2004). Although scientifically unproven, fears of down-low behavior continue to fuel homophobia toward BMSM. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC, 2005), Black women are at risk for HIV/AIDS for multiple reasons, including casual sex, prostitution, STDs, and having sex with infected partners.

Learning to Live With Oppression

Adult Education, in fulfilling its role of social justice and social action could provide safe spaces for BMSM to address many of their social issues. Researchers in adult education have address issues related to race and gender within the last ten years. A few offer new and provocative perspectives on working with marginal populations. Merriam & Caffarella (1999) highlight some interesting perspectives related to learning in these populations. They state the following:

Adults are rarely just Black or white, male or female, homosexual or heterosexual, or of one cultural origin. Rather, most adults come in many shades and variations. For example, they may be female, but also white, of Hispanic origin, and a lesbian; or they may be male, but also Black of

African origin, and heterosexual. Although this complexity makes it difficult to form any generalizations, researchers nevertheless are working to untangle the intersection of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. (p.121)

Historically, education for Blacks was often directly related to reinforcing stereotypes of Blacks as inferior (Johnson-Bailey, 2006). This is just part of the racist ideology that Black men have to cope with. This research will help unveil how BMSM navigate racist and homophobic spaces. Overall, this study will explore the strategies and coping mechanisms used by these men in dealing with society during a time when the Black community is being devastated by compelling issues such HIV/AIDS. As a result of racist and homophobic attitudes, BMSM have been left mostly on their own to learn strategies to cope with an often antagonistic and hostile social environment.

One important question that this research seeks to answer is how BMSM experience and cope with multiple oppressions. This vulnerable population must oftentimes deal with a hostile, violent, and intimidating Black community when it comes to their sexual orientation (Gates, 2001). For example, one in four gay men have been physically battered because they were suspected of being gay; additional, statistics reveal that 50% of BMSM have been threatened with violence (Gates, 2001).

BMSM must cope with violence and many other issues related to being Black and gay in America. For instance, racism, homophobia, marginality, and HIV/AIDS are some of the issues they have to deal with sometimes daily. Their

coping strategies provide a means of survival; a way to deal with the day-to-day oppression, discrimination, and homophobia they face. According to Lazarus and Launier (as cited in Reeves, 1998):

The process of coping is integral to understanding stress reactions by suggesting that, the ways people cope with stress (maybe) even more important to overall morale, social functioning and health/illness than the frequency and severity of the episodes of stress themselves. (p. 29)

Examples of this coping can be found throughout the Black gay community in the social networks they have developed to help sustain their lifestyle and unique ways of expression (Hill, 2007).

During a recent trip to my hometown of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, this author encountered a situation that clearly exemplified how the Black gay community uses unique strategies to cope with oppression. I was invited by a long-time friend to at a local Black gay bar. He informed me that he was invited to say a few words commemorating the passing of a friend and community activist at the bar. He further informed me that this friend (a transgendered person) passed away recently from complications of AIDS, and since this bar was his favorite hangout people wanted to celebrate his home-going.

At first I thought, why on earth would anyone have a memorial service at a bar? However, when I arrived at the bar and began observing the environment, I was utterly amazed at the outpouring of love, compassion, and respect for this individual's life. As each person stood up to tell how she had touched his or her life, I was overcome with emotion and admiration. They spoke of her

commitment to the Black gay community, her involvement and love of drag pageants and talent shows, her activism and involvement in the war against HIV/AIDS, and her commitment to helping unify Black gay men against unfair and unjust treatment by the larger community. Many who remembered her spoke of how the supportive, nurturing, and accepting environment at the bar helped her cope with AIDS in the later stages. It was exclaimed during the ceremony that, many times when she was discharged from the hospital for an exacerbation of the disease, she went directly to the bar.

This is a powerful example of how BMSM learn to cope with societal oppression and homophobia using social networks. In reflecting on this situation, I considered how wonderful it was for this individual to be remembered by her friends, family, and the bar staff who knew that, because of racism and homophobic attitudes, she might not have received this much deserved recognition anywhere else. Moreover, the supportive and nurturing environment of the bar environment probably made her final days much more bearable. BMSM seek spaces where people accept them and provide a nurturing climate where they feel safe to be exactly who they are. This coping strategy exemplifies how BMSM use social networks to learn to cope with the multiple oppressions they face.

Statement of the Problem

Homosexual relationships are frowned upon throughout American society; they are especially problematic in the Black community given the socially constructed masculine expectations within the community (Baker, 1999;

Constantine-Simms, 2000). Many BMSM perceive that, in general, members of the Black community hold negative attitudes toward homosexuality, and many feel the African American community is less accepting of homosexuality than other communities (Boykin, 2005). This homophobia, with its associated stigma surrounding HIV, presents a formidable challenge in the fight against AIDS.

Although many local and national community organizations such as the Black AIDS Institute in Los Angeles, AID Atlanta, and the National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC) are on the frontlines of the war against HIV/AIDS, homophobia and racism, other institutions in the Black community, particularly the Black church have been slow to respond to these problems. In contrast, the NBJC is a Black civil rights organization charged with empowering Black same-gender loving people. This organization promotes equality and social justice within the Black gay, lesbian, and transgendered community. Its primary mandate is to eradicate homophobia and racism, including that perpetuated by institutions such as the Black church.

In the past, the Black church has participated in helping the masses by lending support, providing care, and being actively involved in the health and social welfare of its members (Baker, 1999). However, because of its strong Christian fundamentalist views on homosexuality, the church has been the main instigator of homophobia in the Black community (Baker, 1999). This study seeks to explore these volatile social issues as they relate to BMSM in their social environment.

The theoretical framework that will guide this research includes nonformal learning, critical race theory, and the literature related to coping. Although most research dealing with sexual orientation is limited to White gay males (Hill, 1995), a few scholars have examined social issues that impact Black men and masculinity. Some of these issues include racism, oppression, and homophobia (Alexander, 2008; Malebranche, et. al, 2007). Given the expectations for Black masculinity heaped upon African American men, BMSM have a much more extensive maze to navigate when it comes to sexual orientation. Sometimes that maze can lead to antisocial and self-defeating coping mechanisms, and for the most unfortunate ---an untimely death.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to understand how Black men who have sex with men (BMSM) learn to cope with homophobia and racism. Research questions that guided this study are:

1. How have BMSM experienced homophobia and racism?
2. How have BMSM coped with issues such as homophobia and racism?
3. How have BMSM learned their coping strategies in dealing with homophobia and racism?

Significance

The theoretical significance of this study lies in the contribution of knowledge to the adult education literature base that illuminates both the social, cultural, and practical learning experiences of BMSM. Not only do BMSM have

to learn to cope with the stresses of homophobia, they must also cope with racism from the White gay and straight communities.

The importance of this study lies in its focus on the learning experienced by a marginalized adult population— Black gay men. Moreover, this research seeks to examine ways that perspectives related to sexual orientation are transformed and changed over time among BMSM. The findings from this study have the potential to provide a basis for educational programs targeted toward BMSM to assist them in coping with the challenges they face. Most importantly, this research will help promote HIV/AIDS education that focuses both on the formative and current social context in which these men live.

Education strategies need to be compassionate and sensitive to the oppression that this population faces on a daily basis, both inside and outside Black community. By gaining insight into how BMSM learn to cope successfully with their racial and sexual identities, the findings can serve as a basis for successful learning strategies that help BMSM to successfully adjust to the challenges that face them.

This study will also add to the qualitative research literature exploring the complex social mechanisms influencing BMSM as they navigate a homophobic society. By examining the stories of how these men deal with these multiple systems of oppression we can get a better understanding of the struggles this group has to cope with on a daily bases. Moreover, BMSM stories may provide information for the overall Black community on ways of successfully dealing with oppression.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions are used:

1. Black Men Who Have Sex with Men (BMSM) – Those Black men who engage in sexual activity with members of the same gender. This includes those who may or may not identify as being gay, homosexual, or bisexual.
2. Black and African American - used interchangeably in this study.
3. Homosexuality - describes an erotic desire for persons of the same sex (Drescher, 1998). Hill (2006b) states that “The term homosexuality and homosexual are clinical terms based in psychology and have limited capacity to describe the range of personal being and behaving” (p. 3).
4. Heterosexuality – is described as an erotic desire for persons of the opposite sex (Drescher, 1998).
5. Homophobia – the affective, irrational dislike of lesbians and gay men, has become a contested word, especially with the rise in the religious right in the United States (Hill, 2006b)
6. Internalized Homophobia - this term is not always relegated to heterosexuals who loathe homosexuals. Fone (2000) explains that this phobia may be internalized by homosexuals.
7. Gender identity – is about personal feelings regarding one’s sense of self about being a man or woman, apart from one’s body parts (Hill, 2006b)
8. Heterosexism – is described as the attitude that all people are, or should be, heterosexual. It often is “an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and

stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior, relationship, or community, Herek, (as cited in Hill, 2006).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to understand how Black men who have sex with men (BMSM) learn to cope with homophobia and racism. The research questions that guided this study are:

1. How have BMSM experienced homophobia and racism?
2. How have BMSM coped with issues such as homophobia and racism?
3. How have BMSM learned their coping strategies in dealing with homophobia and racism?

This literature review illustrates the absence of discourse and scholarship in the field of adult education related to the learning experience of BMSM at the intersection of homophobia and racism. Moreover, this review identifies gaps in the existing literature and makes recommendations for filling those gaps. This review is an exposition of the scholarly materials retrieved from a variety of sources and relates to the experiences of BMSM. It is the hope of this researcher that the material contained in these pages provokes critical thought and provide efficacious learning approaches for practitioners and the community at large in dealing with BMSM.

Before beginning the body of the literature review, the process by which materials and information were retrieved will be discussed. Materials were culled from several resources, such as databases and others. These included,

electronic sources, peer reviewed research studies and related methodologies in adult education, written works by BMSM scholars, works by feminist scholars, Black intellectual scholars and those scholars with contradictory and opposing views on the subject of homosexuality in the Black community.

Database searches via Medline, PsychInfo, ERIC, Dissertation Abstracts International, GALILEO, Scopus, Your Journals@ Ovid, and Pub Med were utilized. First, items were selected utilizing the search terms homosexuality, Black masculinity, sexuality, coping, Black gay men, HIV/AIDS, homophobia, and race. Results from these searches identified approximately 100 articles of which 40 were retrieved. Additionally, approximately 15 books by scholarly writers were utilized to enrich this study's literature base.

Multiple Systems of Oppression: Racism, Sexism and Homophobia

Despite the numerous historical contributions of an expansive literature base on race and sexuality, much of the historical literature is based on norms that mostly ignore the intersection of race, gender and sexuality. In this section, the work by postmodern Black feminists such as bell hooks, Patricia Hill-Collins, Marlon Riggs and other scholars that address racism, sexism and homophobia will be reviewed. These scholars have challenged patriarchal standards of normalcy regarding the double standard that rebukes women for the same behaviors that men are equally culpable (Hill-Collins, 2004; hooks, 1990, 2004). hooks (1990) provide us with the most descriptive definition of patriarchy. She explains.

Patriarchy is a political-social system that insist that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone else is deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of terrorism and violence. (p.18)

In hooks' description of patriarchy, she implies that this terrorism and associated violence is not just perpetuated against women, but others in our community perceived as weak, passive and not exhibiting a machismo posture---namely BMSM. hooks (1994) further remind us that patriarchy is the single most devastating issue plaguing our community. She further laments that patriarchal thinkers are not just males. She states: "Women can be just as wedded to this type of thinking and action as men" (p. 23).

Riggs (2001) warns that this strong, protective, impassive, patriarchal stance has cost us dearly. He explains further that, "It has sent us down a perilous road of cultural and spiritual redemption, and distorted or altogether deleted from the historical record the multiplicity of identities around color, gender, sexuality and class, which all inform the Black experience" (p. 296).

Interestingly, BMSM have complained that these same sexual politics deny them the right to participate in and be fully accepted by institutions such as the Black church, their families, marriage, health care institutions, higher learning institutions, and some mainstream Black organizations (Boykin, 1996, 2005; Hill-Collins, 2004; Constantine-Simms, 2001; Lorde, 1992). Much of this isolation from Black mainstream thought comes in the form of heterosexism.

Burn, Kindle a Rexer (2005) defines heterosexism as prejudice against those persons who are not heterosexual. The term heteronormative is the widespread notion that heterosexuality is normal and that everything else is somehow deviant. Grace & Hill (2001) further explain this concept by noting, "Historically, in heterosexualizing culture and discourse, heterosexism and homophobia have been cultural expressions of a public pedagogy of negation, erasure and violence that violates queer identities and assaults queer integrity" (p. 145). They suggest that we build what they call figurative knowledges as a part of any cultural discourse. Figurative knowledges are ways of knowing that are not under the jurisdiction of those in power who normally espouse a heteronormative discourse when it comes to gays and lesbians (Grace & Hill, 2001).

The link between racism and heterosexism provides a platform for making some very sweeping assertions; one such assertion is, as Hill-Collins asserts (2004), that these two entities are separate systems of oppression. She further contends that these systems of oppression rely on each other for meaning. Suggesting that, "racism and heterosexism might better be viewed as sharing one history with similar yet disparate effects on all Americans differentiated by race, gender, sexuality, class, and nationality" (p. 88).

Hill-Collins (1998) asserts that this intersectionality provides a framework to explore how race, gender, sexual orientation and nation are mutually dependent on each other in the construction of identities. Williams-Crenshaw,(1995) expounds on this thesis, she states that, identity politics,

multiple identities, and power imbalances all are representations of intersectionality that help us better analyze tensions related to race and gender.

Andersen and Hill-Collins (2004) expand on this idea by arguing that the intersection of multiple identities, race, class, and gender for example, comprise intersecting systems of domination that they call the matrix of domination.” A matrix of domination posits multiple, interlocking levels of domination that stem from the societal configuration of race, class, and gender relations. These structural patterns affect individual consciousness, group interactions, and group access to institutional power and privileges” (p. 5). This concept of the matrix of domination focuses on the structural relations of power and hierarchy that are manifested through intersecting systems of domination. This domination characterizes the lived experiences of BMSM who reside at the nexus of systems of domination based on race, gender, and sexual orientation. The lived experiences of BMSM therefore are evidence of the impact of these systems of domination. Andersen and Hill-Collins state: “Because of the simultaneity of race, class, and gender in people’s lives, intersections of race, class and gender can be seen in individual stories and personal experience” (p. 8).

hooks (1990) add yet another dimension to this intersectionality. She notes that “postmodernism calls attention to those sensibilities which are shared across the boundaries of race, class and gender, and which could be fertile ground for the construction of empathy” (p. 3). These feminist scholars agree that these issues serve as a foundation from which to foster commonality

between sexes and sexualities. In fact, BMSM were among the first to question how racism, sexism and heterosexism are interrelated.

For example, BMSM point out that assuming that all Black people are heterosexual and that all lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) are White, misrepresents the prevalence of homosexuality in society at large (hooks, 2004). This must, by definition, include all races or else any distribution of personal attributes would be statistically skewed beyond explanation. Moreover, the lived experiences of BMSM would be wholly unaccounted for using a model that suggests only White men are homosexual (Hill-Collins, 2004; hooks, 2004).

hooks (2004) explains that, much like societal sanctioned roles for women, gays are often placed in confining categories and expected to conform to certain stereotypical roles based on their sexual orientation. How do BMSM deal with these societal stressors that place so many limits on them? The answer may lie in capturing those learning experiences that BMSM utilize to cope with their sexual orientation.

Critical Race Theory

Solórzano & Yosso (2002) examine elements of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a possible frame work for working with Blacks; they define (CRT) as “Research and theory that explicitly address issues of race and racism” (p. 24). They further posit that:

1. Critical Race Methodology offers ways to understand the experiences of people of color (POC) along the educational pipeline; this methodology

generates knowledge by looking to those who have been marginalized, silenced, and disempowered (such is the case with Black gay men).

2. Critical Race Theory (CRT) challenges traditional methods because it requires us to develop theories of social transformation wherein knowledge is generated specifically for the purpose of addressing and eradicating poverty, oppression and discrimination. Thus, it focuses on how people of color experience and respond to US institutions, including, developing research questions, collecting data, analyzing and presenting data.
3. CRT posits that we must look to experiences with and responses to racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism as valid, appropriate, and necessary forms of data. These can be captured in its truest form through story telling.

Although CRT considers the issues that Black men face in this country as far as gender and race in concern, it fails to answer pertinent questions Black gay men have related to living in a homophobic and racist society. For example, how do I, as a Black gay man, find self-acceptance and respect from my community?

Internalized Homophobia and Racism

Although the term homophobia is used to mean an irrational fear and disdain of homosexuality and those who practice it, this term is not always relegated to heterosexuals who dislike homosexuals (Herek, 1986). Fone (2000) explains that this phobia may be internalized by homosexuals themselves:

Homophobia is not limited to heterosexuals, of course. It can also be found among homosexuals; indeed it has long been a commonplace of gay lore that rabid homophobes are often repressed homosexuals. Just

as homophobia exists between non-homosexual and homosexual people, so it can exist between gay men and lesbians, both as sexism, and as incomprehension or dislike of another kind of sexuality. Nor, indeed is racism unknown among gays and lesbians. Like other prejudices, homophobia among homosexuals may result from internalization of the lessons of a homophobic society. (p. 6)

Homophobia contributes to many Black gay men silencing and denying their homosexuality. Gay writer, Joseph Beam (2001) gives poetic expression to this phenomenon:

Silence is a way to grin and bear it. A way not to acknowledge how much my life is discounted each day---100% OF ALL BLACK MEN TODAY--- EVERYDAY! I strive to appear strong and silent. I learn to ingest hatred at a geometric rate and to count (silently) to 10...10thousand...10million. But as I have learned to mute my cries of anguish, so have I learned to squelch my exclamation of joy. What remains is the rap. (p. 286)

BMSM are faced with a dilemma in their relationship with their families and communities. They love their families and cannot afford to be disconnected and isolated from them. Yet many are willing to accept dysfunctional relationships and roles just to survive. Beam (1986), in another provocative essay captures the essence of this familial disconnect:

When I speak of home, I mean not only the familial constellation from which I grew, but the entire Black community: the Black press, the Black church, Black academicians, the Black literati, and the Black left. Where

is my reflection? Am I most often rendered invisible, perceived as a threat to the family, or am I tolerated as if I am silent and inconspicuous. I cannot go home as who I am and that hurts me deeply. (p. 231)

Beam succinctly captures the pain and agony of these family dynamics through poetry with a remarkable poignancy. Along the same lines, Hemphill (2001) warns that “We cannot afford to be disconnected from our institutions, yet it would seem that we are willing to create and accept dysfunctional roles in them, roles of caricature, silence, and secrecy” (p. 298).

This may explain why many gay men and women seek to unconsciously change their appearance, their personality, and sexual behavior in an attempt to conform to the norms of the larger society. Yoshino (2006) calls this phenomenon *covering*. He asserts that gays cover their sexual orientation in a myriad of ways to assimilate in a heterosexual society. He denotes four ways individuals cover: appearance, affiliation, activism, and association. Appearance concerns how individuals present themselves to the world physically; affiliation concerns cultural identification; activism is how individuals politicizes their identity; association concerns how individuals choose their social networks; including, lovers, friends and colleagues. These factors come into being when gay people decide to what extent they want to express their sexual orientation. For some individuals, the decision is to deny their same sex desires.

Historical Development of Attitudes toward Black Gays in the Black Community

The attitude of the Black Community has changed over time. Three significant periods to consider are the Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights Era,

and the post-Civil Rights Era. Prominent Black gay writers from the Harlem Renaissance early on began the battle for recognition and acceptance.

Examples of Black gay men/women of note from the Harlem Renaissance era include, Langston Hughes, Bruce Nugent, Alain Lock, Bessie Smith (Silberman, 2001). Silberman recognizes that many prominent Black gay men and lesbians were part of the Harlem Renaissance era; she acknowledges the following: “Despite the notion that no African Americans were homosexual, there were many bulldaggers and faggots in Harlem” (p. 257).

The radicalism of the 1960s escorted in a new era of intolerance by some members of groups such as the Black Panthers. This staunch patriarchal disposition left little room in the way of self-actualization and self-discovery for gays and women. Even during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, Black gay men were excluded from active participation or leadership in the movement and were not recognized for their contribution to the successes of the movement. For example, Hutchinson (2001) and Haskins, (1997) discuss the contribution of seldom recognized gay Civil Rights leaders Bayard Rustin and Augustine Dill.

Rustin exemplifies how many BMSM are caught up in a quandary between race, politics and sexual orientation. His most significant contribution to the Black community would occur during the Civil Rights Era where he masterminded the March on Washington. Here his organizing and strategizing genius catapulted this event into the annals of world history as one of the most significant achievements in Black history. Furthermore, this is where Martin

Luther King delivered his “I have a Dream” Speech-----one of the most important orations in world history (Hill, 2006).

In 1955, Bayard Rustin worked with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to organize the successful boycott of the segregated local bus system in Montgomery, Alabama. For the next five years he remained King's special assistant and close adviser. One of his most celebrated achievements was helping to create the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (Haskins, 1997). According to Haskins (1997), gay social activist, Augustine Dill's contribution to the Civil Rights Movement has also been mostly ignored. After his departure, W.E.B. DuBois noted Dill's contribution to a widely disseminated newspaper, *The Crisis*, when he wrote: “It is with deep regret that Dill left the *Crisis* with the good wishes of us all” (p. 24). *The Crisis* was a magazine published by the NAACP of which DuBois was editor for many years. Although this exchange seems fairly well intentioned, DuBois struggled with the issue of homosexuality in his immediate family.

According to Mason (2007), Dubois's daughter (Yolanda) was married to Countee Cullen (a gay man) who invited his lover on their honeymoon. Cullen subsequently divorced Yolanda in 1930 under the guises that he had “another woman.” However, Yolanda confided to her father that the breakup was because of his homosexuality. Mason further asserts:

Because the Dubois/Cullen union was widely staged and reported as a specifically racial triumph, this episode offers a unique window into the racial logics of heterosexuality in the twenties. In short, I am interested

less in the question of Cullen's homosexuality than I am in the assumption and construction of his heterosexuality as the public face of the new Negro. (p. 289)

In addition to the oversight of Black gays during the civil rights era, women were also excluded from the planning table.

Women were mostly disqualified from participating in the male dominated organizing structure behind the March on Washington. In a recent personal communication Robert Hill discussed the program line-up:

Women were not part of the all-male key organizing committee for the March; their participation in the event was debated by the strategists. Listed on the official *Lincoln Memorial Program* are Marian Anderson for the opening song, the national anthem, however Marian arrived behind schedule, and so later sang "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands." Opening remarks were provided by A. Phillip Randolph, the formal March director. Next on the agenda was a 'Tribute to Negro Women Fighters for Freedom.' Expatriot, Josephine Baker was present, wearing a French uniform and her French Legion of Honor decoration. Josephine addressed the crowd, "You are on the eve of a complete victory. You can't go wrong. The world is behind you. For the first time in my life I feel free. I know that everything is right now." Females listed on the program under the section 'Tribute to Negro Women Fighters for Freedom' included Rosa Parks (famous for her participation in the Montgomery Bus Boycott), Daisy Lee Gaston Bates (who was central to the legal fight to desegregate the

public schools after the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*), Diane Judith Nash Bevel (activist with the Sit-In Movement at lunch counters, Freedom Rider, and planner of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference [SCLC] campaign in Selma, Alabama), Mrs. Herbert Lee (widow of the slain Mississippi National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People [NAACP] and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [SNCC] activist, killed September 25, 1961), Gloria Richardson (from the Cambridge, Maryland office of SNCC), and Myrlie Beasley Evers (wife of the assassinated NAACP civil rights leader Medger Evers, slain June 12, 1963) R. Hill (personal communication, July 9, 2008).

Although gays and women were an integral part of the civil rights movement their overall recognition was marginal.

Another Black gay activist and literary scholar of the Civil Rights Era was James Baldwin. Shin and Hudson (1998), compare James Baldwin and Richard Wright's treatment of race, masculinity and sexuality. Baldwin wrote extensively about homosexuality, masculinity and race. His writings stand out because his perspectives and insights were ahead of his time. His signature work *Giovanni's Room* (1956) and, *Just above My Head* (1964) dramatically expose the issue of homosexuality and its taboo in the Black community.

Baldwin often wrote of homosexual erotic relationships. At times this brought contempt from more militant scholars of the day, including writers such as Cleaver (1968) and Wright (1940). Cleaver frequently bashed Baldwin in his

writings for his homosexuality. Although Baldwin later embraced nationalism, he did so from a very critical lens, opting instead to usher in the concept of homosexuality as a cultural renovation. Although some of James Baldwin's writings and contributions to Black culture have been lost in favor of a more militant treatment of masculinity by such writers as Richard Wright and Eldridge Cleaver, his writings articulated a gay consciousness long before the issue of sexual orientation became part of the mainstream discourse (Shin & Hudson, 1998).

Post Civil Rights Attitudes towards Black Gays

Recent developments show that attitudes towards gays in the Black community are varied although they predominantly take a negative slant. Herek & Capitanio (1995) suggest that attitudes towards gays in the Black community are an important consideration because they represent the reactions of one oppressed group toward another. At the same time, BMSM face significant discrimination from the White gay community. These multiple oppressions present a debacle for BMSM in their efforts to combat not only racism and homophobia (Hill-Collins, 2004).

Although attitudes regarding homosexuality in the Black community have been the topic of much debate and speculation, scholarly research regarding this issues have been sparse. A telephone survey of 391 Black heterosexual adults contained in a study by Herek & Capitanio (1995) revealed astonishing results. Data indicated that negative attitudes towards homosexuality are widespread, but no more prevalent in the Black community than in White communities. The

survey revealed men had more negative attitudes toward homosexuality than women. The most significant factor in negative attitudes towards gays is the perception that sexual orientation is a choice (Herek & Capitanio, 1995).

The leading argument against homosexuality in the Black community is that homosexuals can be changed and, therefore, BMSM should be converted to heterosexuality or abstain from sex altogether (Giordano, 1999). Sexuality has been a very volatile and contentious subject in the Black community.

Some contemporary writers and researchers have begun to examine the interrelatedness of homophobia, racism and masculinity in the Black community (Boykin, 1994; Constantine-Simms, 2001; Malebranche & Bryant, 2007; Millett, Malebranche, Mason & Spikes, 2005; Peterson, Folkman, & Bakeman, 1996). For example, Malebranche et al. (2007) found that formative masculine socialization experiences for BMSM are marred by an absence of biological fathers and Black male role models. This study was compelling in that the researchers utilized face-to-face one-on-one qualitative interviewing to capture the voices of BMSM.

Similarly, as long as the Black community accepts America's artificial standard of what a man is, and as long as antigay attitudes remain rooted in American contempt for difference, our community will continue to experience conflict and disunity. Riggs (2001) describes his frustration with Black on Black homophobia and racism within the gay community:

What disturbs me no, enrages me, is not so much the obstacles set before me by whites, which history has conditioned me to expect, but the traps

and pitfalls planted by my so-called brothers, who because of our same history should know better. I am a Negro faggot, if I believe what movies, TV, and rap music say of me. My life is game for play. Because of my sexuality, I cannot be Black. A strong, proud, "Afrocentric" Black man is resolutely heterosexual, not even bisexual. (p. 293)

In addition to his discussion on homophobia, Riggs talks about racism within the gay community in his landmark documentary, *Tongues Untied* (1990). In his declaration that he is attracted only to White men, Riggs complains that the White gay community is rampant with stereotypes of Blacks as the mammy, the obese Black sex kitten in string bikini, and the Black gay male with a large penis enslaved by his white master (Riggs, 1990).

West (2001) explains the impact of this oppression on BMSM. Most Black gay men who reject the major stylistic option of Black machismo identity are marginalized in White America and penalized in Black America for doing so. In their efforts to be themselves, they are told they are not "really Black men," not machismo identified. Black gay men are oftentimes the brunt of comedians like Arsenio Hall, Eddie Murphy and Damon Wayans. Yet behind the laughs lurks a Black tragedy of major proportions: "The refusal of White and Black America to entertain seriously new stylistic options for Black men caught in a deadly web of rejecting Black machismo identities" (West, 2001, p. 306).

In a land-mark study, Burn, Kadlec and Rexer (2005) found that not all heterosexuals who used derogatory terms and slurs toward gays perceived these as offensive; However, many gay and lesbian participants in this study (N=175)

experienced these gestures and /or remarks as antigay harassment. Although the participants were Euro-American students, this study is important because these participants were less likely to disclose their sexual orientation because of this perceived harassment. These findings may have implications for BMSM.

Huey Newton, once a radical supreme leader of the Black Panthers suggests that regardless of one's position on homosexuality or the role of Black women in our society, we should try to unite as a people to fight racism and oppression in all of its forms. He is quoted as saying the following:

Whatever your personal opinion and your insecurities about homosexuality and the various liberation movements among homosexuals and women (and I speak of the homosexual and women as oppressed groups) we should try to unite with them in a revolutionary fashion. (2001, p. 281)

This unity could provide the same catalyst that propelled the 1960s revolution into the national spotlight and provided Black men with a sense of pride.

There are other examples of African American leaders who support and affirm equal rights for gays and lesbians. The following names comprise part of the list of those national figures who have taken up the fight for equal rights for gays and lesbians: Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, Carol Moseley Brawn, Michael Erick Dyson, Jocelyn Elders, Henry Louis Gates, Reverend Peter Gomes, Rep. John Lewis, Reverend Joseph Lowery, Reverend William Sinkford, and Corretta Scott King. These leaders believe that equal rights also extend to the gay

community and expressed disapproval of homophobia in any form (Constantine-Simms, 2001).

Coretta Scott King, in remarks at the 13th annual “Creating Change Conference” said “Freedom from discrimination based on sexual orientation/gender is surely a fundamental human right.” King (1998) made her now famous appeal linking the Civil Rights Movement to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Human Rights Movement. She posits:

I appeal to everyone who believes in Martin Luther King Jr’s dream to make room at the table of brotherhood and sisterhood for lesbian and gay people. It is encouraging that we have seen more gays and lesbian candidates elected to political office. It is important for lesbian and gay officeholders and their constituencies to achieve greater visibility as supporters of laws that benefit the entire community. I think this will help educate the American public that lesbian and gay people seek the same goals of quality education for young people, cleaner air and water, safe streets and better health care that straight people want. We have to work harder for the broader vision of the compassionate and caring society that demands decent living standards for all citizens. (¶ 2)

Her support for gay and lesbian rights, including same sex marriage, sometimes put her in conflict with some members of her family including her daughter Bernice and her niece Alveda King. There were many other instances where Mrs. King took the opportunity to support gays, lesbians, transgenders and bisexuals (King, 2003).

Although not recognized in the adult educational literature, Mrs. King and her husband, Martin Luther King, Jr., engaged in the education of adults and in this process helped to transform the lives of millions world wide. Evidence of Dr. King's support is his inclusion of Lillian Smith, a well know lesbian, in his letter from a Birmingham jail (King, 1964).

The 1993 National March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Equal Rights and Liberation positioned this group as the natural successors to the Civil Rights Movement. However, many progressive Blacks do not believe the two are one in the same. However, this social movement challenged the Black community and society's homophobia and directly aided in the gay community's claim to "freedom from discrimination." Boykin (1996) explains this issue in the following statement:

White religious conservatives, who have discovered a fund-raising Jackpot by exploiting the Black community's worst fears, telling Blacks that their "legitimate" civil rights are threatened by "special rights" request of Lesbians and Gays. The religious conservatives, many of whom had not favored civil rights in the 1960s suddenly call out the name of Dr. Martin Luther King to oppose gay rights. (p. 31)

Many Black gay men consider their cultural heritage and color as taking precedence over their sexual orientation; therefore, race is an important factor in the issue of freedom from discrimination (Boykin, 1996; Malebranche et al. 2007).

In summary, homosexuality in the Black community is largely a taboo subject. When it is discussed it is oftentimes with contempt and disdain for BMSM. Although many contemporary Black leaders are becoming more open to positive affirmation of Black gay men, homophobia is still very pervasive and persistent in the Black community.

The Black Church

Many in the Black church believe homosexuality is immoral, unnatural and an abomination in the sight of God. Further adding to this quandary is the Black church's intolerance of anything sexually outside of traditional heterosexual marriage, a party to which BMSM have not been invited. Leland & Miller (1998) reported that for more than a century churches have tried to change gays with a number of interventions including luring them into conversion groups such as the Transformation Ministries branch of Exodus International, an anti-gay conservative Christian fellowship, whose primary goal is to convert gays to heterosexuality or complete celibacy.

Fortunately, organizations such as the National Black Justice Coalition actively support and advocate for gay marriage among African American same gender loving persons. They state the following:

The National Black Justice Coalition supports marriage equality. We believe that marriage is a special bond of love and commitment between two people. We believe that government has no right to tell two unrelated, consenting adults who they should love. As we oppose marriage discrimination against gays and lesbians, we condemn efforts to enact the

Federal Marriage Act or other constitutional measures to re-define marriage to exclude gay and lesbian couples. We also oppose the Defense of Marriage Act of 1996. (§ 1)

Many religious leaders such as Eddie Long and Louis Farrakhan preach and advocate that gays should not practice or engage in homosexual behavior, even though some ministers admit that homosexuality may be beyond one's control and that some are born this way (Giordano, 1999). Additionally, many in the Black community do not believe that gays should be placed in the same categories as other minorities when it comes to oppression, even though gays contribute economically, culturally, socially and spiritually to the overall richness of the Black experience---including the church (Boykin, 2005).

Based on literal interpretation of scripture condemning homosexuality, the conservative theological orthodoxy condemns Black gay behavior as immoral. Conversely, leading scholars on the subject (Boykin, 1996; Kader, 1999; King, 2004; Helminiak, 1995; McNeal, 1988; West, 2001) suggest that BMSM become more aware of the difference between pathological and healthy belief systems, since they are easily victimized by this religious rhetoric.

McNeal (1988) a theologian and leading biblical scholar on homosexuality and the Bible, writes from the premise that there are specific questions that gays and lesbians ask of reality that are different from the questions that heterosexuals ask. For example, how do I love and accept myself just as I am in a homophobic and racist society? How do I cope with living with a positive HIV

diagnosis? How do I deal with the guilt and shame I sometimes feel about my sexual orientation?

Gays have a unique and equally important contribution to make to Biblical interpretation. He makes the following poignant statement in his book "*Taking a Chance on God*." When pathological belief systems and feelings become rooted deep in the unconscious of gay people, the result can be resistance to healthy self-acceptance, pathological religious teachings can result in destruction of one's psychological health and spiritual development" (McNeal, p.16). Other scholars such as Helminiak (1995) and Kader (1999) support this declaration.

The literature has many examples of religious leaders who bash, condemn, and scorn their members for being gay. Crawford (2006) gives the following example. At a recent Palm Sunday worship service, a bishop in a large popular Baptist church in Washington D.C. declared before a cheering congregation, "You can't be a faggot or a sissy and serve Christ! You have to be a real man, he requested that all real men stand up and then commanded them to come forward to the pulpit and be recognized" (p. 2). This scenario takes place throughout many Black churches, while gay choir members bring the church to a spiritual frenzy in song and praise; they are simultaneously battered with religious dogma that reduces many to feelings of humiliation, isolation and degradation.

Helminiak (1995) reports two approaches to interpreting the Bible: the literal reading and the historical cultural-critical reading. The literal reading claims to take the text for what it says and is the approach used in fundamentalism. For

example, some ministers condemn homosexuality because the Bible mentions same-sex acts in passing. However, the same preachers do not advocate slavery even though the whole epistle to Philemon and many other long passages support slavery (Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-4:1; 1, KJV).

BMSM consider religion and/or spirituality an important part of their identity (Malebranche et al. 2007; Woodard, 2000); however, many feel unaccepted and isolated from their cultural mainstream. Traditional theological interpretation supports the belief that all non-heterosexual behaviors are immoral, and should be changed to heterosexual. For many BMSM this belief has resulted in bondage, legalism, ostracism, depression, alienation, psychiatric institutional admission, violence, despondency, and suicide (Helminiak, 1995). In the Black Community, religion is often cited as a major culprit in perpetuating homophobia and hatred against BMSM (Boykin, 2005; Constantine-Simms, 2001; Hill-Collins, 2004).

A few researchers have begun to address these issues. According to Woodyard, Peterson, Stokes, Joseph (2000), BMSM are highly influenced by the church. Woodyard et al. (2000) interviewed 76 individual BMSM between the ages of 18-29 in Atlanta and Chicago. This group reported high levels of church involvement; however, they also reported a negative impact on self-esteem because of anti-gay teachings. Woodyard et al. further noted that, for many BMSM, participating in church activities required secrecy and denial of sexual orientation.

In another study supporting this data, Malebranche, Fields, Bryant and Harper (2007) interviewed 29 BMSM and found that the majority of participants were active in their church; surprisingly, this study noted that 80 percent of participants reported that they believed that homosexuality is a sin. As reported by McNeal (1988) this internalized belief may have a negative impact on the masculine identity and self-concept of BMSM.

Many Black religious leaders believe it is their responsibility to deliver BMSM from homosexuality through prayer, conversion tactics, anointment, guilt, brainwashing, humiliation, and fear; however, the American Psychological Association has denounced therapies aimed at attempting to change one's sexual orientation (Helminiak, 1995; Kader, 1996). Reverend Michael Dyson (as cited in Byrd, & Guy-Sheftall, 2001) suggests the need for a theology of eroticism rooted in honesty about one's sexuality. He explains: "While we tell our kids not to have sex, more and more of them do. They are making babies, having babies, and dying from AIDS" (p. 318).

Along these same lines, scholars such as Johnson (as cited in Constantine-Sims, 2001) discuss the blurring of the secular and the sacred boundaries unique to many Black traditions found in blues, gospel, spirituals and folk preaching. He uses the example of singers like Aretha Franklin who utilized her gospel heritage to accomplish this. In her song Spirit in the Dark, she uses the notion of "spirit" as a metaphor for sexual eroticism when she says "It's like Sally Walker, sitting in her saucer. That's how you do it, it ain't nothing to it. Ride sally ride, put your hands on your hips, cover your eyes and move with the

spirit in the dark". Johnson interprets this to suggest that the innocent chaste girl Sally is riding in sexual ecstasy. According to Johnson, for many BMSM this blurring is necessary and is a manifestation of the reality of everyday life in the Black community. Particularly, since many BMSM have been completely shut out from Black mainstream culture.

In summary, without changing the rules in the middle of the game, the literal approach to biblical interpretation cannot be used to answer the question of homosexuality among African Americans. In fact, the Bible does not present a clear position on homosexuality (Helminiak, 2005). Many Black ministers believe that the church has a moral responsibility for heterosexual men to interpret and execute the will of God. This influence is particularly relevant in shaping Black men's attitudes about masculinity, sexuality and their positionality in the Black community. Although the Black church is the largest institution in the Black community, many feel that its response to our community's most pressing problems is minimal, specifically, HIV/AIDS. These problems are not limited to BMSM, but also impact heterosexual men and women in much the same way it impacts BMSM.

The Down-Low

One issue that has been the topic of much debate in the Black community and media is a phenomenon known as the down-low (DL). Millett, Malebranche, Mason, and Spikes (2005) review the history of this term:

Several nuances of the term "down-low" have been use in the African American community since the early 1990s. However, it was not until the

release of the statistics citing high HIV incidence among BMSM and the fact that a significant proportion of BMSM identify as heterosexual, that the term in the popular media became synonymous with heterosexually identified men who have sex with other men without the knowledge of their female partner. (p. 52)

Although DL behavior has always been in the Black community, this issue was given new life with the publication of a book by King (2004). This novel propelled Black fears and anger to a new height and unjustly blamed the escalating spread of HIV in the Black community on BMSM.

These accusations put another stress on BMSM because they are oftentimes vilified for the escalating rise in HIV among Black women (Boykin, 2005; King, 2004). The media continues to utilize this tactic to further perpetuate myths, stereotypes and stigma around Black men's sexuality. A recent article by Crawford (2007) clarifies this issue:

While it is clear that the infection of Black women by bisexual men is a serious problem, there are relatively few data to indicate what proportion of women are actually infected in this manner. Recent studies suggest that this is not the major risk group of men who infect their female sex partners. (p. 7)

Although scientifically unproven, fear is probably part of the catalyst driving the down-low phenomenon in the Black community today. The stigma associated with HIV/AIDS and homosexuality is the reason that it is so difficult for Black men

to “come out” about their sexual orientation (Boykin, 2005; Carbado, 1999; King, 2004).

Utilizing the term “down low” can be problematic because of its many differing expressions and interpretations. Throughout the Black community, the term has been used by many different people, for different reasons that have nothing to do with the above definition. Millett, Malebranche, Mason and Spikes. (2005) assert that “Black men who have varying sexual behaviors identify with the term ‘DL’” (p.52). For example, in a sub-culture of the Black gay community, some exclusively gay men identify as DL because it is associated with a more masculine perception (Millett et al. 2005). Many BMSM do not relate to the term gay or homosexual because of its association with flamboyant, effeminate, males. In this regard, BMSM seem to be looking for a term that depicts a more masculine persona (Malebranche, Fields, Bryant, & Harper, 2007).

Moreover, many entertainers have interpreted this term in popular hip-hop culture. For instance, R&B sensation R. Kelly sings about “keeping it on the down-low”; however, this reference isn’t necessarily DL behavior as described in the media; it refers to a relationship between himself and a second woman he is secretly seeing on the side (Boykin, 2005). This term has been misused by a racist and homophobic media to demonize Black men and place blame for the AIDS epidemic on Black gay men. Although this is a difficult population to research, the complex mix of race, masculinity and sexuality from which this term originates is a topic that warrants further examination (Millett, Malebranche, Mason & Spikes, 2005).

The issue of closeted homosexuality is not a new phenomenon in the Black community; in fact, it has been around for years, mostly as a result of the volatile and contentious attitudes perpetuated against BMSM.

Black Masculinity

Scholars such as Blazina (2001); Franklin (1994); Jackson (1997); Whitehead (1997); Monteiro & Fuqua (1993) have pointed to the cultural conflict inherent in the Eurocentric definition of masculinity that focus on family, community, cooperation and an open acknowledgment of both masculine and feminine energies in men. Blazina (2001) describes this cultural conflict as “A psychological state where gender roles have negative consequences or impact on a person or others” (p. 51).

Part of this conflict includes what O’ Neal (1986) calls fear of the feminine self. He describes this phenomenon as a benchmark for defining Black masculinity. O’Neal (1982) defines this fear as “a strong negative emotion in self or others associated with feminine values, attitudes, and behaviors” (p. 18). This restrictive emotionality includes intimacy, vulnerability, and emotional dependency (Blazina, 2001).

Wade (1996) examined the relationship between gender role conflict and racial identity. He found that African Americans are influenced by mainstream society’s definition of masculinity, and that they experience psychological strain trying to adhere to society’s male role definitions; he also notes the difficulty in defining Black men’s sexuality in Eurocentric terms. Although a positive self-image and personal responsibility are characteristics that should define one’s

masculinity, many Black heterosexual men rely on behaviors such as obtaining female conquests, fathering children, and having sex without a condom to define and express their masculinity (Franklin 1994; Whitehead 1997).

Wright (1993) also discusses the confounded issues related to Black male masculinity. He posits that Black male sexuality is most probably based on culturally established roles and responsibilities. He suggests using different sexual behavioral categories for Black men that reflected the diversity of the sexual continuum from heterosexual to homosexual. He also suggests that we refrain from using confining categories such as the terms “gay” and “bisexual” when referring to BMSM as these terms may not adequately reflect one’s sexual identification or experiences.

(Hooks, 2004) further explains this male role conflict, she posits that “Black men are hurting and that the whole culture responds to them by saying that ‘please do not tell us what you feel’” (p.6). In other words, Black men are supposed to keep their feelings hidden. Hill-Collins asserts this male role conflict is the result of a dynamic relational construct. She states:

In the American context, hegemonic masculinity becomes defined through its difference from and opposition to women, boys, poor and working class men of all races and ethnicities, gay men, and Black men. In other words, hegemonic masculinity is a concept that is shaped by ideologies of gender, age, class, sexuality, and race. Ideas about groups formed within these ideologies, for example, women, LGBT people, constitute an important benchmark for defining a hegemonic masculinity that must

constantly construct itself. Without these groups as ideological markers, hegemonic masculinity becomes meaningless. (p. 186)

In American society these hegemonic masculinities are evaluated and installed based on the dominant social norms (Collins, 2004). Given the many volatile issues and experiences BMSM have to navigate, many have developed coping strategies that help them survive oppressive environments.

Popular Culture and Homophobia

The popularization of hip-hop and gangsta rap music has ushered in a new level of intolerance toward gays and women. This media flurry has been spearheaded by music executives who have no conscience when it comes to giving a public voice to homophobia and sexism (hooks, 2004). Rappers like Ice Cube and comedians like Eddie Murphy all espouse vitriolic vernacular when it comes to homosexuality in the Black community (Boykin, 1996).

A few early gangsta rap artist promoted homophobia, violence, misogyny against women through their music, then achieved legendary status posthumously. Scholars such as Iwomoto (2003) sincerely try to appeal to a seemingly unsympathetic and anti Hip-Hop public as he ask us to look behind the controversial and oftentimes vile lyrics of rappers such as Tupac Shukur, and search for a more positive and enlightening meaning to their music. Of the hundreds of gangsta, thug, violent and sarcastic songs that Tupac recorded, Iwomoto seems to only be able to come up with two songs that have a positive and empowering focal point: Dear Mama, and Keep You're Head Up.

Tupac's contentious diatribes stand out as distressing in this article and clearly point out his negative attitude toward women and penchant for violence. However, some scholars suggest that the real culprits in this serendipitous assault on Black culture are greedy music executives. hooks (1994) notes that the White capitalist power structure is partly to blame for this sexist, misogynist, and patriarchal way of thinking:

The sexist, misogynist, patriarchal ways of thinking and behaving that are glorified in gangsta rap are a reflection of the prevailing values in our society, values created and sustained by White supremacist capitalist patriarchy. As the crudest and most brutal expression of sexism, misogynistic attitudes tend to be portrayed by the dominant culture as an expression of male deviance. In reality they are part of a sexist continuum, necessary for the maintenance of patriarchal social order. While patriarchy and sexism continue to be the political and cultural norm in our society, feminist movement has created a climate where crude expressions of male domination are called into question, especially if they are made by men in power. It is useful to think of misogyny as a field that must be labored in and maintained both to sustain patriarchy but also to serve as an ideological anti-feminist backlash. What better group to labor on this "plantation" than young Black men (¶3).

hooks further notes that if this issue were not given a more critical inspection, one would think that the gangsta rap pendulum swings squarely in the direction of uncaring, self-centered, self-glorified Black men. Greedy White music

executives as well as youth who buy the music are willing participants in gansta raps venomous sting. Alridge (2005) notes a tension between the Civil Rights Movement and Hip-Hop. He contends that the hop-hop community has failed to live up to their responsibility in the struggle; the disrespect of Black women, homophobia and the perpetuation of violence has become commonplace in hip-hop culture. In contrast, adult education scholars should encourage the Civil Rights generation to reach out to the hip-hop community in a spirit of cooperation and unity and recognize common interest in ameliorating problems in the Black community (Alridge, 2005).

Similarly, other adult education scholars see adult education as being disconnected and unaware of the magnitude and powerful influence of the hip-hop generation (Guy, 2004). Guy's research extends hooks (1994) presupposition that hip-hop artists are being exploited by powerful music media moguls for the sake of profit. He asserts that, the White controlled music corporations profit tremendously from their hegemonic privileged vantage point. Astonishingly, these products are mostly consumed by Whites, who oftentimes revel in the destruction and disenfranchisement of Black culture. Guy's quote captures this unfortunate reality:

A central aspect of this system is that only those people with sufficient economic power have the ability to manipulate consumer needs and create and expand markets in the first place. These White owned and White run companies do not operate in the interest of Black urban communities seeking to reverse decades of racist segregation and

disenfranchisement. Instead, these cultural industries operate in the interest of their owners and the White communities that they are a part. (p. 49)

This issue is significant to this study in that both Black gay and straight men are highly influenced by hip-hop's powerful cultural enigma. This represents an opportunity for adult educators to help bridge this cultural and age disconnect. Scholars such as Guy and Alridge are beginning to make in-roads in connecting this popular musical genre to the attention of adult educators. We must foster effective strategies that promote a strong positive correlation between the needs of urban youth and adult education (Guy, 1999, 2003, 2004).

Psychological and Behavioral Aspects of Sexual Orientation

Several classic studies examine psychological and behavioral aspects of sexual orientation (Foucault, 1990; Herek, 1986; & Swaab, 1990). Sexual orientation involves several factors, including passion, romanticism, and the attraction of individuals to specific genders. For example, many view sexuality as falling within two discrete categories, heterosexual or homosexual. However, Kinsey (1998) author of the widely employed Kinsey scale of sexuality determined that sexuality is much more fluid. In interviewing people about their sexual histories and practices, Kinsey determined that thoughts and feeling related to the same or opposite sex was not consistent across time. Although most participants in this study reported being exclusively heterosexual, and a percentage reported exclusive homosexual desires, many fell somewhere in between these two classifications.

Much of the debate and speculation in the literature regarding homosexuality revolve around the nature/nurture question. Many believe that homosexuality is a choice. This belief is a major source of homophobia in the Black community (Riggs, 2001). On the other hand, biological theorists believe that homosexuality is intrinsic and therefore unchangeable. For example, Swaab (1990) conducted a ground breaking experiment in which he documented a physiologic difference in the anatomical structure of the brain of gay men. He noted that a portion of the hypothalamus was different compared to the heterosexual brain, thus supporting the biology argument (Swaab, 1990).

Schmidt (1995) posits that sexual conduct is social in origin and that people learn sexuality as they learn everything else. His argument against homosexuality is from a religious perspective. He posits that marriage, including pro-creation, sexual complimentary, and responsibility to the human community are un-achievable through homosexuality. Although Schmidt adamantly opposes a homosexual lifestyle based on his personal beliefs, he makes a powerful point about church leaders and ministers of the gospel who think it is their sole responsibility to bash homosexuals; He contends:

Christians who cannot yet deal with the issues calmly and compassionately should keep their mouths shut, and they should certainly stay away from the front lines of ministry and public policy debate, not to mention television talk shows.....They must be convinced that the way of Jesus is the way of the Wounded Healer, not the Holy Terror. (Schmidt, p. 173)

He goes on to present a compelling argument for compassion and integrity when dealing with homosexuals. He further calls for heterosexuals to deal with their own sexuality flaws in the process of engaging others on this topic.

While some believe that sexuality is nature and others argue that it is nurture, many believe it may be a combination of both (Johnson, 2003). Many in the Black community believe that sexual orientation can and should be changed (Leland & Miller, 1998). They believe that homosexuality is a choice, as opposed to the belief that people are born homosexual. Some have even admitted that although gays may be born with these tendencies, they should remain celibate from sex (Giordiano, 1999). The issue of homosexuality and its morality, or the lack thereof, will probably not be settled in our lifetime

“Fixing” Black Gays: The Role of Conversion Therapy

Leland & Miller (1998) reported that for more than a century therapy groups and churches have tried to change gays with a number of interventions, including luring them into conversion groups such as the Transformation Ministries, a branch of Exodus International, an anti-gay conservative Christian fellowship, whose primary goal is to convert gays to heterosexuality or to help them reframe from homosexual activity. This organization preys on confused vulnerable gays by demanding heterosexuality or celibacy and invoking strict literal adherence to their interpretation of scriptures condemning homosexuality. The following is their mission statement on homosexuality:

Exodus is a Christian organization dedicated to equipping and uniting agencies and individuals to effectively communicate the message of

freedom from homosexuality, as well as how to effectively convey support and understanding to individuals facing the reality of a homosexual loved one. Exodus upholds heterosexuality as God's creative intent for humanity, and subsequently views homosexual expression as outside of God's will. Exodus cites homosexual tendencies as one of many disorders that beset fallen humanity. Choosing to resolve these tendencies through homosexual behavior, taking on a homosexual identity, and involvement in the homosexual lifestyle is considered destructive, as it distorts God's intent for the individual and is thus sinful (Exodus International, 2005)

Although these attitudes and positionalities represent extreme views, it nevertheless is the core belief of many Christians and conservatives throughout the United States. Haldeman (1999) presents a powerful analysis as to why conversion therapy should not be a consideration in any debate on homosexuality. He asserts that conversion therapy is based on faulty assumptions about gay persons and homosexuality. The stresses from external and internal homophobia lead some individuals to seek sexual orientation change. Riggs (2001) warns that gay and lesbian people do not suddenly wake up in the morning and choose to be gay. Given the oppression, the stigma, the ridicule and the heartache, a person would have to be masochistic to willingly make this choice. Many gays believe that society would be more accepting and supportive of them if research could prove that homosexuality had a biological origin (Swaab, 1990). Haldeman warns that conversionists incorrectly assume that gay people are motivated to change their sexual orientation by inherently

negative forces associated with homosexuality. However, these same people ignore the powerful influences of social factors such as the church, family, friends and organizations such as Exodus International, which are the likely culprits in individuals wanting to change their orientation.

In light of this disheartening rhetoric regarding homosexuality from religious groups, several mainstream mental health organizations began to take a stance against homophobia. The American Psychological Association and most mental health experts agree that homosexuality is a viable lifestyle, not a mental illness. Conversion therapy can be harmful and there have been no long term studies which support its efficacy. They also note that conversion therapy adversely affects the public's view of gay, lesbian and bisexual persons.

In the early 1990s The National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH) began to disseminate materials that rebuked much of the negative stereotypes that portrayed gays and lesbians as immoral, unnatural, and mentally troubled persons (Haldeman, 1999). Additionally, the American Counseling Association (ACA), the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) have denounced in ringing terms any form of conversion therapy seeking to change gays (Friedman, 1999).

HIV and BMSM

HIV/AIDS is a major public health threat in the United States, especially in the African American community (CDC, 2005). Rates of infection for African American women are nineteen times that of White men and five times that for

Hispanics. Rates for African American males are seven times that for White men, and three times that for Hispanic men (CDC, 2004).

According to the 2000 Census Bureau, African Americans represent 13% of the US population; however, they account for 50% of all new HIV/AIDS diagnosis in the United States. Moreover, the rate for African Americans is still the highest rate for all racial and ethnic groups. Moreover, BMSM is still the largest population in America living with AIDS (CDC, 2005). Local and national community organizations such as the Black AIDS Institute in Los Angeles and AIDS Atlanta in Atlanta, Georgia are on the frontlines of the war against HIV/AIDS. Other institutions in the Black community, particularly the Black church, have been slow in responding to the epidemic and lack the willingness to support BMSM in their many social and personal struggles.

Even though the CDC reports that the incidence of HIV/AIDS in the Black community has dramatically decreased in recent years, Black men who have sex with men (BMSM) continue to experience a disproportionate increase in infection rates (Millet et al, 2005). This is not a surprise since this is a demographic that has been virtually ignored by public health interventions; and based on community attitudes about homosexuality; this is a population that is considered dispensable (Crawford, 2006).

In a recent study of BMSM in five urban cities, Baltimore, Los Angeles, New York, Miami, and San Francisco, the CDC found that of the BMSM tested for HIV, 46 percent were HIV positive. Approximately 67 percent of these men were unaware of their HIV/AIDS status (CDC, 2004). These staggering statistics

represent a grave public health crisis in the Black community. The spread of HIV/AIDS will not be stopped globally until prevention strategies help empower people to feel comfortable with their sexuality and become more sexually responsible for their behavior (CDC, 2004). Some scholars blame issues and behaviors related to oppression in its various manifestations for the escalating spread of AIDS throughout the Black community, most scholars agree, that there is a need to come together in a united front to fight this disease and the social malevolence that it inspires (Boykin, 1996; King, 2004; Peterson & Bakeman, 2001). This process challenges public health educators to fulfill their roles of promoting social action and social change like never before, remembering--- knowledge without action is useless.

Informal and Non-Formal Learning

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) examine education in non-formal settings. They describe learning opportunities outside the formal education settings that enhance and compliment the needs of underserved adults. Because of its flexibility and fluid structure, nonformal educational structures are more appropriate in dealing with inequalities, injustices, discrimination, and oppression of marginal populations (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999).

In a study, Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm (n.d) examined the relationship between formal learning, informal learning and nonformal learning. They found that the relationship between these concepts can only be understood within particular contexts. They conclude that it is better to explore elements of formality and informality and the various ways they interrelate to each other.

Historically, personal and community empowerment was the chief goal of non-formal education. Later definitions included adult education as a social practice of practical and prudent action; this action rest on an epistemological attitude which ask some very salient questions: How does individual experience, community position, and historical location shape the way we see ourselves in the world and subsequently determine how we act in and on the world? (Wilson, 1994). In contrast, informal learning is the everyday experiences from which we gain learning. This may include, learning networks, churches and community centers.

Hill (2007) states that nonformal activities for gays and lesbians represent important centers for learning; these include, but are not limited to: gay and lesbian community centers, sponsored lectures, workshops, classes, conferences, political events, gay pride, meetings for mobilization and activist strategizing, “rap”, talk sessions, and coffeehouse discussions.

According to Reeves (1998), coping is defined as, “a dynamic pathway that changes over time and as a response to the changing demands and changing appraisals of a particular situation” (p. 29). BMSM have developed learning strategies and coping mechanisms to deal with the sometimes daily oppression they face in a homophobic society. These coping strategies provide a means of survival; a way to deal with the day-to-day oppression they face.

According to Lazarus and Launier (as cited in Reeves, 1998), “the process of coping is integral to understanding stress reactions by suggesting that, the ways people cope with stress, may be more important, to overall morale, social

functioning and health/illness, than the frequency and severity of the episodes of stress themselves” (p. 29). Examples of this coping can be found throughout the Black gay community in the social networks they have developed to help sustain their life and unique ways of expression.

Reeves (1998) suggests that there is a viable link between stress, learning and coping. She posits that, “By actively responding to environmental circumstances, individuals can learn to adapt and to overcome adversity” (Reeves, 1998, p. 29); this includes HIV/AIDS. Peterson, Folkman and Bakerman (1996) explore the issue of coping among HIV+ individuals:

Stressful life circumstances are closely associated with people’s social network resources and the environmental and personal systems which expose them to life stressors and affect their coping processes. Social and coping resources provide the means to prevent life stressors before they occur or to reduce the debilitating effects of stressors that are inevitable. It is important to distinguish the use of social support as a coping process from perceived social support, which is a coping resource (p. 463).

Of particular relevance to this review is the fact that some coping strategies (emotion-focused coping) result in denial and avoidance of the stressful circumstance (Reeves, 1996). This denial may result in depression, antisocial behavior, and acting out sexually (McNeal, 1998; Peterson, Folkman, Bakerman 1996). Reeves (1998) also states that “Individuals can learn to adapt to environmental circumstances; thus, coping actions are learned behaviors” (p.29).

She further points out that:

Coping and learning are part of everyday experiences of adult life and, as such, present limitless opportunities for growth and development.

Although different in fundamental ways, the concepts of coping and adult learning contains a set of shared assumptions that provide a linchpin for establishing a relationship between the two. (p. 29)

This author hopes that future studies can begin to address this debacle by examining the ways BMSM learn to cope in a homophobic and racist society. For example, Kulkin (2005) notes that factors such as increased self-esteem, enhanced personal skills, and support networks provide avenues for a healthy life in their social environment. Other examples of coping strategies include relaxation techniques, confiding in someone close, and psychotherapy.

BMSM have developed unique and creative strategies for coping with social stressors by utilizing social networks for support, empowerment and survival; attending HIV/AIDS support groups, taking advantage of community resources to cope with HIV/AIDS, utilizing their spirituality, and involvement in community activism.

Historically, gays have developed networks and subcultures that served a critical function. For example, during the Harlem Renaissance these social supports networks created music, clubs and literary scenes that functioned to help gays cope with a homophobic society. Garber (1989) notes that private parties during this time period (1920s) were the best opportunity for Black gay

and lesbians to socialize without fear of persecution; it provided a safety net as well as privacy for gays to meet other gays.

Studies done by Peterson, Folkman, and Bakeman (1996) found that social support and personal resources such as optimism and religiosity-spirituality had a positive correlation among Black gay men; especially those who were HIV positive. For example, the authors note that optimism has been found to be related to coping and physical and psychological well-being; they state:

Findings support the psychological adaptive function of optimism and its importance as a coping resource because it reduces overriding fears and promotes the use of active coping efforts to influence the threatening situation. Religiosity or spirituality practices such as prayer and church support also may be used as an important resource to effectively cope with psychological distress, especially given the prominence of spirituality in Afrocentric models of African American culture. (p. 464)

BMSM have developed learning strategies and coping mechanisms to deal with the sometimes daily oppression they face in a homophobic society; many of these strategies are considered nonformal learning. These areas may overlap with each other at times. The most important thing to remember is that these learning strategies represent opportunities for adults to acknowledge prior knowledge and experiences regardless of where it occurs (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Summary of Literature Review

This literature review examined educational, psychological, literary, and historical literature for relevant conceptual and theoretical perspectives that they provide on the impact of homophobia and racism on the learning experiences of BMSM. Because this group is widely impacted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States, and are arguably one of the most oppressed groups, creative and efficacious educational intervention strategies must be developed and implemented to help these men achieve self actualization, personal fulfillment and a healthy lifestyle. Education, through its ability to empower, uplift, and transform the lives of millions of people, is in a unique position to make a significant contribution toward making the world free from homophobia and racism.

This literature review has attempted to address some of the social and psychological issues that BMSM face during a time when BMSM in particular, and Black men overall are experiencing conflict directly related to their survival. These include homophobia, racism, internalized homophobia, racism, masculine identity issues and HIV/AIDS. Although this subject as it relates to BMSM remains sparsely investigated in the adult education literature, the author hopes to make an original contribution to the literature base by aggressively pursuing some of the tenets inherent in progressive adult education philosophy as espoused by Merriam (1995). They are: "1) Education as an instrument of social change, 2) A changed relationship between teacher and learners, 3) New educational methodologies, 4) A new focal point in education and, 5) a

broadening view of education” (p. 55). These tenants provide a much more expansive and inclusive lens from which to view the population under study. Some adult education scholars are beginning to make a joyful noise in adult education when it comes to gay and lesbian issues. For example, (Grace, 2001a & 2001b; Hill, 1995, 2001, 2003, 2006, 2007) all investigate, examine, and critique gay and lesbian issues through an adult education lens.

There are several important themes in the literature worth considering when working with BMSM. First, the dilemma currently facing the medical and public health communities is how best to use educational strategies to promote a better understanding of the issues BMSM face on a daily bases. The adult education literature reveals potential theoretical, social, and psychological perspectives pertinent to the lives of BMSM as well as the Black community overall.

For example, research by (Courtenay & Merriam 2000; Hill, 1995, 2007) include the process of critical reflection, transformation, and education as powerful tools in working with oppressed populations, especially in the areas of self-improvement, acceptance, and personal responsibility for their sexual behavior. This is in contrast to some of the literature pertaining to BMSM; much of this discourse is wrought with debate espousing vitriolic dogma and hate toward this group, particularly in light of an escalating HIV/AIDS epidemic in the Black community.

Books and articles by authors such as (Boykin, 2005; King, 2004; Millet, et. al. 2005) have focused on the down-low, or BMSM who identify as

heterosexual but secretly have sex with other men. These conversations often link internalized homophobia, racism, and issues related to masculinity as compelling forces affecting BMSM and driving the AIDS epidemic in the Black community.

Research has shown that BMSM have developed coping mechanisms to deal with homophobia and racism. Many of these mechanisms have been developed through informal, nonformal and formal learning and are only minimally recognized in the adult education literature. The literature identifies creative and unique networking channels employed by BMSM to survive an often hostile and unempathetic Black community and American society.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand how Black men who have sex with men (BMSM) learn to cope with homophobia and racism. The research questions that guided this study are:

1. How have BMSM experience racism and homophobia
2. How do BMSM cope with issues such as homophobia and racism?
3. How do BMSM learn their coping strategies in dealing with homophobia and racism?

It is through the eyes of BMSM that information can be gleaned that better help us understand how this population copes with problems they experience as they attempt to survive in a homophobic, racist and heterosexist society. This research employed qualitative methods to reveal how BMSM cope with homophobia and racism. This chapter presents the methodology, research design, and the data analysis used in this study.

Rationale for the Study Methodology

There are many benefits to using a qualitative design. Some of these benefits include providing opportunities for respondents to share their life story and in doing so, explore how people make sense of their life experiences and assess the quality of the outcomes they produce in their lives. Because this is a study of how BMSM learn to cope with different life experiences, qualitative

methodology is most appropriate. In addition, qualitative methodology can most effectively capture BMSM perspectives on life as understood from their personal experiences and as told by their stories. BMSM actually provides the rich data about their lives that qualitative methodologies employ through interviews. This approach may help adult educators better identify, and gain insight into the issues and problems BMSM face in their daily lives.

In an effort to gain a deeper understanding of the methodological process utilized in this research, the formative work of several noted scholars are discussed. Crotty (2004) emphasizes the importance of describing our research methods as thoroughly as possible. He notes the following about the interviewing process:

To this end, we will not just talk about “carrying out interviews” but will indicate in very detailed fashion what kind of interviews they are, what interviewing techniques were employed, and in what sort of setting the interviews are conducted. (p. 6)

In an effort to understand the author’s rationale for using this methodology the following interview techniques and strategies provide powerful examples of this methodology at work. Several scholars provide examples of how stories can help capture participant experiences through conversations.

Delgado (1989) discusses the benefits of capturing research participant’s stories through interviewing. Many who are considered to be members of *out-groups* have had their voices and perspectives silenced. Moreover, their consciousness has been devalued, suppressed, and for some obliterated.

Delgado further reminds us that storytelling provides a means of destroying fallacies, mindsets, misnomers, and stereotypes that function to maintain the status quo of those in power. Interviews are a powerful tool for collecting information about many different populations but, most importantly, it gives those who are oppressed an opportunity for their voices to be heard. The author hopes to accomplish this by vigorously applying the tenants of applied qualitative research.

Applied Qualitative Research

Merriam and Simpson (2000) point out that “Applied research is directed toward solving immediate practical problems” (p. 7). Qualitative research methods capture exactly how BMSM learn to cope with homophobia and racism and tease out how the immediate and practical problems are dealt with by BMSM on a daily basis. Kidder and Judd (as cited in Merriam & Simpson, 2000) assert the following regarding applied research.

Applied research, which really subsumes evaluation research, is any social research designed to answer practical questions. Applied researchers may also be testing theories while they are answering practical questions, and they may be more or less directly involved in a practical or real-world setting, but ultimately they are interested in answering some question with practical implications. (p. 7)

This study uncovers some of the relevant issues BMSM face in a racist and homophobic society. This research is a learning study that will familiarize adult educators and the general public with the most salient issues impacting BMSM

and how they learn to cope with these issues. Ideally, this study will increase interest in the subject among adult educators and promote more compassionate and inclusive discourse in academia and throughout the Black community.

Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework for this study draws from critical race theory and nonformal learning theory. Constructivists argue that truth or meaning manifest itself as a product of engagement with the realities in our world (Crotty, 1998, Grbich, 2007). For example, homophobia and racism are realities that BMSM must deal with in their day to day interactions. Constructivists argue that truth or meaning manifest itself as a product of engagement with the realities in our world (Crotty, 1998; Grbich, 2007). For example, homophobia and racism are realities the BMSM must deal with in their day to day interactions. According to constructivist, meanings that people give to situations are constructed as opposed to being discovered. In this perspective, different people may construct different meaning from the same phenomenon (Crotty, 1998). This concept may be better understood through a theoretical lens such as Critical Race Theory (CRT).

No single theory in and of itself is all-inclusive in dealing with BMSM; However, CRT provides conceptual tools to help better understand learning in this population (Solórzano, 2002; Reeves, 1998). Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, Thomas (1995) describes CRT as follows: "CRT challenges the ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in American legal culture, and more generally, in American society as a whole" (p. xiv).

Other scholars expand this perspective. For example, Delgado discusses CRT as a form of resistance, in which White as the normative standard is challenged. The strongest claims rest in the view that CRT is a collective movement to counteract what is perceived as a setback to the civil rights movement (Bowman, 2004). Leaders of this perspective (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 1989; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, Thomas, 1995; Guinier, 2001; Solórzano, 2002; Tate, 1997) provide historical beginnings, and key writings related to (CRT). They view this approach as a social movement that addresses oppression in its many insidious and cunning forms (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000).

Solórzano and Yosso(2002) note that CRT calls for an examination of issues such as racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism as valid, appropriate, and necessary forms of data. These can be captured in its truest form through story-telling and, especially, counter-storytelling. Examples of such powerful stories can be found in the works of Lathers and Smithies “Troubling the Angeles.” Lather and Smithies (1997) conducted qualitative interviews with women who were HIV positive. These interviews were conducted between 1992 through 1993 in a variety of settings, from a living room in a home, to an AIDS community center.

This ethnographic methodology reached into the hearts of women living with HIV/AIDS with such power that it propelled their groundbreaking book, *Troubling the Angels*, into the forefront of qualitative research. For example, occasionally the subtext opens out to highlight one of the women as she narrates

her recent changes, providing a counter-story to her earlier story at the top of the page (Lather & Smithies, 1997). They poignantly describe these stories.

These stories were about oppression, about victimization, about one's own brutalization---far from deepening the despair of the oppressed, lead to healing, liberation, mental health. They also promote group solidarity. Storytelling emboldens the hearer, who may have had the same thoughts and experiences the storyteller describes, but hesitated to give them voice. Having heard another express them, he or she realizes, I am not alone. (p. 2437)

These stories provide a deeper understanding of living with the stigma of HIV. By telling their stories, these people gain healing and greater self acceptance.

Design of the Study

A qualitative approach was employed in this research because it is an investigative tool designed to discover meaning about different life situations and phenomena. The central focus of this type of research is to examine facts about people, their opinions, and attitudes (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). This methodology encourages the exploration of knowledge by asking the simple questions---why and how (Merriam & Simpson, 2000).

Research which focuses on understanding the perspectives and experiences of those being studied offer the greatest chance of making contributions to the field of adult education. It is through this initial investigation with BMSM that innovative and ultimately more effective education and training strategies can be created for this population that reflect their gender, sexual

orientation, and culturally specific conditions. The why and how questions regarding homophobia, racism and masculinity can best be answered through qualitative methods that give BMSM the opportunity to talk about their coping and learning experiences. Qualitative research is appropriate when there is little existing theory or knowledge of an existing problem (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Such is the case with BMSM and the issue of homophobia and racism.

A limited number of studies have examined BMSM and issues related to masculinity (Malebranche 2001; Montiero 1994; Ross 1983; Wright 1993). These studies have found that BMSM do not always relate to White stereotypical terms such as *gay* or *lesbian*. Therefore, educational information often overlooks those who identify themselves differently. The goal of this research is to provide a vehicle to better understand the experiences of BMSM as they negotiate an oppressive society.

Sample Selection

The subject population for this study is Black men who have sex with men (BMSM). According to Merriam (2001), "In purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. If the purpose is to maximize information, the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sample units; thus, redundancy is the primary criterion" (p. 64). Sampling in this study was done until a point of saturation or redundancy was reached.

Merriam (2001) also posits that purposeful sampling is based on the expectation that the researcher wants to understand, discover, and gain insight

about a portion of a population, so as much information as possible is collected. The criteria for selection included: 1) self-identify as Black or African American; 2) between 21 and 55 years, 3) self-identify as gay. Respondents who do not meet all of these criteria were not considered for this study. The sample included a diverse group of men in terms of age difference as a demographic. In addition snowball sampling was employed in order to identify additional participants for inclusion in this research project. As a result the final sample was skewed toward an older population (mean age 44).

Finally, a decision to include this researcher among the participants was made in conjunction with the committee chair. The resulting sample included thirteen self-identified BMSM from a range of demographic backgrounds. Secondly, this interviewers' committee chair administered the interview at a local coffee shop in Athens, Georgia. Thirteen self-identified BMSM were interviewed, this number best represents an attempt to adequately answer the research questions.

Participants were recruited at a local park frequented by BMSM during Atlanta's Pride Festival (2007), (June 23rd and 24th, 2007) and during Black Pride Celebration (2007), (September 4, 2007). Piedmont Park is a local venue popular among BMSM in Atlanta, particularly during gay pride. Potential participants were given flyers which introduce the study and stated the inclusion criteria. If eligible, the participants were told to contact the researcher on a private phone line to schedule an interview for a later time.

Participants were encouraged to pass the recruitment flyer to those men in their social and/or sexual networks who they feel would be eligible for the study. This is known as the snowball sampling method. Snowball sampling is one of the most common modes of purposive sampling; it rests on the premise that respondents refer others to participate in the research study, usually by word of mouth (Merriam, 2001).

The recruitment sites used in this study are most likely to include both men who identify as gay and those who have sex with men but identify differently. For example, some men in this study use the term same gender loving in identifying themselves. In an effort to capture a varied segment of this population the age of the respondents ranged between twenty one and fifty five years of age. If the study's inclusion criteria were met, he then was enrolled in the study and a date, time, and mutually agreed upon safe space was set for the interview.

Data Collection

This study employed individual face-to-face, one-on-one, in-depth semi-structured interviews using questions from an interview guide (Appendix A). This technique is one of several primary tools used in qualitative inquiry and involves outlining relevant themes in an interview guide related to the research topic in advance (Merriam, 1988; 2000). Kadushin, (1990) defines interviewing as "A conversation with a deliberate purpose, a purpose mutually accepted by the participants" (p. 3). Kadushin further posits that: "A good interview, like a good conversation, gives pleasure to both participants. The most important difference

between an interview and a conversation is that the interview interaction is designed to achieve a conscious purpose” (p. 3). Merriam (2001) expands this definition by noting the usefulness of this technique “Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behaviors, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them” (p. 72).

A semi-structured interview approach was utilized in this study because it is flexible enough to respond to changing dynamics during the interview. For example, body language, emotions, voice tone, and facial expression are important elements of the interview process. Another advantage of this technique is that it allows the researcher the freedom to go with the natural flow of the interaction. Taylor and Bogdan (as cited in Merriam 2001) list five important factors that should be considered at the outset of every interview:

1. The investigator’s motives and intentions and the inquiry’s purpose
2. The protection of respondents through the use of pseudonyms
3. Deciding who has final say over the study’s content
4. Payment (if any)
5. Logistics with regard to time, place, and number of interviews to be scheduled. (p. 84)

The purpose of using interviews in this research was to allow BMSM the opportunity to tell their own stories in their own voices and in their own way, providing a clearer picture of the issues they face on a daily basis; issues such as homophobia, racism, masculinity. By telling their stories, BMSM can begin to share their pain, insights, struggles, and victories in a way that provides a lens for

society to see them in a more positive light. Additionally, storytelling through interviewing is a powerful means of destroying racist and homophobic mindsets upon which legal, political and social discourse are built (Delgado, 1989).

The interview guide was developed by the author using information obtained from the current literature on homophobia and racism (appendix A). Additionally, peer examination utilizing colleagues and dissertation committee members gave valuable input and feedback to help the interview guide be more robust. Questions incorporated into the guide for exploration were based on the research questions and included the following: 1) formative experiences and upbringing of BMSM related to racism and homophobia, 2) questions on how BMSM cope with racism and homophobia, 3) how BMSM learn to cope with homophobia and racism (Appendix A).

Study participants completed a brief written pre-interview questionnaire that asks general demographic questions. It took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete this questionnaire (appendix B); they were not asked to put their name or any identifying information on this document. The respondents were given a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality. Participants were asked questions in three categories.

The first categories ask questions related to life experiences as BMSM. The second category asked more specific questions about how they cope with homophobia and racism. The third category asks questions related to how these men learned their coping strategies. It took approximately an hour and a half to complete the interview, which was taped with a handheld recorder and

transcribed verbatim. A professional transcriptionist and the author transcribed the interviews. Most interviews were conducted in the researcher's home, participant's home, or other agreed upon locations. For example, this researcher was interviewed at a coffee shop in Athens Georgia. Transcripts were cross-checked for accuracy with the audio recordings as they were completed.

Because participants may have been uncomfortable answering some of the questions asked during the interview, they were assured that they did not have to answer any question that they did not want to. Also, they were told that they could stop participating and remove themselves from the study at any time without explanation. It was made clear to all participants that there was no known physical risk in participating in this research and that findings may help the overall community better understands the issues BMSM experience on a daily basis

During the screening telephone call, verbal information about the study was provided. At the time of the interview, participants were given an information sheet that described the nature of the study, the risks and benefits, and researcher contact information. The information sheet was chosen over a consent form because the consent form would be the only record linking the subject and the research, creating a potential risk of breach of confidentiality. Any harm to the respondent in any way is unacceptable. Internal Review Board (IRB) approval was granted in August 2007, participants were given information to contact The University of Georgia's (UGA) Institutional Review Board for future questions and concerns.

Data Analysis

This study used content analysis to identify, code, and categorize themes and patterns in the data (Patton, 1990). This method provides a way of analyzing the structure of the interview, allowing salient themes, patterns, and observations to emerge from the data. For example, narratives aimed at extricating text related to internalized homophobia allowed for sub-codes such as associated stressors, identity issues, and coping strategies to be identified.

An outside agency and the author did the data transcribing, with the transcriber doing approximately 70% of the work. All transcriptions were double checked to make sure that the information was accurate and reflective of the audio-recordings. Additionally, these transcripts were coded using the constant comparative method. This method involves comparing segments of the data with other segments to compare and contrast similarities and differences (Merriam, 2001).

The first phase entailed identifying themes as they emerged from the data, this process utilized a code workbook consistent with the domains in the interview guide (Appendix A), the second phase consisted of collaborations with the researcher's dissertation committee methodologist comparing coding patterns to ensure interrater reliability.

The author used coded color schemes to identify emerging codes and note their relevance to the research. This process is known as frame analysis. Grbich (2007) notes, that frame analysis is a useful tool to classify and understand conversational information, rituals, and behaviors. She further

describes three important questions to be considered in this process “1) what sort of conceptual and contextual interpretive frames do we place around situations and what sense do we make of them? 2) How are meanings and understandings constructed? 3) What classifications do we use to frame different kinds of communication/situations and to shape our social lives?” (p. 47).

Meetings were held with this researcher’s committee chair and committee methodologist on a weekly basis to review findings and make modifications as new themes emerged. The interviews were coded such that no new themes or sub-codes emerged from the data. Creswell (2003) offers some valuable procedural suggestions for handling the data. He suggests that the researcher first read through all the data to get a general sense of its overall meaning. Second, he suggests that one short interview be scanned. The researcher then asks him or herself, what is this about? Thoughts related to these questions may be written in the margins.

The tendency to intersperse personal feelings into the research process has been brought to this researcher’s attention by both peers and scholars. Peskin (1988) warns about this subjectivity. He makes the following statement: “Perhaps, at some level, researchers already are aware of their subjectivity and its impact on their work; I advocate the enhanced awareness that should result from a formal systematic monitoring of self” (p. 20). Attempts to minimize this tendency through the process of continuous self-reflection, self-monitoring and self-examination were made by this researcher.

Insider/Outsider Considerations

The relationship between the participants and the researcher is very important, particularly when conducting qualitative inquiry. Historically, Blacks have had a tumultuous relationship with the medical, science, and academic communities. One such example is the Tuskegee syphilis study (where Blacks were denied medication for treatment of syphilis for research purposes). Blacks have often been the target of unscrupulous scientific inquiry that has caused many to be distrustful of the scientific community's motives and intentions.

An outsider is someone who comes into a community to do research. There are distinct advantages and disadvantages to being an *outsider* when conducting research. Researchers admit they possess an unequal power status when they come into a community. These imbalances have the potential to encourage insensitivity, dominance, and aloofness toward that population. Wilson and Hayes, (2000) remind us that researchers have often invaded communities and taken valuable information without benefiting those communities in ways that are defined by the people in that setting. In contrast, Wilson (1994) lists the advantages of being an outsider.

1. We bring a certain passion and commitment to the research process that is based on experience and a desire for social change.
2. We bring the abilities, knowledge, and skills of the research process and adult education principles to the community and society at large.

3. Often the researcher and the community share identification based on empathy and shared experiences with oppression, discrimination, racism, and homophobia.
4. The level of trust between the researcher and the community can be unique and close.

This methodology enables one to develop a relationship with members of the community that will be investigated; thereby, promoting understanding and communication with this population (Wilson, 2000).

In a rare visit to Cornell University in the early 1980s, Paulo Freire was asked by community organizers if they would have to become insiders in order to become effective in their community efforts at conducting participatory research. Freire (as cited in Wilson and Hayes [2000]) is quoted as saying: “We are all outsiders and that cannot be changed. Insiders do not want us to give up our connections to the outside; the real question is whether we are going to be invaders” (p. 599).

What Freire is saying in this statement is important to researchers. We must remember that we are guests in the communities we research and should conduct ourselves accordingly. Brookfield & Heron (as cited in Wilson and Hays (2000) clarified this point when they stated: “Aware outsiders may catalyze action in a way that may be more difficult for insiders to accomplish by themselves” (p.599).

What is clear to this researcher is the importance of maintaining a relationship with the communities we research that is based on respect,

beneficence, and justice, Deshler & Grudens-Schuck (as cited in Wilson and Hayes, 2000). These are ethical standards for how each researcher, whether insider or outsider should conduct him or herself. I will discuss three dynamic experiences that impacted my position as an insider/outside. That is, 1) being a participant in this research study, 2) my experience visiting my hometown of Philadelphia attending a home going and, 3) a rather unique experience at starbucks coffee shop in mid-town Atlanta.

First, although initially reluctant, I am now glad that through this study my personal story could be told; most importantly this allowed me to be frank about my positionality on the research topic and my sexual orientation. As an academician and researcher I feel my honesty and clarity about who I am lends more legitimacy and integrity to my research. This perspective shapes the lens from which this dissertation is written.

What was most astonishing about being apart of this research is that some of the questions that were asked during my interview compelled me to reflect on issues that I had not previously thought about. For example, I struggled with determining what was more important, my sexuality, or my race. Although most respondents in this study weighed sexual orientation and race equally, I consider my race as a more sailent issue in my life. What I discovered is that, I live my life consistent with this reality. The significance here is that my identity as an insider forced me to reflect on the same issues (sometimes uncomfortable) as the other respondents, providing a more empathetic and understanding lens.

Secondly, earlier in this dissertation I talked about the moving experience I had while attending a memorial service for a transgendered person in a gay bar in Philadelphia. After much reflection on this experience, I must admit that I initially had to confront my own bias toward transgendered persons. However, after attending this event my entire perspective toward this group has been changed. One goal of this research is to promote more compassion toward BMSM; I thought it utterly ridiculous to have a formal memorial service for someone in a bar; however I realize that I had to become more compassionate.

Lastly, the most compelling experience of this entire research process was what I will call my coffee house experience. While sitting in Starbucks analyzing this study, a group of about 15 Black gay men swooped into the shop like a swarm of bees. It appears they were having a community meeting from the serious looks on their faces.

I spoke to a couple of the gentleman that I knew, but never found out the group's name or purpose. What was most astounding about this encounter is that this group began an open discussion of issues they were dealing with ranging from homophobia to racism. At times the discussion became heated, passionate and fiery. I was bursting at the seams, because I wanted to join the discussion, after all, this was what my research topic was all about and this was the exact social context where BMSM learn their coping strategies in dealing with these issues.

Part of me felt compelled to join in the discussion even though I was not formally invited, it was then I realized that part of the respect that we give our

research community is shown in not invading the community, Deshler & Grudens-Schuck (as cited in Wilson & Hayes, 2000). Alridge (2003) uses the following guideline for conducting research when you are an insider and an outsider. "In illuminating the voice and agency of a community of which a scholar is a member, the scholar should strive for a critical analysis of the self or 'reflexivity'" (p. 32). In maintaining respect for this group's privacy I reframed from intruding on their conversation and simply wrote down my observations for inclusion here. In retrospect, I realized what I was searching for was a way to involve myself in their discourse because I felt that I was the expert, doctoral student, academician whose voice should be have been heard.

Participation in this type of research may involve a loss of privacy; however, participant's records will be handled as confidentially as possible. They were not asked to put their names or any other identifying information on the written survey. No personal identifying information was included on the audiotape of the interview.

After the interviews were transcribed to paper from the tapes, they will be retained in a locked file cabinet for five years, this is required by law, and the tapes will then be destroyed. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications that may result from this study.

Validity and Reliability

Qualitative inquiry is not subject to the same conditions of validity as quantitative research because of its differing philosophical assumptions and methodologies. However, qualitative inquiry is still held to rigorous and ethical

standards (Manning, 1997). This study follows some of the criteria espoused by Manning (1997); one important criterion he discusses is authenticity. This concept is composed of a set of criteria use to gauge a study's quality. Several of these concepts are relevant to this research; they are, fairness, informed consent, reflexivity, peer debriefing and maintaining an audit trail.

Fairness is concerned with voice. All participants must have a fair and equitable chance to tell their story from their own perspective without any undue persuasion from the researcher. This requires that the researcher be aware of the power that he/she possesses during the interview process. Every attempt was made to allow full expression of the participant's experiences and concerns. Additionally, any published materials will be made available to the participants after the study is complete.

The researcher should periodically consult with peers and colleagues who are knowledgeable about the subject but not connected to the research (Manning, 1997). Many hours were spent consulting with my mentors and research committee members discussing research strategies and available resources that would compliment and enhance this research. For example, I discussed with my methodologist and colleagues, ways to make the interview guide more robust.

Manning (1997) states that the process of debriefing "Increases authentication by expanding the community of people involved in discussing interpretations and meaning. "This consideration utilizes scholars with the methodological competence and theory-building experience necessary to add

richness to the dialogue and ultimately the interpretations” (p.104). Other scholars such as Merriam (1988) agree that feedback and comments from colleagues as the data emerges is important.

I have learned from previous experiences, the importance of maintaining an accurate audit trail; this involves record keeping of all activities related to the research. For example, how the data was obtained, collected, who has access, what data was analyzed, and when materials are to be destroyed after the study is completed. Moreover, I kept a research journal of all interactions, observations, thoughts, insights and lessons learned. This process can ultimately result in the study being more rigorous (Merriam & Simpson, 1985). Other scholars support Manning's assertions and provide additional insight into strategies that can add validity to the research process.

In an effort to maintain validity in the research process it is important to keep a neutral position. Validation of findings happens throughout the research process and is extremely important in terms of accuracy and credibility of the research findings. Creswell (2002) suggest the following to enhance the credibility, trustworthiness, and accuracy of qualitative inquiry:

- Triangulate different data sources of information by examining evidence from sources and using it to build a coherent justification
- Use member checking to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking the final report back to the participants and determining if they are accurate
- Use peer debriefing to enhance the accuracy of the account.

- Spend a prolonged time in the field. In this way, the researcher can develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study, and can convey detail about the site and the people that lends credibility to the narrative account.
- Clarify the bias that is brought to the study. This self-reflection creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with readers

Because of the confidentiality of the study and time restraints, the author did not do member checking; however, all of the above recommended techniques were utilized to enhance the accuracy of this study. Researchers utilizing a qualitative methodology are held to the same rigorous standards as other methods; therefore, the above criterion can help establish the kind of integrity and validity that has made qualitative methodology a force to be reckoned with in contemporary research.

Conclusion

Many questions remain regarding homophobia and racism among Black males in our society. These questions can best be answered through qualitative research that poses direct inquiries to this population. Although many of these men do not fit the traditional masculine profile and may not be able to rely on heterosexual female conquests and the rearing of biological children to define their sense of masculinity, their voices nevertheless must be heard.

BMSM are represented in all areas of our community: doctors, lawyers, scientists, artists, activists, just to name a few. They deserve the same equality and justice that the rest of mainstream society enjoys.

CHAPTER FOUR

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Opening this discussion are brief profiles identifying participant demographic and background information. These profiles provide a better lens from which to view these men, and exemplify how issues such as homophobia, and racism impacted their beliefs, relationships and outlook on life. The importance of these profiles cannot be understated because they add a more personal dimension from which to view these men. Moreover, these profiles exemplify the wisdom and knowledge these men accumulated through lifelong learning.

Participants in this study were more than willing to share this insight with today's youth and others who may be experiencing challenges with the research topic. Thirteen participants were interviewed for this research study. The purpose of this section is to provide a personal view of the participant's perspectives as they relate to learning. The participant ages range from 24 to 55, with a mean age of 44 years. Prior to the one-on-one face to face interview, participants were asked to complete a pre-interview questionnaire which captured key demographic information.

At the end of each interview, participants were asked what advice and/or encouragement they would offer a younger BMSM or a friend who is experiencing challenges as a BMSM. This advice was based on participant's

having overcome many of the pitfalls and dangers inherent in being Black and gay in America. I do, however, have a personal motivation for including these profiles.

The viewpoints and positionality of BMSM are oftentimes suppressed and silenced; therefore, I felt these profiles would be a great opportunity to break the chains of omission by providing an added venue for these men to share their experiences, strength and wisdom with the general public. These profiles parallel the purpose of this study, which seeks to understand the coping and learning strategies of BMSM as it relates to homophobia and racism.

Most importantly, these profiles illuminate the current consciousness among this group and functions as a barometer of attitudes and positionalities. Moreover, the insight and wisdom generated from these profiles provide an opportunity for the Black community and America to learn from this groups' experience. The intention here is to promote discourse among personnel such as church leaders, adult educators, counselors, BMSM, heterosexuals, and those looking to learn more about the study population.

It has been a great challenge in undertaking this project to keep my own subjectivities in check (Peshkin, 1988). In an effort to minimize this tendency, I have included my own personal interview. The reason for this inclusion is that this researcher is a member of the group under study. The purpose for my inclusion was two-fold; firstly, my perspectives would be obvious and up-front from the start; secondly, other participants may be more comfortable during the interview process if they knew that I was also a participant as well as the

researcher in this study. The decision was made to include my story because it was felt that this would provide a lens from which the entire study was launched. This author's committee chair conducted and tape recorded the interview in a local coffee shop in down-town Athens Georgia. This section will begin with the author's profile.

Lawrence

I am a fifty-four year old individual from Philadelphia Pennsylvania, my involvement as a participant in this research provides the lens from which to view this dissertation. This process compels me to be up-front and forth-right about my subjectivity from the very start in sharing my experiential foundation. Although I grew up in a religious household I now consider my religious affiliation as non-denominational. In terms of identity, I refer to myself as same gender loving; this identification more fully captures the essence of love and relationship as opposed to a pure sexual connotation. Professionally, I am in the human services field with an annual income of between \$55, 000 – \$60, 000.

As this research can probably attest, I am a passionate and sometimes vocal individual who truly believes in holding our country accountable for our constitution's guarantee of freedom and justice for all: that includes Black men who just happen to be gay. My best advice for younger BMSM is to look inside your hearts to find self-acceptance, peace and comfort in who you are. I wholeheartedly believe that It is ok to be gay; it's ok to be same gender loving; it's ok to be exactly who you are. Although, I admit that self acceptance has been a process for me, my personal freedom started after reading a powerful

book by McNeal (1998) entitled, *Taking a Chance on God: Liberating Theology for Gays, Lesbians and Their Lovers, Families, and Friends*.

I strongly believe that BMSM must educate themselves about issues related to sexuality and race. Insight and wisdom did not stop when the Bible was written. It continues to be written to this day. New materials, books, resources, web-sites are available to help educate us about our selves and society as it relates to sexual orientation, race and masculinity. Many current books challenge traditional ways of interpreting scripture and point toward a more liberating theology that is consistent with acceptance of one's total self. We no longer need to be ashamed or deny who we are. We can be at peace and celebrate the fullness of our humanity---after all isn't that part of what life is about?

Sam

Sam is a forty-nine year old individual from Norfolk County Virginia. He identifies himself as "same gender loving"; Sam has some college education and describes his religious affiliation as "spiritual." Professionally, he is a Licensed, Practical Nurse with an annual income of between \$30, 000 – \$40,000. Sam resoundingly asserts that he hopes somebody could be blessed by his participation in this research. His advice to the younger generation is potent and straight forward:

Having God as my foundation gives me the ability to face each day, saying it is a great day already: and to pursue greater things in life; deal with my sexuality, racism, and all those things. To have God as my

foundation, as my source, gives me the ability to eat, to drink, and to do all that I do.

Learning to utilize a higher power as a source of strength was echoed resoundingly throughout these interviews. This learning affirms the central role that spirituality plays in the lives of these participants. This learning proved pivotal to their overall survival amidst a community that is oftentimes hostile, violent and indignant toward them.

Kevin

Is a 48 year old male from Atlanta, he describes himself as a Grady baby and has never lived any where else. He describes his religious background as nondenominational, but professed that he is very spiritual and loves the Lord. Kevin is a high school graduate with ties to the restaurant industry. He is employed at a fine dining restaurant in mid-town Atlanta and loves his job. He proudly notes that he loves life and lives it as if he were going to die tomorrow. He explains that he does not spend time sweating the small stuff and tried to do into others as he wants done to him.

Adam

Adam is a fifty-year old individual from Tampa, Florida who identifies himself as “*two spirited.*” He also describes his religious background as spiritual. He has some college education; however, he admitted that he was unemployed at the time of the interview. Adam offers some very humorous advice about the gay lifestyle. He proclaims, “*Have fun with it. The gay life can be fabulous.*” However, painful lessons learned point to a far more serious declaration. He

thoughtfully advises, “You don’t have to be feminine to prove that you are gay. You can meet in New York and go to theaters and have fun”. Adam has learned to appreciate the value of having fun; in his opinion, doing so provides a healthy outlet. Adam also recommends that people seek some outside source to talk about their feelings, especially as they relate to sexuality.

Jack

Jack is a forty-five year old, born in Brooklyn, New York. He describes his religion as *Holiness* and identifies his sexual orientation as gay. He has an Associate’s Degree in Applied Science, but was not employed at the time of the interview. Based on his lifelong learning experiences, Jack offers a very insightful perspective on the gay lifestyle. His interview is powerful because it encourages us to find our happiness within. He makes the following robust decree:

Find yourself. Define yourself. Those two are very important, find and then define. Don’t give that over to someone else. Define who you are. Don’t spend your career looking for Mr. Right. Spend your time becoming Mr. Right. Let people look for you. Most of us can identify the great qualities that we want to find in a man, that we want to find in a friend, or that we want to bring into our life via somebody else. When we just need to bring them in via our self, you know. I definitely would give that advice and don’t become a home entertainment system for everybody, you know. Let them, wherever else they want to go for that home entertainment, but don’t you be it.

Mike

Mike is a forty-five year old born in New York City. In answering the question, "how would you describe your religion?" He replied, "Spiritual". He is one of only two participants in this study to describe their sexual orientation as *homosexual*. Mike's mannerisms and attitude reflected frustration with the state of BMSM. He feels that we are simply touching the surface of the issues that need to be address in the Black gay community. He recommends that we dig down deep in our consciousness to realize our own inherent value as Black people, particularly as it relates to our masculinity:

We will have to understand the African concept about masculinity, femininity, before the White man came. We have to have a conceptual idea of ourselves before Europeans came to make a comparative analysis and determine the value of where we are, what are we comparing this against, you know, what is the measuring stick here. So I mean you know, I hope this will come out because we are only entertaining surface issues. You know, I just wished that we could dig down deeper, and further in some of the issues about sexuality.

Billy

Billy is a forty-five year old individual from Kansas City, Missouri. His religious preference is non-denominational and he identifies his sexual preference as same gender loving. Professionally, Billy has an undergraduate degree, and is currently employed as a Research Coordinator at a major

university. His annual salary is between \$45, 000 and \$60, 000. Billy's interview was conducted at my home one evening where he spoke passionately about how his spirituality helps him deal with the challenges of homophobia and racism. At one point, he shared the following: "Thanks to my spiritual core, I don't have a challenge with it; it's the other person who has a problem, and that's their problem. I can either try to educate them about it, or just find my way around." Billy suggests that it is the perpetrators of homophobia and racism with the problem---not BMSM. Billy affirms one of the overarching themes found in this study, the willingness of BMSMs to educate others and to help promote a better understanding of the issues this population faces on a daily bases.

Ted

Ted is a fifty-five year old born in Des Moines, Idaho. In terms of his religion, he identifies as a Protestant and considers his sexual identity as same gender loving. He is a substitute teacher in the Atlanta Public School system, and makes between \$20,000 and \$30,000 a year. Ted shares his experience, strength, and hope in dealing with the research topic:

What I was thinking about when you talked about homosexuality and all this other stuff, and racism and stuff like that, I really want to get the idea that all of that is really other people's projection. I think I wouldn't know that I am Black if it wasn't for someone telling me that I was Black. If I grew up and acknowledged your difference, I could look at you and see that you have brown skin and I can look at someone else and say wow they have red skin or White skin, and be okay with that, without a

judgment of it or saying that somehow it is, you know, better, or worse, or whatever. I think sexuality is like that too. We have, and I say we, because I have done it too, fed into what other people have said about homosexuality. As soon as we start doing independent thinking, looking at each situation not as a group, you know, like oh this is a label, and so everybody that falls into that label is this way. I find that most people are so much more than one particular label, that it is almost an injustice to even say that you are Black, because you are so much more than just a Black person.

Ted leaves us with a powerful message that we are so much more than the labels people attempt to attach to us. He further encourages us to think independently and outside of the box with regard to racism and sexuality.

Fred

Fred is a forty-two year old individual born in Dayton, Ohio. He associates himself with the Protestant religion and identifies himself as same gender loving in terms of his sexual orientation. He warns future generations of BMSMs about assuming that gay men are everywhere:

I try to meet other same gender loving men, other homosexual men, in areas that are predominantly for African-American same gender loving men. So I think that has been you know the primary thing. I don't have an assumption that gay men are everywhere, you know, and I don't have illusions that all straight men want to be with gay men, and that you know,

every straight man can have some type of relationship with a gay man sexually. I don't believe all of that is so.

Bobby

Bobby is a fifty year old born in Washington, DC. His religious affiliation is Protestant, and his sexual identification is same gender loving. Bobby considers himself to be qualified professional holding a masters degree in social services. He earns between \$45,000 and \$60, 000 per year. He advises us not to compromise when it comes to what we want out of life and relationships. He warns:

Here is the advice I would give. So you know, always be clear what it is you want, and what it is you are not interested in. And then don't deviate from that. You run into a lot of people who bring a lot of different things, you know, to relationships. Some of it you want to have in your life. Some of it you don't want to have in your life. You know, if you always know what it is you are interested in having in your life, don't settle for less than that.

Brad

Brad is a forty-two year old from Nashville, Tennessee. He is affiliated with the Protestant religion as are most of the participants in this study. Brad also identifies as same gender loving. He has had some college, but is not working at this time. Brad shares a gripping story about a troubled, young BMSM named Trevor who he once mentored:

Well I think the first piece of advice I would give, and I have been mentoring some kids, younger than me. One I call little brother Trevis.

Trevis of course was a same gender loving brother. His dad always called him a sissy and fag, and all this other stuff, but he didn't know. He just assumed, because he wasn't married and all that other stuff. Trevis should be about twenty-eight now. The advice I gave to Trevis was, if you love yourself what you would do is you would let them know who you are, because I think it is very painful for your daddy to be calling you sissy and faggot, and gay and all this other stuff, and you are not truly acknowledging who you are. And so when I gave him that advice, he toiled with it for a little while and he finally said he was going home to North Carolina. When he went to North Carolina he told his father, and when he told his folks his daddy went, I knew it, I knew it, I knew it, but when he came back here his mom and dad visited him, probably a couple of months later. So I think his dad made amends with him. And so the advice I would give, if you really want to live freely in the truth of who you are, you know. At least you could tell your biological family because there is no guarantee that they are going to be close to you. You know. Even if you tell them then or later, there is no guarantee. So the best thing you can do is live in your truth and live freely in your truth. That is not to say that it doesn't matter. You can tell whoever and if they don't like it, you know, if they don't like it that is their problem. The thing is that you want to be free. You want to be free and you want to be open and the only way to do that is to be truthful with who you are.

George

George is a fifty-year old individual born in the windy city of Chicago, Illinois. He is not affiliated with any religious denomination and considers his sexual identity as same gender loving. George is a personal physical fitness trainer, who earns anywhere from \$20,000 - \$30,000 per year. George challenges today's youth to do the following, "Any young person, African-American or not, that is same gender loving, and having challenges coming to terms with their sexual orientation, I would say, get to know who you are and love yourself". George makes the case for future BSMs and others who struggle with self love and acceptance. He further advises us to rely on our trust in the God:

We come into this world where we are instantly taught that God is somewhere above, or God is in Heaven, or God is out yonder, or God is somewhere there, but never really understanding that the very essence of our being is God. Until you can understand and get that concept, then that God of separation always causes you to see God outside of ones self, and when you are in search of things outside of ones self, you are never at your core. So part of what gets us connected is once we understand and realize that the very essence of your being is the presence of God, it then forces you to connect with other beings and see God's presence in them. What that does is open you up to a level of acceptance that you can not get until you get that concept.

Lou

Lou is a twenty-four year old individual from New Orleans, Louisiana. He describes his religious background as Catholic and identifies his sexual orientation as homosexual. Only one other participant in this study identified as himself as being homosexual. He has had some college, and his job title is a cook. His salary is between \$15, 000 - \$20,000 per year. He echoes the advice of other participants. He states:

To always, always, know that no one else defines who you are, but you know that you choose the things in life and you choose how everything affects you. If you want to be unhappy it's because you choose to be unhappy, because you choose the way things affect you. How things affect you matter. How you let them affect you matter. You don't have to let everything affect you negatively. You can learn from it and use it to your advantage.

Chapter Summary

These portraits of BSMs learning experiences point to the fact that these men have endured and overcome many barriers and painful experiences. These profiles are a testimony to valuable lessons learned and speak to the personal perspective transformation these men have undergone. These biographical sketches provide a road map of how these brave men reached this pivotal climax in their lives. Consonant with these findings are Jack Mezirow's (1991) perspective transformation. This theory explains the way adult learning is structured and how frames of reference are changed through viewing past

experiences differently (perspective transformation). Transformative learning theory explores how individuals learn to make meaning of life experiences and events. It speaks to the individual's ability to use critical- reflection to make meaning of their life.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

As described under the data analysis section, relevant themes, patterns, and observations related to the three research questions emerged as the data was rigorously examined, and compared. The constant comparative method was utilized in extracting relevant themes across the entire spectrum of 13 qualitative interviews. These themes were pulled from three research questions; (1) How have BMSM experienced homophobia and racism? (2) How have BMSM coped with issues such as homophobia and racism? And, (3) How have BMSM learned their coping strategies in dealing with homophobia and racism?

This chapter is organized into four sections. The first section presents findings related to the experiences of BMSM at the intersection of homophobia and racism. In this section three themes emanated. They are: (a) BMSM face oppression within their own communities, (b) participant's lived experiences of racism and, (c) BMSM realization of same sex attraction. The second section focuses on how BMSM cope with homophobia and racism. The associated themes from this section were categorized as: (a) BMSM challenging homophobia and racism, (b) BMSM utilize social networks as coping strategy.

The third section, how have BMSM learn their coping strategies, presents findings outlining the learning strategies utilized by these men. Thematic expressions include the following, (a) BMSM learn to accept their sexual

orientation and teach others acceptance, (b) BMSM utilize spirituality as a coping mechanism, and (c) BMSM have learned to define masculinity. The fourth section provides a comprehensive summary of the findings in this study. As the pages of this chapter unfold the unique experiences of BMSM will become real as they share their stories, individual struggles, victories and insights.

Findings relative to participant experiences underscore the heartache many of these men face as they seek to navigate a society ingrained in a tradition of homophobia, racism and demasculinization of Black men. These issues have a significant impact on the coping and learning strategies this population utilizes. In the face of sometimes insurmountable odds, this group's resilience and tenacious resolve helped them maintain a sense of self-acceptance and dignity. Moreover, BMSM in this study are challenging traditional religious and societal discourse labeling them with such derogatory terms as sissy and faggot.

Table 5.1
Themes and Sub-Themes

	Theme	Sub-themes
Research Question One.	1. BMSM face oppression within their own communities	Different moral standards for BMSM Discrimination by church leaders
	2. Participant's lived experiences of racism	BMSM face discrimination from the White gay community
	3. BMSM realization of same sex attraction	BMSM have varied behavioral characteristics
Research Question Two.	4. BMSM challenge homophobia and racism	
	5. BMSM utilize social networks as coping strategy	Relationships based on acceptance and trust, not sexual identity
Research Question Three	6. BMSM learn to accept their sexual orientation and teach others acceptance	
	7. BMSM utilize spirituality as a coping mechanism	
	8. BMSM have learned to define masculinity	

Findings Related to Research Question One: How Have BMSM Experienced Homophobia and Racism?

All of the respondents in this research study said they hold religion/spirituality to be an important part of their lives and all said that they have a personal relationship with God despite the adamant disapproval of homosexuality by some churches. Most respondents claimed active membership in a church in the past and associate themselves with some kind of religion or spirituality. This issue is presented as a salient theme in BMSM experiences related to homophobia and racism. All participants attended a Black church at some point in their lives and described experiences directly related to the Black church's homophobia and negative stance on homosexuality.

Although Black churches differ in their views on homosexuality, most teach that it is a sin, and an abomination in the sight of God. Many believe that gays should be converted to heterosexuality or practice celibacy. Other themes that resonated throughout this study include the following: research question one, they discussed oppression within their own community; they shared their lived experiences of racism; and discussed issues related to first realizing they were attracted to the same sex.

Theme 1: BMSM Face Oppression within Their Own Communities:

Although Black heterosexual men face oppression in the form of racism, Black gay men face what could be called triple jeopardy; oppression from the majority community, oppression from their own Black community, oppression within the white gay community. Jack maintained that homophobia is not just

relegated to the church; he commented that many in the Black community perpetuate the same kind of oppression toward gays and lesbians that is forced on them by Whites. He gives a poignant example of this internalized Black on Black oppression:

Within the Black community we readily discriminate against people for being gay. It's one of our pet peeves; I always said that people who were oppressed become the best oppressors, because they know how to do it. As people, as Blacks, we were put down, regulated as being second class citizens. Because you are Black, knowing how that felt, being a recipient of it, all of a sudden now you have been told okay, you are as good as everybody else. Well the one thing that they were waiting for, the opportunity to do, how do I know I am as good as everybody else, because I can put somebody else down. That's what people on top do, that's how, you know, they are on top, they put other people down.

Jack acknowledged that Black on Black oppression in the form of homophobia is epidemic in the Black community. Most BMSM in this study shared this view, some even posed the question; how could a people who know the horrors of slavery and racism perpetrate this behavior on others---- especially their own ethnic group? Bobby boldly addresses this question:

I just think it is hogwash, you know, on the one hand, you know, we sort of pride ourselves as being loving and accepting, and you know, in it together, and you know, it is kind of our history, we are the victims, like that right. Then we turn right around and victimize people who don't do

what we do right, or don't share the same moral values. I don't think of it as a moral issue, but a lot of people do hold it like it is a moral issue.

George, who has been in a monogamous relationship with the same person for the last 18 years, thinks he has one possible explanation for the Black community's stubborn stance on homosexuality. He details this point:

The problem is that it's easy for people to hate something that they can't put a face to. So a lot of times when our community has this adamant hatred, or this shut down mode of not accepting homosexuality, a lot of it is based on the fact that they don't have a real depiction of what it looks like. But if we could get every brother and sister that is same gender loving to come out of the closet and to be who they are, we would wipe out homophobia in our community over night.

Many participants felt if more heterosexuals got to know BMSM personally they would be less inclined to discriminate. If they knew that gay people were their neighbors, doctors, lawyers, and ministers, some of the stereotypes associated with them may be dispelled.

Many respondents admitted that church leaders routinely espoused anti-homosexual rhetoric as part of their traditional religious services, condemning BMSM as sinners, fornicators and an abomination to God. Nevertheless, most of participants in this study believed homosexuality is not a sin or something that is shameful. They also admitted that their sexual orientation is not something they could change, although some participants said they would change if they could.

Adam challenged the church's position on this topic:

I do not think homosexuality is a sin. I think social sex is a sin, be it homosexual, heterosexual, when a man and a woman have sex for the purpose of having a child, I find that different or more spiritual, but having sex to have sex, I don't find it specific to just homosexuality. Because what I see, just the act of having sex with the same person, of the same gender, is no different than heterosexual sex. I think it is no more sinful than having sex, heterosexual sex. I mean if you believe that, some people think that is a sin.

Adam's comment suggested that heterosexual sex for the purpose of pro-creation is somehow more spiritual than having sex for pleasure. The position of many religious leaders in the Black community is that any sex outside of traditional heterosexual marriage for the purpose of pro-creation is sinful.

Although many gays and lesbians have children and are supporting them, some religious leaders justify their inflexible position on homosexuality by blaming BMSM for the disintegration of the Black family and for not pro-creating. George addresses this myth "We are everyday people who go to work, you know, raise families, have families, connected to families, doing things to build a community, doing things to help people in the community and if people could see that they would get a real picture of who we are."

Participants in this study overwhelmingly complained that they are often judged based on sexual orientation as opposed to their overall contribution to society. Many respondents stated that they contributed significantly to the

enrichment of not only the Black community, but to the world. Entertainment, medicine, law, politics, theology, and academia are just a few of the professions where BMSM are represented. Although BMSM contribute significantly to the betterment of their community they are still held to a different standard when it comes to morality.

Different Moral Standard for BMSM.

Although Adam stated that he does not specifically think homosexuality is a sin, he acknowledged that gay sex is no different than heterosexual sex when it comes to morality. The participants felt that there is a different standard of morality for gays and straights. Fred stated “People were selectively utilizing the issues that were in the Bible about homosexuality and weren’t looking at all the issues in the Bible about sins, and so, I didn’t believe one sin was any greater than another sin.” Fred defiantly asserted that he also believes homosexuality is not a sin; he views scripture from a historical and cultural lens as opposed to a literal interpretation. He spoke with passion and conviction about this issue:

In church when I would hear them talk about homosexuality, I just sat there and just said well, you know, they are being hypocrites, you know, because there were so many other sins, so many people breaking so many of the ten commandments, to me homosexuality is the least of our problems.

Fred alludes to the belief in many Black churches that there are big sins and little sins----homosexuality being the biggest. Fred’s powerful quote captures the overall sentiment of the majority of participants regarding the Black church and

the different moral standards expected of BMSM. Fred further asserted that the Black community has more pressing problems that are important to the survival of our race. Examples of these problems include: Black on Black crime, a judicial system that targets Blacks for incarceration, poverty, drug addiction, disparities in health care, high STD rate, HIV/AIDS and the high dropout rate among our Black youth.

BMSM Face Discrimination by Church Leaders.

Sam, who has attended church most of his life, responded with great emotion when describing blatant discrimination at the hands of religious leaders:

I have experienced in the past where pastors have sat people down because of their sexuality or sin as you have it, whether it be homosexuality or if somebody cheated on their wife, adultery, whatever it may have been, they actually sat them down, where they couldn't participate in communion, if there were ministers they couldn't preach, until the pastor of that particular church felt like their punishment was due. Just like sending someone up to their room without dinner, you know, and I have seen that happen in churches in the past. I mean anywhere from Church of God in Christ to Apostolic churches, a lot of your strict holiness type churches, Pentecostal type churches especially, not to exclude anyone. I am just saying those are some of the ones I have been involved with.

Sam went on to detail the importance of openly discussing homosexuality in our Black churches. He feels it is important to engage in the kind of discourse that

promotes empathy, compassion and understanding about issues related to sexuality. He commented:

I think we may have to get to a point of really getting people, especially the church to start really dealing with homosexuality, some are, but really dealing with and talking about homosexuality because whether a person wants to be about homosexual or wants to even not be a homosexual. I think that we need to get to a point of being loving enough, to even get that out, as opposed to hating someone and pushing them out.

Here Sam is specifically referring to being treated differently based on sexual orientation. He believed that although an open discussion of homosexuality is needed in the church, he argued that the way that the subject is approached has to change.

Theme 2: Participant's Lived Experiences of Racism

The following theme highlights the issue of racism within the Black gay community. In addition to racism from the White mainstream culture, participants share experiences of blatant racism by the White gay community. Participants felt that this community should be especially sensitive to the plight of BMSM given the homophobia both groups face. However, as is evidenced in this sample, experiencing oppression does not necessarily translate into empathy or compassion for others.

One example of this discrimination can be seen when BMSM attempt to gain entrance into White gay social establishments. Participants detail vivid stories of being asked for multiple identifications at the door of some gay clubs

and entertainment venues. Gay bars represent opportunities for BMSM to socialize and network with other like minds. Many learn how to negotiate the challenges faced by the Black gay men in these environments; Moreover, gay bars represent the only societal sanctioned meeting place for Black gay men. Therefore, these venues are an important element to Black gay life.

BMSM Face Discrimination by the White Gay Community.

Fred noted that he faced discrimination when attempting to gain entrance into mostly White gay establishments. Most bars normally ask for some form of identification as a standard procedure; however, in an effort to minimize the number of Blacks that enter their establishment, doorman in many White gay bars ask for multiple identifications from Blacks as a way of limiting the number allowed. Participants complain that they are harassed, insulted and have been asked for up to five pieces of ID at the door of some clubs. Fred remembers:

I remember going to the white gay bars and being asked for, you know, five pieces of ID. I need five picture IDs, you know, to get in, and to me that was clearly racist, you know, because they weren't asking the white patrons for five pieces of ID, you know to get in.

Adam affirmed this practice:

You know, if I only had one ID, they would ask for two, or when I am standing in line to get into a club, you know. They will let the white ones in before they will let a Black in. That is pretty much it, I really haven't had too much, I don't hang around a lot of people who don't like me. I hang around with my own race a lot.

Because of these racist practices many BMSM choose to hang out in strictly Black entertainment venues. However, most of these establishments are owned by Whites. Oftentimes they allow Black clientele into their establishment only after their White patrons have deserted them. This practice often puts BMSM in a quandary, although they do not experience the racism at the doors of these clubs, they still find themselves being economically exploited by these establishments. Most participants in this study agreed that racism within the gay community is persistent throughout American society, just like homophobia.

Other examples of racism by the White gay community include BMSM being harassed and threatened by local authorities for congregating at a local park frequented by gays. Fred described a contentious situation at Piedmont Park in Atlanta, a place where BMSM hangout in large numbers on Sunday afternoons. He noted that Whites in the community (many of them gay) feel threatened and afraid when large numbers of Black men congregate at the park and around their neighborhood. They have often complained to the police about these gatherings. Their goal is to seek legal action to prevent large numbers of Black men from entering and socializing in their community. Fred elaborates on this contentious situation:

I think that White people are fearful of you. A good example of that is there are young Black gays and lesbians hanging out at the park, they are having fun and teasing and everything. Well, you know, there have been several reports and things that come out, and you know, their whole thing was that you know, these people were aggressive, and you know that it

was a problem, you know, that congregating together created a threatening situation.

Fred's comment affirmed that BMSM face the same challenges with racism that the rest of the Black community faces. Given this baffling quagmire, some BMSM are torn between what is more important, sexuality or race. However, participants in this study give both issues equal credence.

Theme 3: BMSM Realization of Same Sex Attraction

Most participants realize same sex attraction early in life. Their initial attraction presented as sort of an initial coming-out experience. This recognition was not a single event or experience but was more of a process over time. These experiences involved physical sexual encounters, coming out to family and conflict related to same sex feelings.

Participants discussed exploring their sexuality early on, only to discover conflict and confusion surrounding the morality of homosexuality, mostly, as a result of religious teachings. However, over time participants became more comfortable and accepted their same sex attraction.

Adam asserted that he has changed his view about homosexuality; he no longer thinks it is a sinful lifestyle "I have been taught that it was, but as I have gotten older, I don't believe it, so it's sort of a catch 22. I would say no, I do not believe, the core of my belief systems I would say no; I do not believe that it is a sin." George claimed that he has had similar experiences and that his initial conflict about his sexuality was a result of religious teachings about homosexuality.

He realized his same sex attraction at the age of six, came out to his mother at fourteen and after engaging in the traditional sports related activities, finally accepted these same sex feelings at the age of fourteen. This acceptance seemed to suggest that after disclosing his sexual preference to his mother he felt more comfortable with his sexuality. He states:

Well for me my experience, I actually came out to my mom when I was fourteen and for me, I felt that that was probably the catalyst for the person I am today. I grew up in a very religious, church going home, where the belief system was that of course homosexuality was wrong. But I discovered at the age of six that I had an attraction for the same gender. I started playing sports at a very young age, like all of the men in my family, got involved with football, basketball, and baseball every summer and with school. It was probably around the age of fourteen when I discovered that it was no longer just an attraction for me, but that I wanted to pursue, at least take it to another level, and get actively involved with one of the young men that was on my basketball team.

Ted's experience was slightly different. He explained his father's response after coming out to his family. His comments reflect dissatisfaction with what he heard:

I can think of an instance, when I came out to my parents, the first thing my dad said, that he still loved me, as if my sexuality questioned his ability to love me. Now I appreciated him saying that, but after I thought about it,

that was like I really felt wow, you know, if my sexual orientation somehow would affect his ability to love me, so that was a big thing for me.

Ted's statement seems to question his father's sincerity. It's as if his father was really saying; I still love you in spite of your homosexuality. Although this may have provided solace for some in this situation, Ted considered his father's response homophobic.

For some BMSM sexual orientation disclosure to one's parents can be a freeing experience especially if it helps them feel better about themselves. On the other hand, if the experience is negative it may contribute to denial, shame, and guilt about one's sexual orientation. Ted shared that he now is much more reluctant to disclose his sexual orientation to others:

I think it has forced me to be cautious about who I am out and open to, that's one of the big things we have in my own household. Even though I came out years ago, we have a don't ask, don't tell, you know, they don't want to hear anything about what's going on about my sexual life. They don't feel that is appropriate behavior so I don't really discuss it, but they know, you know, they will ask me, are you still with your friend?

For many Black gay men, the only seemingly viable solution to the homophobia problem is to keep their sexuality and sexual desires a secret. Many find themselves slipping into the abyss of invisibility, imperceptibility and denial. Many participants recognize same sex feelings early in life and are confused about how to handle these attractions.

BMSM Have Varied Behavioral Characteristics.

General descriptions of BMSM by the heterosexual community oftentimes center on effeminate, passive references. However, just like heterosexuals, BMSM personalities and mannerisms vary considerably. For example, some BMSM are very masculine; they play sports, ride motorcycles, drive racing cars, and are NFL basketball stars. Basketball player John Amaechi, who played center for 5 seasons with Orlando, Cleveland, and Utah, was the first NBA player to publicly come-out about his homosexuality in his book entitled *Man in the Middle* (ESPN, 2007).

Although many admire his courage and honesty, Amaechi revealed that he also received contempt and admonition from some Blacks in the sports industry. In a profession dominated by male machismo and physical prowess some found it unfathomable that this 6-ft-10 masculine acting basketball star could possibly be gay:

There's something incredibly powerful about people who are genuine or authentic—not just in terms of their sexuality, but in every regard. There's something almost transcendent about it, I spent 15 years of my life putting a ball in a hole, and what I do now as a psychologist, what I do now in terms of my activism for human rights in general, that's something that's legacy worthy.

BMSM just as heterosexuals have varied characteristics, personalities and skills, some are very masculine, others more effeminate; nevertheless, many in the Black community often attribute characteristics like muscular physique, baggy

clothes, and thug like behavior as illustrations of masculine prowess. One participant described how some people are shocked when they learn he is gay. He claims that he does not fit the flamboyant stereotype attributed to many gays:

Well, initially they don't seem to have an issue with it, and I don't know if it is because I don't fit the stereotype, or whatever, I don't know. A couple of people have told me that, well I didn't know you were gay, I mean I didn't suspect you were, you know. I am used to seeing something else on TV and all this other stuff and so you know, initially when I tell them you know, I, my mind is going, okay here it comes, but it is just the opposite. They start talking with me and stuff, and we just strike up a conversation and it is friendly, and you know it's none of that separation of spirit we are just talking, like two people sharing.

Participants express a sense of pride at not fitting the traditional effeminate stereotypes attributed to Black homosexual men. BMSM do not always fit the Black construction of gay based on Black masculinity constructs. Jack asserts:

I guess, it's empowering, to think that you can dispel myths, to know that you are not this stereotypical, purse carrying lip gloss wearing, whatever they think a gay man is. Of course all those images come from the media, you know when they show one, the media, he's going to be swishing and swishing, and you know, snapping his fingers, and you know, dressed in a leotard. So they get this image that that is what he is, but then when they realize that you are not all that, what they have been seeing, it's, one it is

empowering to me and it's educational to them, and our friendship is stronger than anything. What I always say is, how I came to understand that I was a gay man was the fact that I liked men, as opposed to women, or as opposed to men who were acting like women, or being women.

There was nothing about the feminine traits that attracted me sexually; it was the masculine trait, so masculinity is something that attracted, that is attractive to gay men.

In addition to being perceived as effeminate, many participants say they are also oftentimes perceived as hypersexual promiscuous individuals. Fred discussed societal expectations around masculinity. He expressed the following thought:

To me being a Black man in this country, to me a lot of people are fearful of you, they have low expectations about who you are, your conduct, they don't think you are supposed to be intelligent, you are supposed to be overly emotional. It's very difficult being a Black man, people's attitudes about you, you are looked at as being these hypersexual men, all the time, you know sex is supposed to be, you know, the foremost thing on your mind and you are not, you know, you are not supposed to be nurturing or caring, you know, the same from like the old Jim Crow era, beliefs still hold true, you know, they think that we are big and lazy, and you know, so we have to fight against that on a day to day basis, people have a low expectation of us.

Jack described his personal struggles with this issue:

So I am very okay with the fact that you know, I am a man and I am attracted to other men. What I think bothers me sometime is that, I feel like, man, I sure would like to have sex all the time, every day all the time. But then as I talk to these straight men or other men, that is a common element of being a male, that we are always ready and for some reason I took that from myself, and told myself that wasn't going to be me and yet it is, so I am having to deal with that.

In terms of social context, Black masculinity is an especially ambiguous and misunderstood subject in the Black community. Many have pointed to slavery, with its creation of Black masculinity expressed in such features as; physical labor, breeding and servitude. The internalization of these roles is often slated as the reason for the focus on these stereotypical attributes of masculinity among Black men today. This depiction of BMSM often overshadows other qualities and assets they possess.

Findings Related to Research Question Two: How do BMSM Cope with Issues
Such as Homophobia and Racism?

In the analysis of the second research question, two distinct themes emerged from the data. These themes communicated a commonality among the research participants that relate to how they cope with homophobia and racism. These similarities tell stories of how BMSM challenged the forces of oppression and the stigma of homosexuality. Participants explained that they utilize their relationship with God to help them deal with this pain and stress. Similarly,

participants discussed how they utilize their close friends as a source of support and empowerment in dealing with their daily struggles. This support system is comprised of individuals who are both gay and straight, White and Black.

Theme 4: BMSM Challenge Homophobia and Racism

Participants described different ways they cope with the daily challenges of living in a homophobic and racist society. For example, Fred stated that he copes by challenging the forces of homophobia and racism. He says he is very vocal about the subject: “I tend to be very vocal, you know, I will express my displeasure, you know, and whether that’s sending a letter or calling the management, or you know, I follow-up on those things, I don’t let them just go.”

Adam on the other hand becomes defensive in coping with the stress of oppression. He states:

Well like I said, I get very defensive; if it is brought up I defend my sexuality and the sexuality of others if they are gay. Like I said, if the word faggot is used, I approach the person and I ask them, you know, if they would not use that around me. I am very sensitive about it and people who don’t accept me, you know, I just, I don’t judge them, but I look at them as being ignorant, you know. So I guess how I deal with homophobia and people who discriminate against homosexuals I tend to just, block them out.

As a participant in this study, this author has used his research on the subject of homophobia and racism to advocate for social justice and social action for BMSM. Lawrence states:

I have wanted to do something for a long time to address the pain and suffering I have been through because of my sexual orientation. Instead of walking around as an angry Black man I have decided to allow my research and work in the field to challenge these evils and to promote compassion and understanding toward gays and lesbians.

Adam, Fred and Lawrence's comments captured the overall sentiments expressed by the majority of the participants regarding how they cope with homophobia and racism. While others may choose to deal with these stressors by becoming hostile or violent, these men choose a more diplomatic approach in coping with these issues. The most important element of their coping strategy is that these men have decided to fight instead of just accepting what is dealt to them. For example Lawrence attended several workshops facilitated by the National Black Justice Coalition. The focus of this workshop was to learn ways to combat homophobic media messages. These coping strategies provide a means of survival; a way to deal with the day-to-day oppression, discrimination, and homophobia they face.

Although participants in this study chose to deal with oppression utilizing a positive approach, they must often deal with an intimidating and hostile Black community when it comes to homosexuality. Many Black gay men have been physically beaten and verbally abused because they were suspected of being gay. Even under these enormous stresses, the participants in this study continue to strive for acceptance and respect from their community.

Participants conceptualized their identity as more inclusive than just sex and race. Qualities such as spirituality and the contribution they make to society stand out as integral parts of their identity. Most participants in this study acknowledged that feelings of same sex attraction started early in life; however, this recognition was often shrouded in conflict and confusion. In an effort to gain a better perspective on BMSM and personal identity, participants were asked which was more important their racial identity or their sexual orientation. The majority of participants (75%) exclaimed that both were equal and that one could not be separated from the other. They view their sexual orientation and race as part of what makes them whole. Bobby believes that his acceptance as a human being and the contribution that he makes to society is what's most important. To him, sexual orientation and race are just one part of who he is. He states:

Neither is more important, what is most important to me is acceptance as a human being, and recognition of the contributions that I actually am capable of making, right. I don't, think that neither of the two, race or orientation, is ever going to be something that is separate from me. It is never going to be something that I am going to be divorced from. It is who I am, and you know, in that regard they are equally important.

Bobby's most important concern is in being recognized for his overall contribution to society. Oftentimes BMSM are judged based on sexual orientation instead of the content of their character and their contribution to society. George believed that both his sexual orientation and race are a gift from God; therefore, they should be embraced equally. He emphasized the following:

Now where I am at forty-two, I think they are equally important. So I wouldn't say race would be more important than my sexuality, and I wouldn't say my sexuality to be more important than my race. I'm very clear now that both of those things are a gift from God, and they are both to be embraced equally, and so where I am spiritually, that I know that they are equally important, and I would not want to put one on a higher scale than the other.

Similarly, Fred described race and sexual identity as equal entities:

I put them on equal levels because both of them are parts of what defines me as a person. But I think more importantly, I think growing up in an upper-middle class family had a lot more to do with my beliefs and my actions as opposed to just my race or my sexuality.

Fred believes that his identity is more related to his being raised in an upper middle class family as opposed to his sexuality or race defining him as a person. George and Fred are clear that separating or minimizing any part of their identity is unacceptable. However, some BMSM feel it is necessary to deny or hide their sexual orientation because of family, job or other social concerns.

This is directly related to the homophobia, oppression and conflict that many BMSM experience. For example, the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS in the Black community is problematic and often is the reason that it is so difficult for Black men to "come out" about their homosexuality. This process often means giving up family, career, livelihood, and friendships, relegating the individual to a life of alienation, isolation and rejection.

Theme 5: BMSM Utilize Social Networks as a Coping Strategy.

Participants discussed having networks of friends that help them cope with a sometimes antagonistic environment. The men in this study identified qualities important to them when choosing people to be part of their network. These qualities include individuals they can trust, that help them maintain balanced, that are honest, and those that are totally accepting of their sexual orientation. Acceptance was an integral ingredient in the relationships that these men developed within their networks.

Relationships Based on Acceptance, Trust not Sexual Identity.

Participants described their social networks as grounded in trusting relationships, not based strictly on sexual orientation. The majority of participants said the most important factor is having friends that they can depend on and trust. They asserted that, although they value their gay friends, their relationships are not based solely on sexual orientation or race. Jack posited the following:

My close friends are level, they have balance, and they keep me grounded. They let me know when I have not been accessible; they let me know when I am too accessible, you know, if I am on track or off track, most friends provide that for me. I have gay friends and straight friends and both sides, I have close friends that come into both categories. I appreciate my straight friends a little more, not more, but I appreciate them because that friendship is not based on sex, not necessarily sex with that person, it is not based on who I go to bed with. We don't even talk

about it, it is not even in there, and my friends that I have who are gay, even though they are equally good friends, wonderful friends, but it is sort of like the commonality. The reason I even know you is because we both enjoy sleeping with men or maybe have even slept with each other.

Mike agreed that in selecting his support network, sexual orientation is not the deciding factor. He stated that he values honesty in his friends regardless of their sexual preference. He remarked:

I have some good, meaningful relationships with some people and some people I don't, just like anything else in life; I think you know the criteria in which you establish friendship is not based on someone's sexuality. It's about truth and honesty, you know, and I would rather have a relationship with someone friendly who is an honest person and supportive, if he is heterosexual or if he's gay and dishonest and don't really give a damn about who I am, or my principals, or will reach out to do anything for me. I really don't give a damn what he does, that's his business, you know, I really don't care about that anymore, but what you do in bed sexually, what does that do for me?

Ted echoed the general feeling of most participants; that is, they just want to be around people who accept them totally for who they are:

These are usually people who are, people who I think accept me for who I am, and make me feel comfortable. This is also to say these are people who I feel comfortable around. Now these may be people I have not shared my whole life story with, but the part of, whatever connection we

have, I feel comfortable with them. Whatever connection we have made, some of my friends, we, they may know about my sexuality, but we don't talk about my partner, or, unless we are going over there and doing things with them. They may ask how is your friend doing, but it's not like, how is your partner doing, you know, that sort of thing, so, but most of the people that I consider my friends are people who really accept me for who I am and those are usually the people I am honest and open to.

Ted spoke passionately about the importance of surrounding himself with people that accept him as he is. Ted's story parallels the sentiments of all the participants in this study; that is, sexuality disclosure was not as important as feeling comfortable around those in one's network.

Although this researcher (Lawrence) believes it is important to be surrounded with positive and affirming people that accept me for who I am, most of my close friends are African Americans "I want to say that this may be circumstantial, however, the truth is that I am more comfortable being around other affirming African Americans." This study underscored the quality and importance of these relationships. Participants used words like honesty, trust, dependence, forthrightness, and loving to describe characteristics they admire in their friends.

Research Question Three: How Have BMSM Learned Their Coping Strategies in Dealing with Homophobia and Racism?

In an effort to understand how BMSM learn their coping strategies, several testimonies present a clear picture of valuable lessons learned. The stories

provide insight into how these men learned to cope with the various struggles related to homophobia and racism. The overarching theme in research question three highlights a transformative process for these men of coming to believe in themselves and acceptance of their sexual orientation despite persistent messages to the contrary from the Black community.

The participants exhibited a keen ability to understand how homophobia and racism impacts their daily lives; they have learned innovative and creative ways of circumventing some of its toxic effects. The following activities have helped BMSM learn to cope with homophobia and racism: (1) educating themselves and others, (2) attending community workshops and support groups, (3) consulting with those in their social networks for support, (4) attending affirming churches or spiritual venues, and (5) reading materials that help them better understand sexuality. These are just some of the activities that help participants learned to become comfortable with their sexual orientation.

Throughout most of the interviews, participants shared that they also learned to cope with homophobia and racism through prayer, meditation, and dependence on a power greater than themselves to help them achieve self-acceptance. Participants took advantage of contemporary literature and books that provide new spiritual insights which affirms their worthiness and value. Moreover, they have come to believe that God loves and accepts them just as they are---Black gay men. Lou and Sam seemed to have captured this truism most succinctly. They poignantly assert:

I always say that loving ones self and once you really understand what that means, when I say loving ones self, what I am really saying is seeing the presence of God in self. Meaning that you see the creative expression of God in ones self, and once you come to that understanding then you have to naturally in some way, it has to move you to see the God expression or the created being in someone else. But a lot of times we don't see God in ourselves. We come into this world and this is what I tell people, in faith beliefs, that we come into this world disconnected from the onset, because we come into this world where we teach a theology of separation.

Sam affirms this reality for his life:

I feel that it is a must to have God as our foundation and I am not saying that I have been doing everything totally right or wrong. I do know having God as my foundation gives me the ability to face each day saying it is a great day already, and to pursue greater things in life, deal with my sexuality, racism, and all those things. To have God as my foundation, as my source, gives me the ability to eat, to drink; to do all that I do. I live more and I have my feelings through him. I say him, others say her.

Through Faith and trust in God as their foundation, participants have learned the value in educating others about the pitfalls and dangers of homophobia and racism. This is poignantly reflected in the participant profiles as they share valuable lessons so that others may learn from their mistakes and gain from their

wisdom. Finally, participants have learned to celebrate their lives as meaningful and define masculinity on their own terms.

Theme 6: BMSM Learn to Accept Their Sexual Orientation and Teach Others Acceptance.

Participants described how they learned to utilize spiritual principles such as acceptance to educate others about homophobia and racism. Most importantly, they have learned their coping skills by utilizing community resources to educate themselves on issues related to the research topic, and to share this with others. Jack described what he calls teachable moments:

I think we have some very teachable moments, and I think a lot of times people will engage in racist acts and not even be aware of it. I think that it has been so engrained that this is the status quo as to how things happen, that they will do things or say things, and not even realize that it was offensive or inappropriate. At that point, you know you take it upon yourself to say this is a very teachable moment. This is not a spot where I can get revenge and fix you and hurt you, but this is a spot where I can teach you a better way of being in this environment, a better way of being in our society today.

Fred validated Jack's position; he said that he has learned how important it is to always be prepared to deal with these issues by educating people:

It would be a beautiful world if it wasn't there. But it is there and, you know, expect it. But also be able, you know, not only when you expect it to be there, always put yourself in a position where you are able to teach,

should that situation arise. I think nothing is worse than for a situation to arise and you are not equipped to deal with it. Where you find yourself just having to resort to some form of violence, because you can't deal with what was presented. So if we are aware that someone is going to approach you, someone is going to say something, somebody is going to do something, that is inappropriate, that is discriminatory, what do you have? What have you armed yourself with? How can you teach this person?

Jack has learned that there are personal benefits in coping with these issues such as homophobia and racism in a positive manner, he posits that in the process of teaching others, he also learns about himself.

Participants emphasize the need to speak out and speak up when people around them are engaging in derogatory or disrespectful behavior toward them or others because of their sexuality. When these kinds of challenges are made, it forces the perpetrators to respond to the allegations. Whether its homophobic remarks, discriminatory practices at work, or being disrespectful, this at least gets people to stand up and be held accountable for their actions. For example, Fred admits that in order to teach acceptance, he has had to first learn to accept and appreciate his own life and sexuality. Through reading books such as the Bible from a historical perspective and reflecting on his own life experiences, he has learned to view his sexuality as God given:

I always was well versed in my religious education, and I realized that a lot of the issues that come about were people's objections biblically about

homosexuality. This stems from instances in the Bible that dealt with another time and place. People were selectively utilizing the issues that were in the Bible about homosexuality and weren't looking at all the issues in the Bible about sins, and so, I didn't believe one sin was any greater than another sin. I just couldn't believe that you know, God made us this way and that it was just all in sin, I just don't believe that.

While all participants agreed that homophobia and racism are persistent in our community, they unanimously agreed that educating others is an essential ingredient in the learning process. They further agreed that negative responses such as violence and cruelty are not viable options. What these men have learned to do is view these offenses as baseless and ignorant.

There are many groups, community organizations, book clubs, gay friendly churches and other resources available through nonformal channels of learning available to BMSM. This author has taken advantage of some of these resources in his quest for understanding and acceptance of his own sexual orientation:

One of the most liberating experiences for me in terms of sexuality came in the form of books that gave me a new perspective on spirituality and sexuality. One such book is Helminiak's (1995) seminal work, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*. This book literally transformed my life in a myriad of ways. First, I learned that much of the dogma espoused by church leaders about homosexuality was open for re-interpretation. Helminiak encourages a view of the bible from its historical

context; in other words, what these messages meant to people over two thousand years ago, as opposed to the traditional literal perspective preached by many ministers. During that time, culture, meanings, positionalities, and perspectives were totally different. The literal interpretation stems from a strong fundamentalist southern origin and adherence to Biblical stories like Sodom and Gomorra to support bigotry. A re-interpretation of this story provides a more practical assessment of its meaning. Firstly, this is a story, not an actual event. During this time period cultural practice utilized stories and parables as a teaching method. According to the old testaments the sin of Sodom was never understood as homosexuality, but rather inhospitality to strangers, idolatry, ungodliness and sexual violence. The prophet Ezekiel makes clear the true sin of Sodom: 'this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, surfeit of food and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy' (Ezekiel, 16:48-49). The sin of Sodom was a bitter hatred of strangers and making slaves of guest who were benefactors. Recall that the strangers were angels on a mission from God. The sin was to treat them abusively. Even Jesus understood the sin of Sodom as inhospitality, yet many ministers in the Black Church continue to use this story to stigmatize and vilify homosexuality.

The above reinterpretation of the Sodom and Gomorrah story is more reflective of what really happens when strangers looking for help and support are turned away and isolated because they are different. Historically, Blacks know this

scenario all to well; similar treatment was thrust upon them when they moved into all white neighborhoods expecting welcome, but instead received contempt, violence and bitter hatred. This story is also more reflective of what is happening to many gays when they come to the churches looking for help and guidance, but turned away or worse, isolated and condemned.

In shaping their attitudes about homophobia and racism, many participants drew from their core belief that regardless of what others say or do, they know in their hearts that they have no real control over their sexual orientation. Many participants acknowledge they are good, law abiding citizens who contribute significantly to enriching the Black community. Participants vividly described how they learned to accept and become comfortable with their sexuality over time. They talk about embracing a set of beliefs that allow their sexuality and their spirituality to co-exist peacefully.

Theme 7: BMSM Utilize Their Spirituality As a Coping Mechanism.

Although participants described homophobia perpetuated by the church as the biggest culprit, they nevertheless spoke passionately about having a relationship with a higher power in helping them cope. Sam explains:

I trust in God, my mother, my father, put me down then God lifts me up and a lot of times there is a lot of disagreements when it comes to the bible and God, and what he said. I don't care, you know, God is real and I think all of us have a tendency of looking at God in one light or another, and then we see the need for him. So when things get to a point where others don't treat me, or even if the government or society have different

laws with prejudice and police brutality, and all this kind of stuff, I have to say I resort in trusting the Lord God to the best of my ability. That is how I cope, you know, where else can I go, what else can I do?

Sam's comments reinforced the importance of trusting in God because he feels that there is no other alternative. Adam is equally committed to reliance on a higher power as a source of strength; he utilizes prayer as a coping mechanism and strongly asserts:

I pray, I pray, I ask for forgiveness, if I am doing anything that is not right in God's eyes, because you know what, I don't know how God sees homosexuality. God, my God, I believe, and I believe this deeply, he looks at my heart not at my actions.

Sam's remarks reflect a very strong belief in God and in the power of forgiveness. He admits his uncertainty in how God views homosexuality, but is secure in his truth; that is, God looks beyond his sexual orientation into his heart; Sam knows he is a good person.

George relates his acceptance of his sexuality to an old axiom; a quoted by Shakespeare, "To thine own self be true". He says he has learned the importance of loving and celebrating himself. He explains:

I'm a firm believer at this point, that how people react is really up to them at this point. I think once one learns to love ones self, and you know like Shakespeare says, to thine own self be true. Once one has gotten the knowledge to do that, and you are able to fully embrace who you are, the reaction of others really at that point is really not about you. It's about

them, and so where I am today as far as you know, walking into spaces surrounding my sexual orientation, like I said, I celebrate it every day. I celebrate who I am. I'm not ashamed of it. I think part of the celebration is dispelling myths that have been created.

Participants state that much of their learning comes from involvement in community organizations like, AIDS Atlanta, AIDS Survival Project, The Deeper Love Project, and Second Sunday in Atlanta. Although many of these organizations offer services for HIV/AIDS, some of their services also involve relationship support and provide a venue to discuss issues related to homophobia and racism. Participants described how some of their learning about, racism and homophobia came from groups like Second Sunday; Bobby explains:

Second Sunday is an Atlanta group of African-American gay men who meet monthly to discuss issues ranging from religion to health. It was here that I learned that many other gay men had some of the same issues that I had, I no longer felt alone, but felt empowered after many of the discussions. The most important thing that I carried away from these sessions was a reaffirmation of my sexuality.

The author's moving proclamation captured the overall sentiments expressed by the majority of the participants. That is, "self-acceptance and self-love is the key to many of our problems, because you can't give away something that you don't have." Most participants alluded to a higher power, a network of friends, and community resources as the part of the learning process that helped them

develop a belief system that supports and celebrates their sexuality and humanity.

Theme 8: BMSM Have Learned to Define Masculinity.

The Black straight community oftentimes reflected America's traditional disdain for their Black gay brothers by the process of emasculation. They exaggerated the John Wayne fallacy that real men don't show emotions, they act a certain way, and have many female conquests. General definitions of masculinity varied among participants; however, responses reflected a more European view on masculinity constituting personal responsibility, duty, community contribution, loving God and loving others. Jack's comment was similar to most participant responses: "A real man is pursuing your own passions and being true to yourself, and that is what a real man is about."

Jack noted that through the process of education he came to appreciate his own masculinity by learning to confront his fear of transgenders. At one time he looked at drag queens as men wanting to be and act like women; he viewed them with disdain and disgust. However, he describes a change in perspective in his explosive testimony. He states that he learned not to judge others sexual expressions based on his own perspective on masculinity. Through taking classes on cultural diversity, and actually getting to personally know transgenders, his whole attitude has changed. He explains this transformation:

Just getting to know more about them, that they were just people, and a big part of that was, I furthered my own education. Its hard to really describe how those two impacted one another, but it seemed like the

further I went with my education the more I began to understand about diversity and that people are different; as a matter of fact, about ninety-nine percent of the people in the world are different than me, on some level or another. But we are different, and so just understanding that within myself made me become a lot more tolerant of differences in other individuals. There is something about being a Black male coming up in the Black community, in the Black church, where we had this rule that everybody needed to be the same, and that you know, we are all supposed to be Christian. If you didn't find Jesus you can't go to Heaven, you know, we just really had these messages that don't tolerate differences, and until I got away from that, not that I got away from my faith, but until I began to incorporate education into my belief and into my faith, then I began to understand that we are not going to all be the same. We are not one big clump of people in this earth who all think and do, and believe the same, people are different, so we differ by age, gender, sexual preference, expression of sexuality, expression of gender, sex, we differ by religion, and we differ by color. I mean we are just very different, and so I actually began to appreciate people for being different, as opposed to criticize people for being different than me.

Jack's testimony validates what many of the participants have learned in this study; that is, people are less homophobic and racist when they get to intimately know and have a positive experience with someone who is Black, gay, lesbian or transgender.

Participants in this research study overwhelmingly agreed that their most important lessons learned in coping with issues related to masculinity, is that masculinity and manhood is much more than just sexual relationships. Although many participants in this study complained that they are often stereotyped as hypersexual and promiscuous, they see a direct link between their manhood and higher values. These values include acceptance of others differences, personal responsibility, valued friendships, loving one's self, and spirituality as valid coping mechanisms. George unapologetically announced what he has learned about being a real man:

I think being a real man can be defined in many ways now. I mean, I can't always say that I have felt this way. But I think being a real man can be defined in many ways now, being responsible, being loving, being caring, being considerate, those things define a real man, you know.

Jack has learned to question our societal norms and expectations of masculinity, although he's not clear on a specific definition of masculinity. He declares:

We mimic what the heterosexual communities display as masculinity. So if they say masculine men walk around with their pants sagging off and one leg rolled up, then even the gay men, you know, they want to demonstrate, display masculinity, they will do the same thing. They are going to mimic their heterosexual counterpart. Now that's a surface level masculinity, yeah, it's such a subjective term as you know; we look at them, and say real masculinity, what is that? I don't know exactly, is that

because you pay your bills, is that because you don't disrespect women; take care of your kids. I mean there are so many different ways of people describing what masculinity is, but I do know that it's considered a desirable trait.

Participants eloquently described how they have learned to define and articulate their own construct of masculinity based on their reality. Most participants in this study agreed that they are much more than who they sleep with. This is particularly evident in how they identify themselves; background information revealed that more than half of the participants identify themselves as same gender loving as opposed to identifying with the terms gay, homosexual, or BMSM. This is important because it denotes that they have learned to associate them-selves with the spiritual principal of love as opposed to simply having sex with other men.

BMSM have not universally determined a single mutually agreed upon point of identity around their sexuality. However, this study revealed that most prefer to be associated with an identity that reflects more than just sex, stigma and flamboyancy.

How these men learned their coping strategies are the result of many years of struggle with their identity; many years of being told that they are not real men, and many years of oppression by a community that is sometimes malevolent in their treatment of their Black gay brothers and sisters. However, this research magnifies the remarkable resiliency and conviction these men possess in coping with homophobia, racism and issues related to masculinity.

As a matter of fact, these men possess qualities and attitudes that are badly needed in up-lifting the Black community.

Chapter Summary

This research study addressed some of the social and psychological problems that BMSM face during a time when they are fighting everyday for their continued survival as Black gay men. In answering research question one, there were three salient themes that played a major role in their life experiences. These themes included BMSM face oppression within their own community, BMSM lived experiences of racism, and BMSM recognition and realization of same sex attraction.

Under the first theme men in this study discussed sub-themes related to homophobia, racism and the different moral standards they are held to by the Black community. This homophobia was especially prevalent among church leaders in the form of discrimination. The oppression these men face in their own community was the most painful of all their experiences.

A second theme under research question one reflected participants lived experiences with racism. These sub-themes unveiled passionate discussions on the discrimination they face at the hands of the White gay community.

The third theme reflected BMSM recognition and realization of same sex attraction. These men also felt that they did not fit the traditional stereotypical profiles that have oftentimes been attributed to them by the media and larger community; they explained that they have different and varied behavioral characteristics.

The second research question uncovered how BMSM cope with homophobia and racism. Themes arose that affirmed a commonality among this group in challenging homophobia and racism. A second theme under research question two supported the development of social networks that help these men cope with the stresses related to these issues. These men boldly and confidently asserted in this sub-theme that their relationships were based on values such as trust and acceptance.

The third research question addressed how BMSM learned their coping strategies in dealing with homophobia and racism. Three themes emerged from this section that captured their likeness. These themes were; BMSM have learned to take advantage of opportunities to learn and teach acceptance; their shared experiences of depending on a higher power too help them navigate an oppressive and oftentimes hostile society and BMSM learn to define masculinity on their own terms. BMSM in this study utilized community learning resources such as discussion groups and forums in dealing with issues related to sexuality, race, and masculinity; they meditated, prayed and attended churches which affirmed their sexuality. They also educated themselves through reading spiritual books which provided insight about sexuality from a more affirming perspective.

Most importantly, despite continued homophobic rhetoric espoused by the Black church and community, BMSM learned to view themselves from a more holistic perspective through self-reflection and perspective change. That is, they learned to embrace all aspects of their humanity; including their sexuality.

In shaping their attitudes about homophobia and racism, many participants drew from their core belief that regardless of what others say, they know in their hearts that they cannot change their sexual orientation. Many participants declare that they contribute significantly to uplifting the Black community. Martin Luther King once remarked that “people should be judged on the content of their character and not their skin color”; BMSM assert that they want to be recognized for their contribution to the world and not condemned because of their sexual orientation.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to understand how Black men who have sex with men (BMSM) learn to cope with homophobia and racism. The research questions that guided this study are:

1. How have BMSM experienced homophobia and racism?
2. How have BMSM coped with issues related to homophobia and racism?
3. How have BMSM learned their coping strategies in dealing with homophobia and racism?

This study explores the learning and coping experiences of BMSM as they negotiate racist and heterosexist environments. To that end, this is a study about adult learning and is marginally situated in critical race theory, literature on coping and nonformal learning. Additionally, this study is embedded in a qualitative research methodology that provides a platform which gives voice to BMSM and their experiences with homophobia and racism from both inside and outside of their community.

Central to qualitative research is the use of narratives and stories which provide insight and in-depth examination of BMSM lives, which public health and psychology literature indicate are fraught with questions and conflict around sexual identity and race. This author has observed that research examining the learning experiences of BMSM at the intersection of homophobia and race is

almost non-existent in the adult education literature. Therefore, this study will add an original contribution to the adult education literature base and provide a platform so that the struggles, milestones and contributions of BMSM can be brought to the frontlines. In keeping with the goals and ambitions of our field, adult education is in a unique position to lend support and guidance to BMSM in their fight for equality, and social justice.

This research has shown that this population possesses a wealth of knowledge, abilities and skills which could function as a model for other marginalized groups in dealing with oppression. In a recent personal communication, noted adult educator Robert Hill gave a robust description of the social responsibilities ascribed to adult education:

The discipline focuses on the education and learning of adults embedded in institutions, communities, and social movements. The lifelong learning enterprise makes a vital contribution to social, economic, political, and cultural life both in the United States and across the globe. Although there are many estimates of the size of this enterprise, it clearly includes virtually all adults in society. For example, education and learning efforts take place in institutional settings (such as higher education and community colleges, workplaces, religious institutions, governmental agencies, professional associations, and corporations and trade unions) as well as in social movements and community-based organizations. Venues include formal, nonformal, and coincidental settings. Adult education in colleges and universities is to prepare graduates to provide

leadership for these efforts in instructional, administrative, and policy roles. R. Hill (personal communication, May 10, 2008).

This description is important because it reflects the spirit from which this research study is launched; that is, adult education as a vessel for social change, and the provision of space for BMSM. Of equal credence is a proclamation on education espoused by the Commission on Human Rights, which states:

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

(Universal Declaration of Human Rights - Art 26).

Because of its strategic position in academia and world wide influence, adult education has the potential to be an integral part of providing spaces and support for learning among gay and lesbian persons. To that end, our profession could propel future generations of oppressed persons such as BMSM toward the fulfilment of their dreams and provide hope for a brighter tomorrow.

There is no shame in dreaming and having that dream fail, the shame is in having no dreams. Contradiction and uncertainty often occur when Black men seek to achieve ideals such as The American Dream. Because of racism and homophobia, for many in the Black community this dream seems out of reach (Whitehead 1997; Bush 1999; Boyd 1996; Harris 1992). According to this study, those Black men who happen to have homosexual tendencies have a tougher

time navigating this maze. Because of the paucity of literature relating to BMSM in the field of adult education, this study's rich data will add significantly to the adult education literature base. With the rise of HIV/AIDS in the Black community, rampant homophobia, and pervasive racism from the White gay and straight community, BMSM are under perpetual siege (Archie- Booker, 1996)

The Structure of Chapter Five

This chapter expands our understanding of the previous chapters by discussing and answering questions such as: What contribution does this study make to adult education? What relevance does the findings in this research bear on the existing literature? What do these results mean? There are four major sections in this chapter: (1) discussion of conclusions, (2) implications for research practice, (3), recommendation for further research, and (4) concluding comments.

Discussion of Conclusions

Three general conclusions were derived based on participant responses and related literature: (1) Many of the coping strategies utilized by BMSM are achieved through nonformal channels of learning, (2) There is a positive connection between BMSM spirituality and their sexual orientation, (3) BMSM have learned to incorporate an emancipatory learning perspective regarding their sexual orientation and outlook on life. These conclusions were integrated within the existing literature at the intersection of homophobia, race and adult education.

Conclusion One

BMSM Learn Their Coping Strategies Mostly Through Nonformal Channels.

According to Lazarus and Launier (as cited in Reeves, 1998), the process of coping is integral to understanding stress reactions; they suggest that, many of these coping strategies are learned through nonformal channels. Although the literature does not explicitly acknowledge a direct relationship between learning and coping; Reeves (1998) suggest that there is a connection between learning and coping.

For example, learning is experienced based and spontaneously occurs within the individual's environment (Coombs, 1985). Findings from this study indicate that BMSM utilize learning in a myriad of ways to cope with homophobia and racism. Examples include (1) participation in community forums, (2) developing and participating in workshops, (3) reading literature related to sexuality, (4) attending positive spiritual venues, (5) frequenting affirming entertainment places, and developing a rich network of friends and acquaintances that support and accept them for who they are.

This is fundamental to this research since BMSM are part of an intricate and unique social and cultural network. This is also important for the BMSM community because adult education is a major source of adult learning (Coombs, 1985). Hill (2003) remarks that learning is important to gay life and has proliferated in response to societal oppression. He found that services supporting the needs of gays are focal points for adult democratic learning. He posits:

Non-profit gay and lesbian centers were shown to function as resource centers for learning and recreation, lending libraries and historical archives, sites of oral history and networking, telephone hotlines, speaker's bureau and other services. Gay and lesbian community centers sponsor lectures, workshops, classes, conferences, political meetings for mobilization and activist strategizing, "rap" and talk sessions, and coffee houses. Topics cover a wide range of issues including legal advice, health and wellness education, women's advocacy; drug and alcohol abuse education, youth and leader programs, personal development, bereavement support, various arts, literature and poetry programs, safer sex education, and personal defense classes. (p. 107)

Although I have attended many of the workshops and community forums available to BMSM in the Atlanta, California and Philadelphia areas, I have observed that the Black gay community lacks many of the resources available to White Men who Have sex With Men (WMSM).

For example, because of racism much of the HIV/AIDS funding of the early and mid 80s focused on the needs of WMSM. Thereby, ignoring BMSM needs, until community grassroots organizations such as the Unity Fellowship Movement began to demand a fair piece of the HIV/AIDS funding pie. Many believe this racism is part of the reason the Black community is disproportionately impacted by AIDS today (Archie-Booker, 1997). In a recent study, Archie-Booker (1997) examined the politics of planning culturally relevant AIDS education for African Americans. She found that HIV/AIDS education

programs were not culturally relevant for African Americans. One of the relevant themes in her research centered around the fact that major AIDS Community Services (ACS) are dominated and controlled by White gay males. She states that:

During interviews, many of the staff members and program participants said that the agency is seen as a “White gay” organization. Others indicated that the agency strives to maintain this White gay image to maintain and attract funding for the organization. This image has a clear historical explanation in that when the organization was created in 1982, most persons with AIDS were White gay males. Thus, many of the people involved in the early development and funding of ACS were White gay males, and this tradition has lasted since that time (¶ 16).

Participants in this research study validate the inherent racism BMSM cope with within the larger gay community.

Other adult education scholars agree on the importance of learning to adult education in dealing with oppressed populations. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) also examine adult education in settings. They describe learning opportunities outside the formal education settings that enhance and compliment the needs of underserved adults. Taylor (2006) describes learning as a collaborative process among students where the teacher acts more like a guide or a coach; he further posits that “Knowledge is seen as always incomplete, evolving, contextually shaped and influenced. Communities of practice like these

learning centers emerge out of necessity to accomplish task and promote avenues within, across and outside organizations” (p. 303).

Because of its flexibility and adaptability structure, educational structures are more appropriate in dealing with inequalities, injustices, discrimination, and oppression of marginal populations (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). This flexibility makes learning especially appealing to this research since many BMSM learn to cope with their struggles through nonformal channels. For example, BMSM in this study utilizes community organizations such as AIDS Atlanta for services ranging from HIV/AIDS to advocating against homophobia and racism.

This community based organization has been a conduit for services and resources that benefit BMSM. These services include, support groups for HIV/AIDS education, book reading clubs, and groups that help individuals gain insight and knowledge about issues such as relationship development. Many of these organizations came into existence because the disproportional impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the Black community. Education may be the pathway for marginalized communities to acquire coping skills, leadership potential and gain confidence to achieve self-acceptance and self-actualization (Shrestha, Wilson, & Singh, 2008).

For many BMSM these networks are a means of coping with the multiple oppressions they face. Jarvis (1987) offers a descriptive contrast of learning and formal learning, he posits that formal situations are bureaucratic, are somewhat structured but less bureaucratic. Many nonformal learning experiences related to African Americans gay men are not recognized in the mainstream adult

education literature (Henze, 1992). Coombs (1985) suggest that adult education is a major source of adult learning. This important declaration is well supported in the literature and is appropriate when working with marginalized populations.

This research study has unveiled a most astonishing reality in the Black community in terms of internalized oppression. That is, a history of oppression, does not necessarily translate into understanding and empathizing with others, even in one's own community. According to Hill (2007), the problem is that, it's difficult to get people to think critically about the topic of homosexuality (and to learn how to learn), and it is even more difficult to help them learn how to care.

Homophobia also expresses itself in the Black community in the form of violence perpetuated against BMSM. For example, one in four gay men has been physically battered because they were suspected of being gay (Constantine-Simms, 2001; Hill, 2006b; McClusky, 2007). This author has witnessed many episodes of this violence against gays throughout the years. What stands out as poignant was the murder of on of my best friend Allen over forty years ago:

Allen was one of the nicest guys I had ever met, attractive, dark skinned, tall, and a gentle and humble individual. Most distinctly, Allen was one of the first Black men I had ever met that was actually working to obtain his Bachelor's degree from a major university. This was a unique achievement for a Black gay man during the 1960s; I was highly impressed with Allen's academic prowess. During a break in his studies, Allen decided to head up to New York for a weekend of fun and partying,

something we Philadelphians often did during this period. The gay life in New York during this time was captivating, intriguing, and to some extent dangerous for Black gay men. However, clubs such as the Big Apple, The loft, The Garage, Peter Rabbits and the Table Tops all had an alluring appeal that was hard to resist. New York also had a darker side that encapsulated many young Black gay men during this time, places such as the loading docs and the areas around grand central station represented grave yards for many BMSM. Unfortunately my good friend Allen was one such statistic.

From New York, to Philadelphia, to Los Angeles California, this violence would repeat itself many times over. What is most upsetting is that law enforcement ignored many of these murders because the individuals were Black and gay. This scenario supports the contention that democracy for many gays and lesbians take a back seat; Hill (2003) states: "Many societies, and the government that represents them, regard lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgressors, intersexuals and queer (LGBTIQ) people to be depraved, degenerate, and a menace to public order" (p. 101). This perceived immorality prevents many gay and lesbians from enjoying the same legal protection under the law afforded heterosexuals (Hill, 2003; Unger, 2000). BMSM must cope with this and many other issues related to being Black and gay in America. These coping strategies provide a means of survival, a way to deal with the day-to-day multiple oppressions they face.

This research builds on the coping literature by using coping as a learning strategy for dealing with oppression. The development of innovative coping strategies represents the survival skills necessary for BMSM to navigate racist and heterosexist surroundings. Many of the coping strategies exhibited by participants in this study were cultivated over time.

Although there is no sustained effort on the part of adult educators to address issues related to BMSM, several scholars are engaged in work that addresses the difficult problems facing gays in academia. Although most of these studies are relegated to Whites, this research study shows they have similar implications for BMSM (Grace, 2001; Hill, 1995; McClusky, 2007).

This dissertation answers the question of how BMSM learn to cope with oppression at the intersection of homophobia and race. Because critical race theory (CRT) does not adequately address specific issues pertinent to BMSM directly, this study enlarges this perspective such that oppression based on sexual orientation is an integral element of its framework. This study provides an avenue for BMSM to speak with candor and honesty about their challenges, struggles and triumphs in coping with homophobia and racism (Solórzano, 1998).

According to CRT, oppression in its many forms is very much ingrained in the fabric of the legal, social, and political landscape of America. What many contemporary researchers Delgado (1989); Lanson-Billings (1994); Solorzano (2002); Taylor (1997) agree on is that oppression in the United States is persistent, obstinate and tenacious in its manifestation. The volatile terrains that

BMSM have to navigate are reflected in the stories and experiences they shared in this study.

These stories provide a microscopic view into the lives of one of the most oppressed groups in our society. Just as CRT suggests that racism is ingrained in the fabric of American life, this research has unveiled persistent and rampant homophobia as well as racism in the lives of BMSM. Some scholars have admitted that CRT in its present context is heteronormative. In other words, it mostly reflects the interest of the Black straight community.

Hutchinson (1999) argues that CRT is centered on the experiences of heterosexuals with racism, ignoring the call for equality from gays and lesbians. Some adult education scholars have recognized this oversight and have attempted to expand CRT from a queer qualitative perspective. Grace (2002) recognizes the storytelling element of CRT to interrogate myths, stereotypes, assumptions, and prejudices related to race in our society.

Storytelling as a powerful methodological tool can be used to re-frame the BMSM discourse from one of simple identity to one of positionality. In other words, CRT can be restructured so that BMSM voice, position, and disenfranchisement become integral elements of the conversation. One of the compelling issues examined in this research centers on participant's feeling that they are being unfairly targeted as a scapegoat for many of the problems in the Black community.

Riggs (2001) offers one possible explanation why BMSM are so despised in the Black community. He argues that the heart of the Black community's

venomous hatred of gays lies in what he calls “A convenient other within the community, yet not truly of the community” (p. 293). Riggs warns that there is a tendency for the Black community to use BMSM as a convenient scapegoat by blaming them for all the ills in their community. For example, BMSM are often blamed for the escalating spread of HIV/AIDS and for the disintegration of the Black family. These attitudes along with playing the blame game keep the Black community impotent in finding solutions to our most pressing problems. Others point to the nature/nurture debate as the catalyst for this contempt toward gays.

Many in the Black community believe that sexual orientation can and should be changed (Leland and Miller, 1998). They believe that homosexuality is a choice, as opposed to the belief that people are born homosexual. Some have even admitted that although gays may be born with these tendencies, they should remain celibate from sex (Giordano, 1999).

The evidence is precarious regarding the origins of sexual orientation with scholars arguing for both nature and environment. Johnson (2003) among others posits that both play a role; however, participants in this study make the most convincing argument for biology. Half of the participants in this study state that they would change their sexual orientation if they could. Almost all of the participants support the notion that their sexual orientation is not a choice. Also, this study and others overwhelmingly affirm that attraction toward the same sex is realized at a very early age; in actual fact, this author realized same sex feelings as early as six years old, further affirming that sexual orientation is not a choice

(Malebranche, Fields, Bryant, Harper, 2007). However, many believe that if sexual orientation is a choice, it must and should be changed.

Leland & Miller (1998) reported that for more than a century therapy groups and churches have tried to change gays with a number of interventions including luring them into conversion groups such as the *Transformation Ministries branch of Exodus International*, an anti-gay conservative Christian fellowship whose primary goal is to convert gays to heterosexuality. This organization preys on confused vulnerable gays by demanding heterosexuality or celibacy and invoking strict adherence to their interpretation of scriptures condemning homosexuality.

However, the American Psychological Association (APA) voted in the 1970s that homosexuality is not a disorder, but a viable way of life; with this stark proclamation, most therapists got out of the sexual conversion business. In 1997 APA officially declared “reparative therapy” scientifically ineffective and possibly harmful. Its guidelines strongly discourage such therapy as unnecessary (Leland & Miller, 1998). This revelation is particularly poignant in light of findings from this research because most participants believe that their sexuality is innate and therefore, unchangeable.

Conclusion Two

There is a Positive Connection between BMSM Spirituality and Their Sexual Orientation.

Some adult educators realize a strong correlation between spirituality and the leaning environment. Dirk (1997) asserts that “Attention to soul in adult

education is important, particularly in attending to group process” (p. 310). He suggests that it is not our responsibility as adult educators to focus on spirituality but to attend to nurturing the soul. In other words, we should recognize what is already inherently inside individuals and respect that as a sacred and valid part of their relationships and experiences.

The term spirituality is difficult to define. Its attributes, meanings and relationship to religion has evolved over time. One explanation of spirituality by Fenwick and Lang (1998) captures the themes espoused by participants in this research study. “Spirituality is a yearning to connect with community, a higher power, or a transcendent energy and to liberate this energy within oneself” (p. 64). According to participants in this study, spirituality is defined based on their personal relationship with a higher power, but contains some elements of their religious upbringing.

A research study by Tisdell (1998) looked at spirituality, women and adult education for social change. One of the themes she found in the sample was what she called “moving away”, that is, participants in early adulthood began questioning their childhood religious teachings and understandings. This initial moving away was in response to their perceptions of hypocrisy, sexism, heterosexism and lack of personal or cultural support. These experiences are consistent with findings in this research study, where participants change their perspective over time on various aspects of their childhood religious beliefs; particularly around sexuality.

Four of the participants in this same study said they respected their childhood religion, but over time, their attitudes about homosexuality had shifted. Contact with sexual minorities had caused them to question the negative religious beliefs they held for so long. These findings are consistent with participant statements in this research study. That is, participants felt that bias against homosexuals would be decreased if more BMSM came-out about their sexuality. Further findings suggest that knowing or being acquainted with a sexual minority has a positive impact on attitudes about homosexuality (Grace, 2001; McClusky, 2007).

Participants in this study revealed that they have come to understand the bible and other religious symbols from an historical and cultural perspective. This interpretation takes into consideration the period in its original situation and then applies the meaning to the present. The literal approach tends to pick and choose some text and overlook others to support a particular point of view. For example, many passages in the bible support slavery and the disenfranchisement of women; however, most agree now that previous interpretations on these issues were wrong.

Literal scriptural interpretation cannot be used to answer the question of homosexuality among African Americans today. This study documents a compelling argument in support of this thesis. Participants contend that most ministers interpret scriptures from a literal perspective that was meant for another time and place and is not relevant to today's BMSM experiences. Findings from

this study emphatically affirm that God made them the way they are; therefore, they do not believe homosexuality is an issue of morally, but a viable way of life.

Participants gave personal stories that demonstrate how they learned to depend on this higher power in coping with their daily struggles. BMSM agree that there is a lot of disagreement when it comes to interpreting the scriptures, but one thing they are sure of is that, despite homophobia and the condemnation they receive from the church, they know deep in their hearts that God loves them *just as they are*.

This enduring truth was echoed many times throughout this study. Another study by Tan (2005) explores gay and lesbian spirituality; this study revealed that despite homophobia and discrimination by the church respondents had high levels of spiritual well-being. That is, how one relates to God (religious well-being) and how one feels about life (existential well-being). In other words, this population appears to have rich spiritual lives and a sense of purpose in spite of homophobia.

These findings suggest that gays and lesbians look beyond the traditional religious rhetoric in exploring their faith and the meaning of their existence (Tan, 2005). Moreover, Tan's study further revealed that "Gays and lesbians who have a good sense of life's purpose, who feel that their lives are meaningful, and who consider themselves to be moral are more likely to be well adjusted" (p. 142). Although Tan's respondents were mostly White, the implications here reflect the general attitudes of respondents in this study.

Similarly, studies done by Peterson, Folkman, and Bakeman (1996) found that social support and personal resources such as optimism and religiosity-spirituality had a positive correlation among Black gay men; especially those who were HIV positive. For example, the authors note that optimism has been found to be related to positive coping strategies. Black gay men more than their White counterpart depended more on religion or spirituality as a strategy for dealing with oppression (Woodyard, 2000).

Conclusion Three

BMSM Have Learned to Incorporate an Emancipatory Learning Perspective Regarding Their Sexual Orientation and Outlook on Life.

As the data from this research emerged, it became more apparent that BMSM in this study were exemplifying learning strategies that initially were not anticipated, namely consciousness raising as a form of emancipatory learning. Historically, transformative learning as a theoretical perspective was pioneered by the women's movement of the 1970s. Although not utilized in this study as a theoretical frame work, Mezirow's work has bearing on some of the findings in this study.

Through the process of consciousness raising this theory utilizes perspectives transformation as a central component in the growth and development of women participating in programs related to entering or returning to college. This perspective has implications for this research because over time most participants in this study have come to accept their sexual orientation,

changed their beliefs about homosexuality, and have acknowledged to themselves that it is not going to change.

This perspective change is based on beliefs that affirm their sexuality and their humanity as God-given. This belief system seeks to pluck them from the clutches of homophobia and racism and bring the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, that they are worthy in his sight (Gayraud, 1989).

This study found that, not only did these men have a perspective change; all were willing to share their life lessons with the world as is evident in the participant profiles. Mezirow (2000) describes an emancipated person as:

Free from unwarranted control of undesirable beliefs, unsupportable attitudes, and paucity of abilities, which can prevent one from taking charge of one's life? Fostering these liberating conditions in making more autonomous and informed choices and developing a sense of self-empowerment is the cardinal goal of adult education. (p. 26)

Similarly, emancipatory learning is defined by Hart (1990) as; "mainly concerned with ways to unfreeze the dimensions of criticizability of norms by thematizing them and questioning their legitimacy" (p. 131). This definition takes into consideration such ideologies as masculinity, femininity, and examines them within the context of values, beliefs, and norms interpreted toward the needs of those oppressed (Hart, 1990).

Other contemporary adult education scholars have researched the topic of emancipatory learning; including, Freire (1970); Mezirow (1991); Tisdell (1998, 2000) & Welton (1993). Several themes resonate across their work that is

consistent with the findings of this study. That is, an emancipatory process that encourages one to become free of self-defeating attitudes and beliefs, and replace them with a more positive self-image through changing meaning perspectives.

Through changes in meaning perspectives participants in this study are challenging, rebuking and breaking away from the traditional dogmatic religious beliefs condemning homosexuality declaring that, "it isn't right for me." Yet within the heart of these individuals is the conviction that there is a God that loves them for exactly who and what they are. These participants found a new definition of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. They found a loving presence rather than one that triggers guilt and duty. They dare to ask questions and challenge traditional values.

For example, Grace, et al. (2004) asserts that he no longer turns the other cheek when faced with homophobia:

When faced with such encounters, I no longer turn the other cheek. I confront my optic no-heart Christians. I express my anger, disgust, and hurt and then I move on to continue the struggle in community with other queer persons and straight allies. These days we can be heartened by the fact that we are knee deep in a fag-in-your-face civil rights movement that has made incremental progress in Canada, especially since 1969 when the government of Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau decriminalized "homosexuality." However, that year remains a bittersweet memory. I spent 1969 in the hell grade 6 in a catholic high school where I was

taunted, stalked, and otherwise abused in a series of heterosexist violence that marked the life of a young person already labeled a sissy and a fag.

(p. 12)

What is most interesting about Grace's compelling revelation is that it parallels many of the stories in this research. For example, findings in this study affirm that BMSM are also not turning the other cheek, they are debunking and challenging traditional religious anti-gay dogma. Through education and community support they not only continue the struggle against homophobia, they share their wisdom, knowledge and skills through this research study.

In addition to Mezirow, the work of Paulo Freire is a potential connection point to this study. There is a link here between adult education, social justice, homophobia, racism and masculinity (Sheard & Sissel, 2001). Freire's (1970) landmark research on consciousness-raising is ground-breaking and provides a framework for understanding how oppression operates. His landmark, *Pedagogy of the oppressed* espouses a discourse of liberatory praxis based on the belief that personal and social transformation is possible. Although Freire was a Brazilian his work has enormous potential as an adult education emancipatory learning tool.

Through a process of conscientisation, he believed that the lives of the oppressed could be transformed. This new way of learning promoted transformation by showing learners how to see themselves differently, not just as receptacles for information, but as individuals possessing the power to evoke radical change. The traditional way of learning is what Freire calls "*The banking*

method' where teachers simply deposit information into student receptacles. Filling the heads of learners with data, he felt was just another way of reproducing the underclass (Freire, 1970).

Over time, BMSM in this study became empowered to challenge powerful systems of oppression by the church and Black community. For most participants this was achieved through developing relationships through social networks, educating themselves and developing a relationship with a Divine Power that is self-affirming, self-actualizing and loving. Although participants did not use the term *banking* as did Freire, their stories reflected banking deposits of denigration, demasculinization, and religious persecution.

Fortunately, many BMSM have found new thoughts about God that make good sense, rebuking the teachings that says you don't exist as humans unless you get "like us". One participant boldly asserted "If Jesus didn't exclude anybody from his teachings, then what right does the Black church or anyone else have to deny BMSM the opportunity to achieve self-actualization, wholeness, and spiritual freedom?" These are themes that resonated repeatedly throughout this dissertation.

It is too late for BMSM Christians in this study to buy the fallacy that they are an abomination or any such thing. According to this study, their relationship with God is too deep to accept that lie when they know their shepherd's voice rings loud and clear, echoing that they are children of the living God. They believe deeply that their master only admonishes them to love him with all their hearts and each other as thyself (Kader, 1999).

Through a perspective change, participants in this study have learned the difference between pathological and healthy religious belief systems. McNeal (1988) makes the case for this point: “When pathological belief systems and feelings become rooted deep in the unconscious of gay people, the result can be resistance to healthy self-acceptance” (p.16). Consequently, pathological religious teachings can result in destruction of our psychological health and spiritual development (McNeal, 1988). Many Black gay and lesbians are no longer attending churches that preach homophobic rhetoric, but attend gay affirming churches.

In response to oppression and alienation of BMSM in the Black Church, Archbishop Carl Beam founded *The Unity Fellowship Movement*. This is a non-denominational organization of African American gay churches started in the 1980s in response to the oppression of BMSM, and the lack of involvement of the Black church in the AIDS epidemic. This movement proliferated because of racist practices by the White gay community in dealing with the AIDS epidemic.

This organization is national in scope and provides support and spiritual guidance to BMSM and others who are oppressed. Moreover, these churches offer assistance to Black gays and lesbians far beyond the traditional church service. For example, they started one of the nation’s first AIDS hospices for poor and indigent BMSM. Many participants in this study utilized similar community resources in learning to cope with homophobia and racism. Unity has adopted the following mission statement, which is emancipatory in nature:

It is impossible to love each other without a sense of mutual worth and respect for one another. Liberation theology is a theology that frees the oppressed; therefore; it is not a male dominated hierarchy, not oppressive to women, not just European in scope, but must relate to people of color and their various cultures around the world. Also, it is not oppressive to lesbian, gays, transgender and bisexual people but enable us to think and discern through human reason and experience. It is not oppressive to Native Americans or their spirituality or any other oppressive use of scripture. We believe in the teachings of Jesus Christ but we do not dismiss all other faiths and beliefs as wrong or second to our way of believing. A person's belief system must be supported by a healthy self-acceptance, must support spiritual growth and must encourage physical, psychic and mental health. We believe the Bible and all great spiritual writings or guides must be read taking into consideration the time of their writing, the traditions practiced at that time and the fact that we have the right to question and examine any and all interpretations. (Unity Fellowship Mission statement, 2007).

Participants in this study have embraced spirituality consistent with the tenants of the unity movement; this was reflected in many of their stories and profiles. In addition to the Unity Fellowship movement, there are New Thought Christians in New Thought centers and churches throughout the world.

These centers and churches may have names like Religious Science, Unity, Devine Science, or they may be one of many independent New Thought

churches. This movement has come about by people who have come to believe that God is more than a judgmental overseer in the sky who sends some people to Heaven and others (such as gays and lesbians) to hell. There is a greater definition for man than *sinner*. The New Thought Christian knows he is great and wonderful (Warch, 2000). This author is proud to be an active member of a new thought fellowship in Atlanta Georgia; Hillside Chapel and Truth Center

Implications for Theory

Malcolm Knowles acknowledges and supports the contribution that all learners bring to the table. An important factor inherent in Knowles's andragogy assumptions is the importance of providing a climate that causes adults to feel accepted, respected and supported; that climate may be in a church, a school, or a community organization (Knowles, 1984; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Similarly, adults are motivated by and interested in problems that are pertinent to their interest.

Findings in this research and others point to the fact that people are less homophobic when they know and have a positive experience with someone who is gay. McClusky (2007) concluded in her research that sexual minorities in academia and research should leave the comfort of *the closet* and self-disclose. This humanizes the classroom, promotes openness in students and adds authenticity and realness to the academic experience.

This study examined the lived experiences of BMSM as their lives intersect with homophobia and race. The theoretical significance lies in the contribution of knowledge to the adult education literature base that illuminates

both the social, cultural, and practical learning experiences of BMSM. Similarly, as the findings indicated, BMSM have learned to cope with the stresses of homophobia within the Black community, and racism from the White gay and straight communities through nonformal channels of learning.

Implications for Practice

Findings in this research illuminate numerous implications for the practice of adult education. Firstly, Homophobia and racism are deep-rooted in the American physic. Furthermore, compared to other ethnic groups, the Black community is extremely homophobic against its gay brothers and sisters. This study represents an opportunity to explore this understudied phenomenon in Black gay men and potentially provide information on how these men cope in this quagmire. Ultimately, it may help promote a greater sense of self-acceptance and self-actualization among BMSM and provide an opportunity for the larger community to view these men from a more compassionate and understanding lens.

This study seeks to provide the public with an understanding of the issues BMSM face in a homophobic and racist society. Some of these issues include oppression, discrimination, racism, and marginalization. This study will benefit the Black community by providing a better understanding of the role social context plays in the lives of BMSM and the learning strategies used to cope with these stresses. The results of this study can inform those who work with BMSM and provide useful information for professionals such as social workers, pastors,

public health workers, adult educators, policy makers, and other interested personnel.

The most salient feature of this research is that it has the potential to advance the adult educator's ability to affect social justice and action. This can best be done through providing space for the learner to realize their desires to be, to belong, and to act in a society that is rapidly evolving culturally, socially, and academically.

In the face of sometimes overwhelming odds, the participants in this study exhibited hardiness and a resolute resolve to develop and maintain a sense of self-acceptance and dignity regarding their sexual orientation. Most poignantly, BMSM in this study are challenging traditional religious dogma and societal discourse labeling them with such derogatory terms as sissy, faggot and an abomination. The implication here is that this may represent opportunities for those who work or are associated with this population to capitalize on these strengths, and provide spaces and research platforms for dissemination of their stories.

BMSM experiences can be instrumental in educating others about the issues they face and how they successfully cope with these issues while enhancing the learning environment (Knowles, 1984). Huey Newton, onetime leader of the Black Panther Party, states that regardless of one's position on homosexuality or the role of Black women in our society, we should try to unite as a people to fight racism and oppression in all of its forms (Newton, 2001).

Huey further posits that gays and lesbians may be a great asset to the revolution; thereby reigniting and re-invigorating the struggle for Black equality.

Because BMSM in this study learned many of their coping skills through community groups and institutions, academic seminars and workshops can be developed that help educate the surrounding community about issues pertinent to BMSM; especially issues related to HIV/AIDS in the larger Black community. For instance, adult education departments can plan forums that provide experiences sensitive to the needs of BMSM and other providers of services related to HIV/AIDS. This forum could include the following: members of the faith community, counselors, adult educators, and interested community members. In addition, this workshop could provide a safe environment for participants to address issues and concerns related to prevention of HIV/AIDS, stigma, and homophobia. This research can be helpful in designing and planning adult education courses and activities that target problems BMSM face; this includes, but is not limited to, HIV/AIDS, homophobia, racism, and other pertinent topics.

These professional growth and development opportunities are crucial to creating a culture of inclusivity, such that all voices may be heard (Hill, 2006). Collaboration with organization such as *The Black Church Week of Prayer, AIDS Atlanta, Second Sunday*, and other community support groups could provide the needed community representation in addition to academic expertise. The ultimate goal is for adult educators to acknowledge and provide a safe learning environment for all participants to fully engage in the lifelong learning process.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research examined educational and psychological literature for relevant conceptual and theoretical perspectives that provide critical insight into the impact of homophobia and racism among BMSM. Limitations noted in the literature reveal that virtually no studies examined or discussed BMSM learning experiences at the intersection of homophobia and racism. This study found that even in the face of oppression, BMSM spirituality and sense of life's purpose remain intact. Future studies should further examine and explore this quality.

It also seems appropriate to suggest that further research takes into consideration the issue of socioeconomic influences on the learning experiences of BMSM. It may be that those BMSM who are not white and/or not from a higher socioeconomic status may exhibit different strengths in relation to dealing with multiple oppressions.

Education has done an insufficient job of alleviating social ills; this problem is an ongoing challenge for adult educators in keeping with our professions purpose (Hill, 2007). That is, to serve as a vehicle to promote social change, and empower learners to help solve problems in their communities. According to Finger (as cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) "Adult education is in danger of losing its social action orientation as it focuses on helping individuals face up to the overwhelming economic and other challenges that threatened their identities and survival in the increasingly dense jungle of a post modern society (p. 21). This review attempts to remedy this problem by adding an original contribution to adult

education scholarship based in social action, social justice and education as a vehicle of resistance and emancipation.

Future studies should also examine the lived experiences of BMSM as it relates to the intersection of internalized homophobia, racisms and issues related to masculinity. In addition, benefits may be derived from qualitative studies that investigate how BMSM cope and learn to cope with these issues (e.g. racial discrimination, homophobia, and stigmatization).

Another possible area for future research may include qualitative research to gather more information on effective ways church-based community health programs can take a more compassionate approach when dealing with problems among African Americans BMSM. Such an approach should emphasize the relationship between the physiological, psychological, and spiritual selves. Any attempt to ensure a healthy living without taking into account these factors could potentially cause more harm than good, especially where HIV/AIDS is concerned.

Other future research should examine internalized homophobia in BMSM. Some respondents in this research study said they still feel that homosexuality is a sin, even though they also believed they were born homosexual. Finally, any research that does not specifically include BMSM as a part of the research process should not automatically be generalized to this group. Future studies should incorporate community based participatory research (CBPR) as a part of their methodology.

This practice allows the culture, positionalities, and experiences of participants to be included in the research process (Guy, 1999, 2003). This approach acknowledges the role of the participants in the research process. CBPR focuses on the social, structural, and physical environmental inequalities through active involvement of community members, organizational representatives, and researchers in all aspects of the research process (Isreal, (1998).

Personal Reflections

The failure of adult education to address homophobia and racism among BMSM is an unfortunate oversight. A few adult education scholars have included people of color in their writings (Hill, 2007). What makes Hill's work so poignant is that he makes no apology for being an openly gay anti-oppressive researcher who through education advocates for activism through adult education. This advocacy covers a wide range of topics; including, public policy, international adult education, environmental adult education, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) issues in education.

Hill's positionality parallels my own *coming-out-to-academia*; That is, my inclusion as a participant in this research study automatically *outs me*. At first, I was quite nervous about the idea of letting the world know my sexual orientation. However, after discussion with my committee chair and much personal reflection, I agreed. Harbeck (1997) warns that many educators default back to perpetuating stereotypes, prejudice and homophobia as opposed too being their

authentic selves in the class room. Grace (1998) discusses coming to terms with his homosexuality in his early academic career. He states:

As I came to terms with my own queerness, I realized that such a solution was no solution. For me silence and invisibility amounted to a form of self-mutilation. They constituted a denial of queer being and acting that led to sickness and thoughts of a final solution. Indeed, they were tantamount to a suicide of sorts. (¶ 8)

The risk of allowing others to know the intimate details of one's being is indeed a great risk; however, current research suggest that those who have a gay friend or acquaintance are less homophobic (Herek, 1988, 1994). I have had some time to ponder this issue and am quite pleased with my decision to share my experience and life with the world. What is at stake here with this issue is the importance of providing a safe academic space for gay scholarship and scholars (Edwards, 1998).

Comments

This dissertation provides some insight into the lived experiences of BMSM. This study also serves to promote understanding and insight into how the unique coping strategies this group utilizes in dealing with homophobia and racism could benefit others. Results of this study highlight this population's positive attributes, thus, serving to illustrate the strengths they exhibit in dealing with multiple oppressions. These stories reflect the positive and functional attributes of this group, illustrating the strengths, resilience, and tenacity exhibited in the face of enormous adversity.

Historically, many of the writings and references toward BMSM have been muddied in analysis focusing on dysfunctional mechanisms instead of seeking out and examining the positive attributes. If research continues to focus on the pathological aspect of BMSM lives, it may serve to defeat movement toward a more compassionate and understanding perception of this group. That is, if we as adult educators do not identify strengths that others bring to the table, this may function to maintain a powerless feeling on the part of the individuals with regard to changing their situation.

This research identified the strengths and wisdom BMSM have exhibited in the face of what seems at times to be insurmountable odds. The methods BMSM utilize to deal with the multiple oppressions they face could be exemplary for the entire Black community in dealing with the many serious problems threatening our survival.

Education can be a form of transformation; a way that the learner can be engaged to change their way of thinking. "The adult educator must recognize both the learner's objectives and goals. The educator's responsibility is to help learners achieve their objectives in such a way so they function as more autonomous, socially responsible thinkers." Johnson-Bailey (personal communication, August 2004). Hill (2006) supports this sentiment; he states, "missing in most organizational formulations is the notion that organizations are places where human sexuality also intersects with technologies, culture and society" (p. 7).

This dissertation has attempted to address some of the social and psychological issues that BMSM face during a time when BMSM in particular, and Black men overall are struggling. Although this subject remains sparsely investigated in the literature, the author hopes to make an original contribution to the literature base by aggressively pursuing research that propels this population from invisibility to invincibility in the annals of adult education.

How Black men define their masculine and sexual identities if they also have homosexual desires and/or behavior must be the driving question behind future research that seeks to bring Black men back to a sense of acceptance, wholeness, and completeness within this society. Many questions remain regarding masculinity, internalized homophobia, and racism among Black males in our society. These questions can best be answered through qualitative research that poses direct inquiries to these men.

Although many of these men don't fit the traditional masculine profile and may not be able to rely on heterosexual conquests and the rearing of biological children to define their sense of masculinity, their voices nevertheless must be heard. BMSM are represented in all areas of our community: doctors, lawyers, scientists, artists, activists, just to name a few. They deserve the same liberty and justice that the general community enjoys.

If we are to make an impact on the HIV/AIDS epidemic in our community, we must begin to look at the issues around race, masculinity and sexuality with an open mind and an outstretched hand of support, rather than contempt and mistrust. How Black men define their masculine and sexual identities if they also

have homosexual desires and/or behavior must be the driving question behind future research that seeks to bring Black men back to a sense of acceptance, wholeness, and completeness within this society.

We as adult educators should be keenly aware that the many problems learners face requires ‘prudent action” not just technological prowess. According to Wilson (1994) we must become more sensitive to how both the individual, community values, assumptions, and beliefs impact that action. This action rest on an epistemological attitude which ask some very salient questions: “How does individual experience, community position, and historical location shape the way we see ourselves in the world and subsequently determine how we act in and on the world? How else can we change if we choose not to see? (p. 27).

The question that is being asked today with increasing frequency is: How can we change our environment if we are unaware of the issues that influence that environment? Given the many issues that Black America faces today (crime, discrimination, incarceration, homophobia, and HIV/AIDS), adult education is one of the last bastions of hope. Hope rest in the transforming powers inherent in the principals of adult education. Any future discourse on oppression should and must include Gays, Lesbians, Transgenders, Transsexuals and Bisexuals as equal partners in this conversation.

In keeping with the spirit from which this dissertation emanates, I would like to close with a powerful message to all those who read or are impacted by this work. Particularly those adult educators, ministers, followers of the gospel, social workers, public health professionals, students, friends of gay persons,

politicians, presidents, and lay persons who carry out the mandate to spread love, compassion and empathy throughout this great universe, this message is particularly geared toward you and the powerful impact that you have on the masses:

Let love be the keynote in all relationships, for the power which must salvage the world is the precipitation of love. Love is not a sentiment or an emotion, nor is it desire or a selfish motive for right action in daily life. Love is the wielding of the force which guides the worlds and which leads to the integration, unity, and inclusiveness' which impels Deity itself into action. Love is a hard thing to cultivate-such is the inherent selfishness of human nature; it is a difficult thing to apply to all conditions of life, and its expression will demand of you're the utmost you have to give, and the stamping out of your selfish personal activities. Arrest each unloving thought; stamp out each critical action, and teach yourself to love all beings – not in theory but in deed and in truth (Bailey, 1985, p. 652).

REFERENCES

- Alexander, B., K. (2008). Queer(y)ing the postcolonial through the West(ern). In N. Denzin, Y. Lincoln, & L. Smith (Eds.), (pp. 101-134). *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Alridge, D. P. (2003). The dilemmas, challenges, and duality of an African American educational historian. *Educational Researcher*, 32(9), 25-34.
- Alridge, D.P. (2005). From civil rights to hip-hop: Toward a nexus of ideas. *Journal of African American History*, 90(2), 226-252.
- Archie-Booker, D. (1997). The politics of planning culturally relevant AIDS education for African American women. *Proceedings of the Adult Education Research Conference*. Retrieved May 29, 2008. from <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/1997/97archie-booker.htm>
- Atlanta pride festival. (2007). Retrieved on June 29, 2008, from <http://www.atlantapride.org/>
- Atlanta Black pride celebration. (2007). *Moving to the next level*. Retrieved June 29, 2008, From <http://www.inthelifeatl.com/news/press/time-to-act-itla-revs-up-for-12th-annual-atlanta-Black-pride-celebration/>
- Baker, S. (1999). HIV/AIDS nurses and the Black church: A case study. *Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care*, 10(5), 1-9.

- Beam, J. (1986). *In the life, a Black anthology*. Boston, MA: Alyson Publications, Inc.
- Beam, J. (2001). Brother to brother: Words from the heart. In R, Byrd. & Guy-Sheftall (Eds.). *Traps: African American men on gender and sexuality* (pp. 284-291). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Bederman, G. (1995). *Manliness & civilization: A cultural history of gender and race*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press.
- Beeker, C. (1998). Influences on sexual risk behavior in young African-American men who have sex with men. *Journal of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association*, 2(2), 59-67.
- Black Leaders Speak Out (n.d). Retrieved October 23, 2006, from <http://www.nbjcoalition.org/assets/docs/BLACK-LEADERS-SPEAK-OUT.doc>
- Bell, D. A. (1992). *Faces at the bottom of the well: The permanence of racism*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- BlackDoctor. (2007, February 2). *HIV/AIDS and the down-low phenomenon*. Retrieved October 18, 2006, from <http://www.Blackdoctor.org/articles.cfm?counter=2995>.
- Black men who have sex with men (MSM). (Feb. 2006). *Standing at the cross road of HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States*. Retrieved September 2, 2006 from www.NASTAD.org
- Blazina C. (2001). Analytic psychology and gender role conflict: The development of the fragile masculine self. *Psychotherapy*, 38(1), 50-59.

- Bogart, L. M., Kalichman, S. C., Kelly, J. A., Rompa, D. J., & Heckman, T. G. (1999). HIV risk differences between African-American and White men who have sex with men. *Journal of the National Medical Association, 91*(2), 92-100.
- Boote, D., & Beile, P. (2005). Scholars before researchers: On the centrality of the dissertation literature review in research preparation. *Educational Researcher, 34*(6), 3-15.
- Bowman, L. (2004). *Black and White attorney's perspective on race, the legal system, and continuing legal education: A critical race theory analysis*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia, Athens.
- Boyd, T. (1996). A small introduction to the "G" funk era: Gangsta rap and Black masculinity in contemporary Los Angeles. *Rethinking Los Angeles, 8*, 127-146.
- Boykin, K. (1996). *One more river to cross: Black and gay in America*. NY: Random House, Inc.
- Boykin, K. (2005). *Beyond the down-low: Sex, lies and denial*. NY: Carroll & Graf.
- Bryson, L.L. (1936). *Adult education*. NY: American Book Company.
- Burn, S., Kadlec, K., & Rexer, R. (2005). Effects of heterosexism on gays, lesbians, bisexuals. *Journal of Homosexuality, 49*(2), 23-38.

- Bush, L.V. (1999). Am I a man? A literature review engaging the sociohistorical dynamics of Black manhood in the United States. *The Western Journal of Black Studies*. 23(1), 49-57.
- Byrd, R., & Guy-Sheftall, B. (Eds.). (2001). *Traps: African American men on gender and sexuality*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Carbado, D. (1999). *Black men on race, gender, and sexuality*. NY: New York University Press.
- Carns, A. (2002, September). Healing Hands. *Savoy Magazine*, p. 83-87.
- Centers for Disease Control (2004). *HIV/AIDS among African Americans*. Retrieved February 23, 2007, from <http://www.cdc.gov/omh/AMH/factsheets/hiv.htm>
- Centers for Disease Control (2005). *HIV/AIDS among men who have sex with men*. Retrieved March 20, 2007 from <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/msm/resources/factsheets/msm.htm>
- Centers for Disease Control (2006). *HIV/AIDS among African Americans*. Retrieved, August 10, 2006, from <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/msm/resources/factsheets/msm.htm>
- Chennault, R., Kincheloe, J., Rodriguez, W., & Steinberg, S. (1998). *White reign: Deploying Whiteness in America*. NY: St. Martin's Press.
- Clark, M. (2003). *How Black deaf or hard-of-hearing adult male learners understand their learning and schooling experiences: A narrative analysis*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia, Athens.

- Cleaver, E. (1968). *Soul on ice*. NY: Dell Publishing.
- Commission on Human Rights. (n.d.). *Universal declaration of human rights: Article 26*. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>
- Constantine-Simms, D. (2001). In D. Constantine-Simms (Eds.), *The greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in the Black community*. (pp. 76-87). Los Angeles: Alyson Books.
- Coombs, P. H. (1985). *The world crisis in education: The view from the Eighties*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Courtenay, B., Merriam, S., & Reeves, M. (1998). The centrality of meaning-making - in transformational learning: How HIV positive adults make sense of their lives. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48(2), 65-84.
- Courtenay, B., Merriam, S., Reeves, P., & Baumgartner, L. (2000). Perspective transformation over time: A 2-year follow-up study of HIV positive adults. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 50(2), 102-119.
- Crawford, K., (2006). *HIV/AIDS and the down-low phenomenon*. Retrieved October 18, 2006, from <http://www.Blackdoctor.org/articles.cfm?counter=2995>.
- Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (Eds.). (1995) *Critical Race Theory: The key writings that informed the movement*. NY: New Press.
- Creswell, J. (2002). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research*. London, Thousand Oaks, Sage.
- D'Augelli, A. R. (1992). Teaching lesbian/gay development: From oppression to exceptionalism. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 22(3-4), 213-227.
- Delgado, R. (1989). Storytelling for oppositionists and others: A plea for narrative. *Michigan Law Review*, 87, 2411-2441.
- Dirkx, J. (1997). *Nurturing soul in adult learning*. In P. Cranton (Ed.). *Transformative learning in action* (pp. 79-88). *New Directions in Adult and Continuing Education*, No. 85. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Donnelly, J., Donnelly, M., Kittleson, M., Fogarty, K., Procaccino, A., & Duncan, D. (1997). An exploration of attitudes on sexuality at a northeastern urban university. *Psychological Reports*, 81, 677-678
- Donne, J., (2000). Devotions upon emergent occasions. Retrieved July 4, from <http://www.anglicanlibrary.org/donne/devotions/devotions17.htm>
- Drescher, J. (1998). *Psychoanalytic therapy and the gay man*. Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press.
- Du Bois, W. E. B., (1903). *The souls of Black folk*. NY: Dover Publications.
- Economic Mobility Project (2007, November 15). *Economic mobility of Black and white families: An initiative of the pew charitable Trusts*. Retrieved November 15, 2007, from, http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2007/11_Blackwhite_isaacs.aspx
- Edwards, T. (2001, October 20). Men who sleep with men. *Essence Magazine*, 8, 76-79.

- Elias, M., & Merriam, S. (1995). *Philosophical foundations of adult education*. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing.
- Exodus International. (2005). *Statement on homosexuality*. Retrieved on June 11, 2008, from <http://exodus.to/content/view/34/57/>
- Franklin, C. (1994). *Men's studies, the men's movement, and the study of Black masculinities: Further demystification of masculinities in America. The American Black male*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers.
- Fone, B. (2000). *Homophobia: A history*. NY: Pan Books Limited.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality: An introduction*. NY: Vintage Books.
- Garber, E. (1989). *A spectacle in color: The lesbian and gay subculture of jazz age Harlem*. Retrieved December 2, 2006, from <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~UG97/blues/garber.html>
- Gates, H. L. (2001). Foreword. In D. Constantine-Simms, D., (Eds.). (2001). *The greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in the Black community*. (pp. X1-XV). Los Angeles: Alyson Books.
- Georgia Department of Human Resources (2006). *AIDS in Georgia*. Retrieved June, 2008 from http://dhr.georgia.gov/DHR/DHR_FactSheets/AIDS%20in%20Georgia%20Jan%2006%20rev.pdf
- Giordiano, A. (1999). HRC Issues Report on Gays & Religion. *FrontPage*. 20. *U2J*. 18-19.
- Grace, A. (2001). Being, becoming, and belonging as a queer citizen educator:

The places of queer autobiography, queer culture as community, and fugitive knowledge. *CASAE-ACEÉÉA National Conference 20th anniversary proceedings*. Retrieved May 9, 2008, from <http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/CASAE/cnf2001/grace.pdf>

- Grace, A. P. & Hill, R. J. (2001). Using Queer knowledge to build inclusion pedagogy in adult education. Proceedings of the 42nd Annual Adult Education Research Conference, Michigan State University, Lansing MI, 145-150
- Guy, T. C. (1999). Culture as context for adult education: The need for culturally relevant adult education. In T. C. Guy (Ed.), *Providing culturally relevant adult education: A challenge for the twenty-first century* (pp. 5-18). New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, No. 82. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Guy, T.C. (2003). Culture wars in predominately Black, urban, ABE classrooms. *Global Research Perspectives, Vol. III* (pp. 89-100). Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia.
- Guy, T.C. (2004). Gangsta rap and adult education. In L. Martin & E. Rogers (Eds.), *New Directions in Adult and Continuing Education, No. 101*, (pp. 43-57). San Francisco: Wiley Publishers.
- Harris S. (1992). Black male masculinity and same-sex friendships. *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 16(2), 74-81.
- Harbeck, K. (1992). *Coming out of the closet: Gay and lesbian students, teachers, and curricula*. San Francisco: Harrington Park Press

- Haskins, L. (1997). *Bayard Rustin: Behind the scenes of the civil rights movement*. NY: Hyperion Books for Children.
- Helminiak, A. D. (1995). *What the Bible really says about homosexuality*. San Francisco: Alamo Square Press.
- Hemphil, E. (2001). Does your mama know about me? In R. Byrd. & Guy-Sheftall (Eds.). *Traps: African American men on gender and sexuality* (pp. 297-300). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Henze, R. C. (1992). *Nonformal teaching and learning: A study of everyday cognition in a Greek community*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Herek, G.M. (1986). The social psychology of homophobia: Toward a practical theory. *Review of Law and Social Change*, 14(4), 923-934
- Herek, G., & Capitanio, J. (1995). "Some of my best friends": Intergroup contact, concealable stigma, and heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 22, 412-424.
- Hill-Collins, P. (1998). It's all in the family: Intersections of gender, race and nation. *Hypatia*, 13(3), 62-82.
- Hill-Collins, P. (2004). *Black sexual politics*. NY: Routledge Publications.
- Hill, R. J. (1995). Gay discourse in adult education: A critical review. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 45(3), 142-158
- Hill, R., & Grace, A. (2001, March). Using Queer theory to build inclusionary pedagogy in adult education. Paper presented at the meeting of the Adult Education Research Conference, Georgia, Athens.

- Hill, R. J. (2003). Turning a gay gaze on citizenship. Sexual orientation and gender identity: Contesting/ed terrain. In C. Medel-Anonuevo et al. (Eds.), *Citizenship, democracy and lifelong learning* (pp. 99-139). The United Nations Educational, Scientific, & Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Institute for Education (UIE), Hamburg, Germany. Retrieved June 1, 2007 from <http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/pdf/uiestud35.pdf>
- Hill, R. J. (2006b). What's it like to be queer here? In R. J. Hill (Ed.), *Challenging heterosexism and homophobia: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer issues in occupational settings*. (pp. 7-16). New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, No. 112. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hill, R. J. (2007). Breaking open our times (and other liberatory acts). In K. B. Armstrong & L. W. Nabb (Eds.), *American Adult Educators: Quintessential Autobiographies by Educators of the 21st Century* (pp. 153-158). Chicago: Discovery Association Publishing House.
- hooks, b. (2001). *Salvation: Black people and love*. NY: Harper Hill- Collins.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Sexism and misogyny: Who takes the rap?* Retrieved May 30, 2008, from <http://race.eserver.org/misogyny.html>
- Hutchinson, D. L. (2001). Ignoring the sexualization of race: Heteronormativity critical race theory and anti-racist politics. *Buffalo Law review*, 47, 1-116.
- Israel, B. A., Schultz, A. J., Parker. E. A., & Becker, A. B. (1998). Review of community-based research: Assessing partnership approaches to improve public health. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 19, 173-202.
- Iwamoto, D. (2003). Tupuc Shukur: Understanding the identity formation of

hyper-masculinity of a Hip-Hop Artist. *The Black Scholar*, 33(2), 44-49.

Jackson, R. (1997). Black 'manhood' as xenophobe: An ontological exploration of the hegelian dialectic. *Journal of Black Studies*, 27(6), 731-750.

Johnson, E. P. (2001). Feeling the spirit in the dark: Expanding notions of the sacred in the African American gay community. In D. Constantine-Simms (Eds.), *The greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in the Black community*. (pp. 88-109). Los Angeles: Alyson Books.

Johnson, D. R. (2003, April 30). Homosexuality: Nature or Nurture.

AllPsych on line. Retrieved March 28, 2008, from

<http://allpsych.com/journal/homosexuality.html>

Johnson-Bailey, J. (1994). *Making a way out of no way: An analysis of the reentry Black women with emphasis on issues of race, gender, class and color*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia, Athens.

- Johnson-Bailey (2002). *A quarter century of African Americans in adult education. A little known and seldom heralded presence*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Georgia, Department of Lifelong Learning. (147-160). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Johnson-Bailey, J. (2006). *Transformative learning: A community empowerment conduit for African American women*. In S.B. Merriam, B. Courtenay & R.M. Cervero (Eds.). *Global issues in adult education: Perspectives from Latin America, Southern Africa, and the United States* (pp. 307-318). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Johnson-Bailey, J., & Cervero, R.M. (2000). The invisible politics of race in adult education. In A.L.Wilson, & E.R. Hayes (Eds.), *Handbook of adult and continuing education*. (pp.147-160). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kader, S. Rev. (1999). *Openly Gay Openly Christian*, San Francisco, CA: Leyland Publications.
- Kadushin, A. (1990). *The social work interview: A guide for human service professionals*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- King, C. (1998). *LGBT and human rights*. Retrieved August 1, 2006, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coretta_Scott_King
- King, J. (2004). *On the Down Low: A journey into the lives of "straight" Black men who sleep with men*. NY: Broadway Books.

- King, C. S., (Speaker). (2003). Remarks at the 13 Annual Creating a Change Conference on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender: human rights and other issues. Retrieved July 14, 2006, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coretta_Scott_King.
- King, M. L. (1965). Commencement address at Antioch College. Retrieved August 1, 2006. from <http://www.antiochcollege.edu/news/commencement/mlkspeech.html>
- King, M. L. (1964). *Letter from a Birmingham jail*. Retrieved June 29, 2008 from <http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/frequentdocs/birmingham.pdf>
- King, M. L. (1968). *A Knock at midnight: Inspiration from the sermons of the great Martin Luther King. Jr.* Retrieved June, 28, 2008, from http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/sermons/650704_The_American_Dream.html
- Kinsey, A. (1998). *Sexual behavior in the human female*. Bloomington Indiana: University Press.
- Knowles, M. S. (1970). *The modern practice of adult education: Andragogy versus pedagogy*. NY: Association Press.
- Knowles, M. S. (1984). *Applying modern principles of adult education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kraft, Beeker. C., Stokes, P., & Peterson, L. (2000). Finding the "community" in community-level HIV/AIDS interventions: Formative research with young African American men who have sex with men. *Health Education & Behavior*, 27, 430-441.

- Kulkin, R. (2005) Social workers in rural areas: Assessment of homophobic attitudes. [Electronic version]. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 50(4). Available online at <http://www.haworthpress.com/web/JH>.
- Lanson-Billings, G. (1994). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465-491.
- Lather, P. & Smithies, C. (1997). *Troubling the angels: Women living with HIV/AIDS*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Leland, J., Miller, M. (1998, August 17). Can gays be converted? News week. Retrieved April 27, 2008, from <http://www.newsweek.com/id/122627/page/1>
- Lincoln, C., & Mamiya, L. (1990). *The Black church and the African American experience*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Lorde, A. (1992). Age, race, class, and sex: Women redefining difference. In M. Anderson & P. Hill-Collins (Eds), *Race, class, and gender: An anthology* (pp. 495-502). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth
- Malebranche, D., & Fullilove, R. (2001). *When the lights go out: Black Men who have sex with men and the medical profession: A Qualitative analysis*. Unpublished Manuscript. Emory University, Atlanta.
- Malebranche, D., Fields, L., Bryant, L., Harper, S. (2007). Cool pose revisited: The social context of masculinity and sexual risk among Black men who have sex with men. *Men and Masculinity*, Article 10.1177. Retrieved May 30, 2008, from <http://jmm.sagepub.com/cgi/rapidpdf/1097184X07309504v1>

- Manglitz, E. (2003). Challenging White privilege in adult education: A critical review of the literature. *Adult education quarterly*, 53(2), 119-134.
- Manning, K. (1997). Authenticity in constructivist inquiry: Methodological considerations without prescriptions. *Qualitative inquiry*, 3(1), 93-115.
- Mason, S. (2007). Father of the bride: DuBois and the making of Black heterosexuality. In S. K. Gillman & A. E. Weinbaum A. (Eds.), *Next to the color line: Gender, sexuality, and W.E.B. DuBois* (pp. 289-291). Minneapolis Indiana: University of Minnesota Press
- Matsuda, M., Lawrence, C., Delgado, R., & Crenshaw, K. (Eds.). (1993). *Words that wound: Critical race theory, assaultive speech, and the First Amendment*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press
- Mays, V., Cochran, S., Zamudio., A. (2004). HIV/AIDS prevention research: Are we meeting the needs of African American Men Who Have Sex with men. *Journal of Black psychology*. 30(1), 75-105.
- McClusky, M. (2007). *Development of adult school professionals and their attitudes toward homosexuality and their sexual minority counterparts*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia, Athens.
- McIntosh, P. (1989). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Peace and Freedom*, 49(4), pp.10-12

- Mc Neal, J. (1988). *Taking a chance on God: Liberating theology for gays, lesbians and their lovers, families, and friends*. Boston Massachusetts: Beacon Press. Media Associates, Incorporated.
- McNeal, J. J. (1998). *Taking a chance on God*, Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press. Media Associated, Incorporated
- Merriam, S. B. (1984). *Selected writings on philosophy and adult education*. Malabar Florida: Krieger.
- Merriam, S. B. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. (2001). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B., & Associates (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B., & Caffarella, R.(1999) *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B., & Simpson, E. L. (2000). *A guide to research for educators and trainers of adults*. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing.
- Mezirow, Jack. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (1993). How adults learn: The meaning of adult education. Paper presented at the 34th Annual Adult Education Research Conference. Pennsylvania State University, University Park.

- Mezirow, Jack. (2000). *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*: San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Millett G., Malebranche D., Mason B., & Spikes P. (2005). Focusing “Down Low.”: Bisexual Black men, HIV risk and heterosexual transmission. *Journal of the National Medical Association*, 97(7), Supplement 52 – 59.
- Monteiro, K., & Fuqua, V. (1993). African American gay youth: One form of One manhood.” *The High School Journal*, 20-36.
- National Black Justice Coalition (n.d.). *Marriage*. Retrieved June 29, 2008, from <http://www.nbjcoalition.org/news/marriage.html>
- Newton, H. (2001). A letter to the revolutionary brothers and sisters about the women’s liberation and gay liberation movements. In R, Byrd. & Guy-Sheftall (Eds.). *Traps: African American men on gender and sexuality* (pp. 281-291). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Nugent, B., Writh, T. (2002). *Gay rebel of the Harlem Renaissance: Selections from the writings of Bruce Nugent*, Duran, NC: Duke University Press.
- O’Neil, J. (1982). Gender role conflict and strain in men’s lives: Implications for psychiatrist, psychologist, and other human service providers. In k. Solomon & N.B. Levy (Eds.), *Men in transition* (pp. 5-40). NY: Plenum Press.
- Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- Peshkin, A. (1988). In search of one's subjectivity---One's own. *Educational Researcher*. 17(7), 17-21.
- Peterson, J.L., Folkman, S., & Bakeman, R. (1996). Stress, coping, HIV status, psychosocial resources, and depressive mood in African American gay, bisexual, and heterosexual men. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 24(4), 461-487.
- Peterson J., & Bakeman, R. (2001). Racial/Ethnic patterns of HIV sexual risk behaviors among young men who have sex with men. *Journal of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association*, 5(4), 155-162.
- Poll reveals a contradictory portrait shaded with promise and doubt. (2006, June 6). The Washington Post, p. A01. Retrieved August 7, 2007, From http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06//03/AR2006060300695_pf
- Pratt, D., Nesbit, T. (2000). Discourse and culture of teaching. In A.L.Wilson, & E.R. Hayes (Eds.), *Handbook of adult and continuing education* (pp.117-131). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Prilleltensky, I., & Gonick, L. (1996). Politics change, oppression remains: On the psychology and politics of oppression. *Political Psychology*, 17(1), 127-148.
- Reeves, L. M. (1998). *An investigation of the use and impact of the internet in coping with an HIV- positive diagnosis*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia, Athens.

- Reeves, P. M., Merriam, S. B., & Courtenay, B. C. (1999). Adaptation to HIV infection: The development of coping strategies over time. *Qualitative Health Research, 9*(3), 344-361.
- Riggs, M. (Producer). (1990). *Tongues Untied* [Film]. (Available from Vivian Kleiman for Signifying Works. USA).
- Riggs, M. (2001). Black machismo revisited: Reflections of a SNAP! queen. In R. Byrd. & B. Guy-Sheftall (Eds.). *Traps: African American men on gender and sexuality* (pp. 292-296). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social context*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Ross M. (1983). *Femininity, masculinity, and sexual orientation: Some cross-cultural comparisons: Homosexuality and social sex roles*. Bedford Park, Australia: The Haworth Press.
- Sampson., H. (2004). Navigating the waves: Usefulness of a pilot in qualitative research. *4*(3), 383-402.
- Schmidt, T. (1995). *Straight and narrow? Compassion and clarity in the homosexuality debate*. Madison WI: Inter varsity Press.
- Sharpton, Al (2003). *Human Rights Campaign: Top ten straight allies*. Retrieved September 12, 2006, from http://www.hrc.org/top_ten_sa/#Al
- Sheared, V., & Sissel, P. (2001). *Making Space: Merging theory and practice in adult education*. Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.
- Shin, A., & Hudson, B. (1998). Beneath the Black aesthetic: James Baldwin's primer of Black American masculinity. *African American Review, 32*(2).

- Silberman, S. C. (2001). How RuPaul works: Signifying and contextualizing the mythic Black [drag queen] mother. In D. Constantine-Simms (Eds.), *The greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in the Black community*. (pp. 76-87). Los Angeles: Alyson Books.
- Solórzano, D., & Yosso, T. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for adult education. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8, 23-44
- South, Kenneth T. (1995, April). The Religious Community, AIDS Ministries, and Prevention: One Person's Opinion. *AIDS National Interfaith Network Newsletter*. Retrieved June 2, 2003, from <http://www.thebody.com/content/living/art32952.html>
- Steinhauer, J. (2001, February 11). Secrecy and Stigma Keep AIDS Risk High for Gay Black Men. *The New York Times*. pp. A5.
- Stubblefield, H. W., & Keane, P. (1994). *Adult education in the American experience: From the colonial period to the present*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Swaab, D., & Hofman, M. (1990). An enlarged suprachiasmatic nucleus in homosexual men. *Brain Research*, 537(2), 141-148.
- Tan, P., (2005). The importance of spirituality among gay and lesbian individuals. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 49(2), 135-143
- Taylor, E. W. (1997). Building upon the theoretical debate: A critical review of the empirical studies of Mezirow's transformative learning theory. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48(1), 5-25.

- Tennant, M. (2000). Adult learning for self-development and change. In Wilson, A., Hayes, E. *Handbook of adult and continuing education* (pp. 87-100). San Francisco: Josse-Bass.
- Tierney, W. G. (1997). *Academic outlaws: Queer theory and cultural studies in the academy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Tisdell, E. J. (1993). Interlocking systems of power, privilege, and oppression in adult higher education classes. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 43(4), 203-226.
- Truslow, J. (1931). *Epic of America*. Boston Massachusetts. Little Brown and Company.
- Ungar, M. 2000. "State violence and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (lgbt) rights," *New Political Science*, 22(1), March 1, 61-75.
- Wade, J. C. (1996). African American men's gender role conflict: The significance of racial identity. *Sex Roles*, 34(1), 17-33.
- West, C. (2001). Black sexuality: The taboo subject. In R, Byrd. & Guy-Sheftall (Eds.). *Traps: African American men on gender and sexuality* (pp. 301-307). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Whitehead, T. (1997). Urban low-income African American men, HIV/AIDS, and gender identity. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 11(4), 411- 447.
- Williams-Crenshaw, K. (1995). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. In K. Crenshaw, N. Gotanda, G. Peller, & K. Thomas (Eds.), *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. (pp. 357-383), NY: The New Press.

- Wilson, A.L. (1994). To a Middle Ground: Praxis and Ideology in Adult Education." *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 13(3), 108-122.
- Wilson, A. L. & Hayes, E. R. (2000). *Handbook of adult continuing education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Woodyard, J., Peterson, L., Stokes, J., Joseph, P. (2000). Let us go into the house of the Lord: Participation in African American churches among young African American men who have sex with men. *Journal of Pastoral Care* 54(4), 451-460.
- Wright J. (1993). African-American male sexual behavior and the risk for HIV infection. *Human Organization*, (5) 421-431.
- Wright, R. (1940). *Native son*: New York: Harper Collins Books
- Yoshino, K. (2006). *Covering: The hidden assault on our civil rights*. NY: Random House Publishers
- Zastro., C. & Ashman, K. (1990). *Understanding human behavior and the social environment*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

**HOW BLACK MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN LEARN TO COPE
WITH HOMOPHOBIA AND RACISM**

1. I would like to discuss your life EXPERIENCES as a BMSM.
 - a) What is your level of comfort with your sexual orientation?
 - b) Describe your experiences with homophobia/racism
 - c) How have these experiences affected or changed you?
 - d) What is more important your race or your sexual identity? And why?
 - e) What positive lessons have you learned from your experiences as a
BMSM
 - f) What negative lessons have you learned from your experiences as a
BMSM
2. These next questions ask about how you cope with racism and,
homophobia.
 - a.) How did your up-bringing impact your sexuality? This includes
issues such as coming-out.
 - b). How do you think others react to your sexual orientation?
 - c.) How do you cope with their reactions?
 - d). What do you think about the Black community's perspective on
homosexuality?

- e.) How does homosexuality fit within your spiritual religious beliefs?
- f.) As a BMSM, how do you see racism as impacting issues related to masculinity

3. These next questions ask about how you learned your coping strategies in dealing with homophobia, racism and masculinity.

- a) Tell me about any significant learning experiences you had to help to cope with the homophobia and racism you have experienced?
- b) How did you learn from these experiences?
- c) Based on your own experience and what you have learned, what advice would give to a friend or a younger Black man who is experiencing challenges as a BMSM?

We have completed the interview. Before ending our discussion, are there any comments related to any of the topics we have discussed? Are there any additional questions that you would like to ask? Is there anything that that I didn't ask about that you would like to share?

Thank you very much for your time and contribution.

APPENDIX B

PRE - INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

**HOW BLACK MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN LEARN TO COPE WITH
HOMOPHOBIA AND RACISM.**

The following questions are meant to find out more about who you are and what you believe. There are no right answers to these questions. Please answer them as honestly as you can. Do not put your name or any other identifying information on this survey!!!!

General: The first section asks general questions about you. Each question in this section is looking for one answer.

How old are you? _____

Where were you born? (city) _____

(country) _____

How would you describe your religious background? (Please pick one)

____ Protestant (Baptist, Episcopalian, Methodist, Presbyterian)

____ Catholic

____ Spiritual

____ Non-denominational

____ Muslim

____ Other (Please describe) _____

What word best describes your sexual orientation? (Please pick one)

- Heterosexual
- Homosexual
- Gay
- Bisexual
- Same gender-loving
- Two-spirited
- Other (Please describe) _____

Education/Work: The following questions ask about your education, job training, and work experience.

What is the highest level of formal education you have completed? (Pick one)

- Less than 9th Grade
- 9th – 11th Grade
- High school diploma/GED
- Some college
- College degree (BA, BS)
- Graduate Degree (Masters, PhD, MD, JD)
- Technical school
- Job training
- Other (Please describe) _____

Do you have a job right now? Yes No

If yes: Job title _____

If yes: (Please check one that best describes the nature of your work)

- Professional

- Office
- Retail
- Entertainment
- Social Services
- Skilled Labor
- Restaurant
- Other (please specify) _____

What is your yearly income? (Pick one)

- Less than \$15,000/year
- \$15,001 - \$20,000/year
- \$20,001 - \$30,000/year
- \$30,001 - \$45,000/year
- \$45,001 - \$60,000/year
- Greater than \$60,000/year

APPENDIX C

INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH SUBJECTS

HOW BLACK MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN LEARN TO COPE WITH HOMOPHOBIA AND RACISM

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Lawrence Bryant: Doctoral Candidate at the University of Georgia is doing this study to fulfill the dissertation requirement for the Doctorate of Philosophy in Life Long Education Administration and Policy. This research will help understand how Black Men Who Have Sex With Men learn to cope with issues such as internalized homophobia and racism. You are asked to participate in this study because you are a Black man who has sex with other men.

B. PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in the study, the following will occur:

1. Complete a brief written survey that asks general questions about you. It should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete this survey, and you will not be asked to put your name or any other identifying information on this survey.
2. You will sit down for a one-on-one interview with the researcher who will ask you questions about your life experiences as a Black man and as a man who has sex with other men. You will also be asked more specific questions about homophobia, racism and masculinity and how these issues impact your life. It should take approximately 1.5 hours to complete the interview, and the entire interview will be audiotaped with a handheld recorder.

C. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

1. Some of the questions in the survey ask about personal issues, and may be uncomfortable to answer. You do not have to answer any questions that you are not comfortable with.
2. Some of the interview questions ask about sensitive life experiences and may be uncomfortable. You are free to decline to answer any of these questions, and you may stop or leave the interview at any time.
3. Confidentiality: Participation in research will involve a loss of privacy; however, your records will be handled as confidentially as possible. You will not be asked to put your name or any other identifying information on the written survey. No personal identifying information will be included on the audiotape of the interview, and only study personnel will have access to your survey and interview audiotape. After the interview has been transcribed to paper from the tapes, the tapes will be destroyed. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications that may result from this study.

D. BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information that you provide will be useful in helping health professionals and social service agencies better understand the life experiences of Black men who have sex with men.

E. COSTS

There will be no costs to you as a result of taking part in this study.

F. PAYMENT

Interviewees will not be compensated for participation in this study

G. QUESTIONS

If you have any additional questions, you may call the researcher at (number omitted for reasons of privacy)

You have any comments or concerns about participation in this study you should first talk with the researcher. If for some reason you do not wish to do this, you may contact the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the committee office between 8:00 and 5:00, Monday through Friday @ 1-706-542-3000

PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point.

You can keep this information form after you complete the interview.