CLEANING OUT THE PROVERBIAL CLOSET: DELAYS IN THE COMING OUT PROCESS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN GAY AND LESBIAN ADOLESCENTS

A dissertation presented to the faculty of

ANTIOCH UNIVERSITY SANTA BARBARA

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the

DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY
in
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

By

Sade C. Carswell, M.A.P.
May 2018
CLEANING OUT THE PROVERBIAL CLOSET:
DELAYS IN THE COMING OUT PROCESS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN
GAY AND LESBIAN ADOLESCENTS

This dissertation, by Sade C. Carswell, has been approved by the committee members
signed below who recommend that it be accepted by the faculty of Antioch University
Santa Barbara in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

Dissertation Committee:

____________________________________
Betsy Bates Freed, Psy D.
Chairperson

____________________________________
Ron Pilato, Psy D
Second Faculty

____________________________________
Madeline Wesh, Psy D.
External Expert
Abstract

The coming out process can be a difficult transition for adolescents to endure, and can result in an array of mental, emotional, and social challenges. This can be especially true for gay, lesbian, and bisexual African American adolescents. This study explores factors that may create barriers for adolescents from beginning or completing the transition of coming out, and how those factors in combination with unique factors of being an African American adolescent affect the coming out process. The study’s findings were produced utilizing a phenomenological research method: a semi-structured interview accompanied by demographic questionnaire (Merriam, 2009). Results of the study indicate that for many of the participants, being African American caused pause, consideration, or delays in coming completely out to their friends, family, and community. Commons themes that emerged from the interviews were identified and labelled Unaccepted, Religious Reasons, Fear of Rejection, Anxious, Acceptance, Avoiding, African American Ideal Status/Masculinity, Denial, Alone/Isolation, Not Pressured to Come Out, and Self-Hatred. This Dissertation is available in Open Access at AURA: Antioch University Repository and Archive, http://aura.antioch.edu and OhioLink ETD Center, http://www.ohiolink.edu/etd
Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank those who assisted me in completing this arduous task. To my committee members: Dr. Betsy Bates Freed and Dr. Ron Pilato, thank you for being patient, supportive, and for editing quickly with precision. Thank you, Dr. Madeline Wesh, for all of your help and support you provided through this process. I also need to thank my parents and Uncle Dane for always supporting me and encouraging me in all that I do. Lastly, a special thanks to the ladies from my cohort, Alexis Judd, Amanda Schnibben, Whitney Dunbar, and Courtney Keene-Viscomi for being my friends, always being a shoulder cry on, and just being there even when we weren’t all together.
## Table of Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................................... iv

Acknowledgements ....................................................................................................................... v

List of Tables ................................................................................................................................ ix

I. Introduction ........................................................................................................................... 1

II. Literature Review .................................................................................................................. 4

  Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity Development Models ....................................................... 4

    Cass model .............................................................................................................................. 4

    Trodien model ......................................................................................................................... 6

  General Delays in the Coming Out Process ............................................................................ 8

    Fear of isolation and rejection ............................................................................................... 8

    Fear of victimization ............................................................................................................. 11

    Substance abuse .................................................................................................................... 12

    Lack of resources .................................................................................................................. 13

  Ethnic Identity Development ................................................................................................. 16

    Minority identity development model .................................................................................. 16

    Black racial identity development model ............................................................................. 17

  Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual African American Adolescents ...................................................... 18

    Lack of positive social influence .......................................................................................... 19

    Religion and family values ................................................................................................. 22
Multiple minority discrimination ......................................................... 25
Possible Effects of an Incomplete Process ............................................. 26
Internalized oppression, the “down low,” and mental health .................. 26
Summary and the Current Study ............................................................. 28

III. Methodology .................................................................................. 30

Introduction .......................................................................................... 30
Rationale for the Use of Qualitative Research Methodology .................. 30
Validity and Reliability ......................................................................... 34
Possible Ethical Concerns, Risks, and Benefits ..................................... 35
Participants ......................................................................................... 37
Procedures ............................................................................................ 38
Data Analysis ......................................................................................... 40

IV. Results ............................................................................................ 43

Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants .............................. 43
Themes ................................................................................................. 45

Theme #1: Unaccepted ......................................................................... 46
Theme #2: Fear of rejection ................................................................. 48
Theme #3: Religious reasons ............................................................... 49
Theme #4: African American ideal status ........................................... 50

V. Discussion ....................................................................................... 53
Fearing Isolation and Rejection ................................................................. 53
Substance Abuse .................................................................................. 55
Resources and Positive Social Influences in the African American Community .......... 55
Implication of Findings ........................................................................ 56
Study Limitations ............................................................................... 57
Suggestions for Future Research .......................................................... 58
References ......................................................................................... 61
Appendix A: Recruitment Advertisement .............................................. 75
Appendix B: Adult Consent for Participation in Research ...................... 76
Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire ............................................ 80
Appendix D: Interview Questions ......................................................... 82
Appendix E: Tables ............................................................................. 83
Table 1: Demographic Information ....................................................... 83
Table 2: Themes .................................................................................. 83
List of Tables

Table 1: Demographic Information .......................................................... 83

Table 2: Themes ................................................................................. 83
I. Introduction

Adolescence is a time for exploring, growing, and learning who one is and who one wants to be in adulthood. During this time of puberty, a person goes through many changes: physical, emotional, mental, and sexual. While these changes are occurring, the adolescent is also attempting to establish positive sexual, gender, racial, and ethnic identities for her or himself. All of these changes can be overwhelming and confusing to the average adolescent and pose extra challenges for adolescents who are dealing with both the changes of puberty and the process inherent in coming to terms with identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB). This transition can be particularly difficult for African American adolescents who are trying to develop a healthy sense of self. These adolescents must attempt to forge a positive racial/ethnic identity while also defining their sexual identity as non-heterosexual, despite negative connotations applied to their race and possibly struggling with their family and community’s views of being LGB. Only once they overcome these hurdles can they begin to try to integrate the two identities into one person, which tends to cause internal conflict (Holmes & Cahill, 2004).

The African American community is reportedly less tolerant regarding homosexuality than other cultures (Bonilla & Porter, 1990; Ritter & Terndrup, 2002). African American culture emphasizes the institutions of marriage, family, children and community, and views homosexuality as a threat to those values and the continuation of the culture (Holmes & Cahill, 2004; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Ritter & Terndrup, 2002). The community stigmatizes LGB youth as being anti-family, anti-community, and non-propagating, thus causing LGB youth to feel isolated from the African American culture (Holmes & Cahill, 2004; Newman &
Muzzonigro, 1993; Ritter & Terndrup, 2002). To cope with these challenges, most LGB youth require "strong personal resources and multiple strategies for developing and maintaining a positive sense of self in the face of negative feedback from others” (Safren & Pantalone, 2006, p 66). However, very few adolescents, much less African American adolescents, have developed these types of resources and therefore, LGB youth may be at heightened risk for depression, anxiety, hopelessness, substance abuse, and other mental health difficulties (Safren & Pantalone, 2006). It is essential that clinicians fully understand what factors may delay the completion of the coming out process of LGB youth in order to better help our African American adolescent population develop healthy sexual identities. It is only after clinicians understand the role these factors play that they will be able to put preventative measures and successful treatments into effect for the LGB African American youth of our society.

There is very little research being done on the non-Caucasian gay and lesbian adolescent population (Consolacion, Russell, & Sue, 2004; Mustanski, Birkett, Greene, Rosario, Bostwick, & Evertt, 2014). North American society has experienced a significant increase in the percentage of adolescents, primarily Caucasian, who come out to their families and peers since the 1990’s. Ensuing research has predominantly centered on middle class, well educated, Caucasian youth, and cannot be generalized to more diverse populations (i.e. individuals with lower or higher socio-economic status, the less educated, or ethnic minorities) (Potoczniak, Crosbie-Burnett, & Saltzburg, 2009). With each generation coming out at a younger age than the one before (Savin-Williams & Cohen, 2015), our society needs to be prepared and educated on how to circumvent future adolescents -- both African American and non-African American -- from developing unhealthy sexual identities or suffering from avoidable mental health conditions.
The purpose of this phenomenological study is to offer further insight into the factors that cause delays in the coming-out process, how delays in the process affect adolescents, and what long-term effects ensue (unhealthy sexual identity, psychopathologies, etc.). Participants in this study are African American adolescents representing a diverse range of socioeconomic statuses, locations, ages, religions, and genders. The research explored potential contributors to delays in the coming out process, including cultural issues, religion, social networks, substance abuse, motivation, family values, discrimination, and community resources. It is only when mental health professionals are able to grasp these factors and their effects that they will be able to educate society and hopefully protect our gay and lesbian adolescents.

**Research Question:** What cultural influences increase delays in the coming out process of African American gay and lesbian individuals?
II. Literature Review

Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity Development Models

A person’s first sexual attraction typically begins in middle childhood around the age of 10, and this attraction sets the development of one’s sexual identity into motion (Broderick & Blewitt, 2003; D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pinklington, 1998; Harrison, 2003;). In Newman and Muzzonigro’s 1993 study, a majority of subjects reported the realization that they may have been LGB between the ages of 8 and 16 years old; the youngest age reported was 3. The subjects disclosed experiencing their first same-sex crush between 11 and 14 years old. Newer research suggests that the age at which individuals first experience same-sex attraction has decreased to 7 to 9 years old (Savin-Williams & Cohen, 2015). In 1998, Savin-Williams found that 90% of adolescents make their first disclosure of non-heterosexuality to a non-parental figure; the majority of first disclosures are made to same-age peers (pg. 54). Several stage models have been published that attempt to describe the process individuals may experience during the development of their sexual identity. Classic theories such as the Cass and Trodien models have been the primary sexual identity models from which other models have been developed (Marszelek, Cashwell, Dunn, & Jones, 2004).

Cass model. The first model of homosexual identity development was published by Vivienne Cass in 1979. The Cass Homosexual Identity Formation Model consists of six stages and combines a psychosocial perspective and the interpersonal congruency theory (Cass, 1979). The first stage is Identity Confusion, in which an individual experiences confusion due to perceiving that they may be experiencing homosexual feelings, thoughts, or actions. As the individual sorts through their confused feelings, they begin to consider what a homosexual identity means for them, either accepting it as positive or negative, or rejecting the possibility
entirely by foreclosing any further development. It is considered identity foreclosure if an individual chooses to cease any further development of a homosexual identity. Foreclosure may occur during any stage of this model (Cass, 1979; Cass, 1984).

If an individual successfully completes the identity confusion stage, then they progress into Stage 2: Identity Comparison. Once the individual has accepted their homosexual identity, they begin to acknowledge possible feelings of alienation as the differences between homosexuals and non-homosexuals become more apparent. They may begin reaching out to other homosexuals in or around their community to decrease their feelings of alienation, and in turn increase the likelihood that they will continue to accept a homosexual identity (Cass, 1979; Cass, 1984). If identity foreclosure occurs at this stage, the individual may view their attraction to the same sex as a one-time experience, and come to believe that they can choose to be heterosexual if they so desire. Identity foreclosure at this stage can increased the risk of self-hatred and self-harm (Cass, 1979; Cass, 1984).

The third stage in this model is Identity Tolerance. As the individual becomes more comfortable with their newfound homosexual identity, they begin to seek out other homosexuals to fulfill social, sexual, and emotional needs. These interactions are often categorized as “necessary” rather than “desirable” (Cass, 1979; Cass, 1984). During this time the individual is often living two separate personas: the public image (appearing heterosexual), and the private image (the new homosexual identity) that is exhibited only in the company of other homosexuals and the limited non-homosexuals to whom they may have disclosed to their homosexuality (Cass, 1984).

During the Identity Acceptance stage (Stage 4) the individual increases their contact with the homosexual subculture; they begin to have a more positive view of homosexuality and
develop a stable network within the community. The individual continues to display a heterosexual lifestyle in certain situations in order to avoid others’ negative reactions/feelings toward homosexuality. They are selective in their disclosures to friends and family, depending upon their own prediction of how each person may respond (Cass, 1979; Cass, 1984). If the individual is able to maintain acceptance of homosexuality and is able to maintain strategies to handle the antagonistic views of others, the individual will begin to move toward the next stage: Identity Pride (Cass, 1979; Cass, 1984). By this stage, the individual has begun to develop a sense of pride regarding their homosexual identity and loyalty to the homosexual community. The individual also may develop feelings of anger toward society’s stigmatization of the homosexual community and choose to promote equality and validity of homosexuals. They begin disclosing to others more frequently and have decreased qualms regarding confronting those whom oppose the homosexual lifestyle (Cass, 1979; Cass, 1984). As the individual’s disclosures are met with more positive reactions, they become more prepared to move into the final stage. During Stage 6, Identity Synthesis, the individual views their homosexual identity less as being an overwhelming intrusion, and more as just a component of their identity as a whole. They also increase their contact with the supportive heterosexual individuals in their lives, while decreasing their interactions with unsupportive/antagonistic individuals (Cass, 1979; Cass, 1984).

**Trodien model.** Another recognized stage model of sexual identity development is the Trodien Model. This model consists of six stages that develop over time. The first stage, occurring around age 10, is the Sensitization or Early Awareness stage. In this stage, the child experiences their very first same-sex attraction and begins to feel different from their peers (Broderick & Blewitt, 2003; Halpin, 2006; Harrison, 2003; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993;
Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000). The second stage is the Identity Confusion stage; the awareness of the same-sex attractions can no longer be ignored. During this stage the adolescent may become distressed, feel guilt and shame, and may use coping mechanisms such as denial. The adolescent becomes hypervigilant regarding self-monitoring behaviors, clothing, and body image. During this stage, the adolescent may also overtly try to prove their heterosexuality by having relationships with members of the opposite-sex and may go as far as having sexual intercourse and getting pregnant. This stage can either end with the adolescent in denial of their homosexual feelings and repressing their same-sex attraction, or accepting their homosexual identity (Halpin, 2006; Harrison, 2003; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000). Hiding one’s sexual orientation hinders and distorts the development of same-sex friendship skills and dating skills, and can lead to risky sexual behavior (Harrison, 2003).

The third stage is the Identity Assumption stage (the precursor to the coming out process). The adolescent integrates their new homosexual identity into their life and begins disclosing to a limited number of individuals (Halpin, 2004; Harrison, 2003; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000). Typically, the individual chooses one of their best friends or a sibling to disclose to first. The fourth stage is Identity Consolidation, also known as the “coming out” process; the adolescent discloses their sexual orientation/identity to others. In this stage, the individual incorporates their homosexual or bisexual identity into various social aspects of his or her life. They will then begin to tell their friends, family, coworkers, and other people in their life. During this stage the individual consciously recognizes and accepts his or her sexual identity. Males in this stage tend to be very selective with whom they come out to. Females in this stage tend to feel more comfortable about coming out to their peers and family, and during their coming out process they acquire new social and political
The fifth stage is Identity Pride; the adolescent is able to address the incongruencies between their positive self as a LGB person and society’s negative perception of the LGB community. During this stage, adolescents tend to reject heterosexual society (Halpin, 2004). In the final stage, Identity Synthesis, the adolescent experiences positive interaction with the heterosexual world and begins to realize that society’s rigid views of homosexuals are inaccurate. During this stage the adolescent comes to the conclusion that their LGB status is only part of who they are, instead of what wholly defines them (Halpin, 2004). Attitudes held by both an adolescent’s peers and family, as well as the quality of their social support network, impact the progression, timeline, and ease of the coming out process (Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993). If the adolescent fears rejection or abuse from his or her social network, they may avoid disclosure and become stuck in the Identity Confusion stage. This fixation can be harmful to their identity formation (Halpin, 2004; Harrison, 2003; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000).

General Delays in the Coming Out Process

Fear of isolation and rejection. One of the major factors that affects an individual’s coming out process is the deep-seated fear that they may lose their family’s love and support by coming out (Carrion & Lock, 1997). Harrison (2003) found that a family’s reaction often follows a similar pattern to Kubler- Ross’s stages of grieving. Parents initially experience fear and guilt but then tend to slip into denial, followed by anger, bargaining, depression, and for some, acceptance. Galazter-Levy and Cohler (2002) found that the parents’ responses were often tied to how the adolescent disclosed their orientation. The greater the fear of rejection the
adolescent felt, the more negatively they would present their sexuality to their parents, which, in turn, would solicit a negative reaction from their parents.

In a 2003 study, Ford found that LGB youths who perceive themselves to have positive resources are less likely to express their sexual identity than those who have weak family relations. Individuals with weak family ties are more likely to come out to their parents because they feel they have nothing to lose. Adolescents with strong family relationships are less likely to seek resources in the gay community or to come out to their family out of fear of being rejected, kicked out, or even physically punished (Ford, 2003; Galatzer-Levy & Cohler, 2002). D’Augelli (1998) found that about 50% of mothers reject their children for being homosexual or bisexual (as cited in Harrison, 2003). Approximately 26% of gay and lesbian youth are forced to leave home due to conflicts over their sexual orientation, and 40% of homeless youth in the United States identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (Bernal, 2005). Potoczniak, et al.’s (2009) study of 202 LGB youths (35% of whom were African American) revealed that 3% of the individuals who disclosed their sexuality to their families had been kicked out of their homes and/or were currently estranged from family. The study also found that fathers tend to be more than twice as likely as mothers to have a negative reaction to their child coming out which, especially for males who are close to their father, can be a major deterrent to coming out from a fear of losing that important relationship.

In a survey of 500 adolescents from the Hetrick-Martin Institution (a non-profit organization devoted to advocacy, social support, and programming needs for LGBT youth), 40% of participants reported being violently attacked; 46% of those attacks were specifically because of their orientation and 61% of the attacks occurred from within the adolescent’s family (Proctor & Groze, 1994). In a 1999 study by D’Augelli, Hershberger and Pinlkington, of 194
LGB adolescents between the ages of 14 and 21 (68% Caucasian youth and 32% youth of color),
several reported verbal abuse (28% by mothers, 19% by fathers), physical threats (5% by
mothers, 4% by fathers), and physical attacks (5% by mothers, 3% by fathers). In a sample of
147 gay and bisexual male adolescents (7.3% identified as African American), one-third of the
participants reported at least one suicide attempt, and half had made more than one attempt
(Proctor & Groze, 1994). One-third of the cases made the attempts in the same year that the
adolescent self-identified as gay or bisexual. Nearly half (44%) of the suicide attempts were
made as a result of family problems, and 33% were attributed to personal or interpersonal issues
such as isolation, bullying, and depression. Thirty percent of respondents reported suffering
from depression, and 22% reported suffering from troubling interpersonal issues with their peers
(Proctor & Groze, 1994). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual adolescents are in danger of being
victimized not only by peers and family members, but also sometimes by their own minds.

Isolation can take many forms, such as social, emotional, or informational isolation, all of
which can cause confusion, frustration, and depression for the individual (Holmes & Cahill,
2004; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993). Isolation occurs when one of two things happen. The
adolescent does not feel it is safe for him or her to come out to those around them; the fear of
rejection itself can then cause isolation for the adolescent. Alternatively, the adolescent comes
out to their family, peers, and community and is subsequently rejected, harassed, attacked, and/or
demeaned by their family, peers, and society. Because of their young age, adolescents lack
independent resources and may have considerable difficulties accessing support (Goode & Good

According to Hershberger and D'Augelli (2000), there are six major stressors in the lives
of LGB adolescents that negatively affect their mental health:
• Their invisibility;
• Assumptions from others that they are defective;
• Stigmatization that follows the assumption of deviance;
• Others’ assumptions that all lesbian and gay individuals are alike;
• The absence of positive role models;

The development of a “negative self” results from relentless heterosexism and homophobia from the adolescent’s peers. These six stressors may contribute to adolescents’ sense of isolation and can lead to depression. Any type of isolation during such a critical time in an adolescent’s development can be harmful to their mental health, especially when they are in need of support and guidance while navigating through coming to terms with their sexual orientation (Hershberger and D'Augelli, 2000; Holmes & Cahill, 2004; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993).

**Fear of victimization.** Studies have shown LGB adolescents are almost twice as likely to experience victimization as their heterosexual peers throughout high school (Consolacion, et al, 2004; Misawa, 2010; Robinson, Espelage & Rivers, 2013). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth may experience harassment and violence, and may have little or no support from their community, school, family, or friends (Holmes & Cahill, 2004). In a 2001 national school climate survey (as cited in Holmes & Cahill, 2004), 85% of participating LGB students reported hearing homophobic remarks often or on a frequent basis from their peers. Eighty percent reported that they had been verbally harassed over the previous twelve months due to their orientation, and 40% said the harassment occurred often or frequently. One in five of the LGB students reported being physically assaulted over the previous year due to their orientation. Seventy percent of the LGB students surveyed reported not feeling safe in school (Holmes &
Cahill, 2004). In a 1995 study of 1,001 LGB youth, Hershberger & D'Augelli (2000) found that 81% of youth had reported being verbally assaulted, 44% had been threatened with physical violence, 23% reported having personal property damaged, 33% had objects thrown at them, 30% had been chased, 13% reported being spat on, 17% had been physically assaulted, 10% had been assaulted with a weapon, and 22% reported being sexually assaulted. In a 1999 Massachusetts youth risk behavior survey, LGB students were found to be three times more likely to have been assaulted or involved in a physical altercation at school than heterosexual students (Holmes & Cahill, 2004). They were also three times more likely to be threatened or injured by a weapon at school, and four times more likely to skip school because they felt unsafe (Holmes & Cahill, 2004). A study at Des Moines Public High School found that high school students hear an anti-gay comment every seven minutes on average, and that teachers will intervene on behalf of a gay student only 3% of the time (Holmes & Cahill, 2004). During a 2005 study of 245 Latin and Caucasian adolescents, it was found that males are more likely than females to be both verbally and physically assaulted, especially if the adolescents do not conform to societal gender norms (Russell et al., 2011). Button, O’Connell and Gealt’s study of 6,636 participants (70% Caucasian and 30% African American) suggest that between 57 and 92% of adolescents who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or are questioning their sexuality have been verbally, physically, or sexually victimized by peers (2012). For some adolescents, fear of being victimized simply for being a non-heterosexual could be enough reason to stay in the closet.

Substance abuse. Many LGB adolescents self-medicate with drugs and alcohol in an attempt to cope with the confusion, frustration, denial, abuse, and depression that accompany coming out. Non-heterosexual adolescents have an increased use of both alcohol and drugs, when compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Busseri 2006; Consolacion, et al, 2004;
Marshal, Friedman, Stall, & Thompson, 2009; Russell, 2006). In Remafedi’s 1987 study, 60% of the 137 LGB males interviewed met the diagnostic criteria in DSM-III-R for substance abuse (Kreiss & Patterson, 1997; Ritter & Terndrup, 2002). A youth risk behavior survey in 1993 discovered that LGB youths had a high incidence of alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, and other illegal drug use, and began using these substances at a younger age than heterosexual youth. The age that most began using the substance tended to coincide with the age they began questioning their sexuality (Russell, 2006). In a six-year study by Russell (2006), interviews with 12,000 youths in grades seven through twelve from Puerto Rican, Cuban, Chinese and African American backgrounds, revealed significant differences in the drinking and drug usage of gay or bisexual, versus heterosexual, adolescents of color. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual adolescents were almost twice as likely to abuse both alcohol and drugs, compared to the heterosexual adolescents. Marshal, Friedman, Stall, & Thompson report that stressors such as harassment and/or discrimination (2009) increase the risk of substance abuse substantially.

Besides being harmful to one’s identity development, the use of substances can also place the adolescent in difficult and dangerous situations; it can increase the chances of physical and sexual abuse by decreasing the adolescents’ awareness, or it can influence the adolescent to come out to people that they may otherwise realize were unsafe (Ritter & Terndrup, 2002; Russell, 2006).

Lack of resources. For the average adolescent, a large portion of the week is spent at school, which they view as a safe haven from the world; this is not always true for LGB students. In many areas, tend to ignore the fact that they serve LGB students. In doing so, they fail to provide policies to ensure the safety of those students. There are few schools that provide support for their LGB students or that educate teachers about how to nurture and support healthy
development in their LGB students, as well as protecting them from harassment. In many schools, teachers are prohibited from discussing sexual orientation with students (Ford, 2003). According to Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)’s 2009 National School Climate Survey, despite the U.S. Department of Education approving inclusive curriculum, many state and district boards prohibit or limit the information dispersed to students, especially in health and sexual education classes (Kosciw; Greytak; Bartkiewicz; Boesen; & Palmer, 2012).

In another 2015 National School Climate Survey, 42.4% of students reported that they were unable to locate books related to LGBT topics, for example, LGBT history, and 49% reported that many keywords related to LGBT topics or websites are blocked by school servers (Kosciw; Greytak; Giga; Villenas; & Danischewski, 2016). Busseri found that LGB students had a lower sense of belonging to their school; school belonging was characterized as a personal feeling of being respected and valued at school (2006).

Besides not feeling safe at school, LGB youths are not being educated about the LGB community. These adolescents are not presented with positive historical or current LGB role models, instructed on how to maintain safety during coming out or daily life, or offered orientation-relevant resources (Hershberger and D’Augelli, 2000; Holmes and Cahill, 2004). Furthermore, there is often no instruction for heterosexual students on how not to be prejudiced, discriminating or harassing to LGB students (Holmes and Cahill, 2004). In a 1998 study of 276 high school students given the Homosexual Attitudes Scale-Revised, it was found that males were more prejudiced against LGB individuals than females; prejudice increased for both gender groups between the seventh and ninth grades; and same-sex prejudice was greater than opposite-sex prejudice. The author concluded that even though LGB adolescents are coming out at younger ages, they are receiving less peer support (Ford, 2003). This lack of education makes
the LGB lifestyle seem inferior to the lifestyle of heterosexuals, and therefore the adolescent feels as if he or she should be ashamed of who they are. That shame affects the feeling of self-worth, interest, and mood (Holmes and Cahill, 2004). Poteat, Sinclair, DiGiovanni, Koenig, & Russell found that even in schools providing gay-straight alliances (GSAs), without additional factors such as inclusive curriculum, school-based counseling, enforced protective policies, and anti-bullying programs, LGB students still experience victimization, isolation, and rejection from their peers at higher rates (2012). Though GSAs do not eliminate all challenges LGB students face in school, a study of 17,366 7th-12th grade students (76.2% White, 6.5% Black, 6.5% multiracial, 3.7% Hispanic, 2.0% Asian, and 5% other) found that adolescents who were regularly involved in GSAs were less likely to attempt suicide than those attending schools without GSAs (Poteat, et al., 2012).

Fear of isolation/rejection from loved ones, fear of victimization in the community and at home, substance abuse, and lack of resources are just a few major influences that have been found in previous research to prevent individuals from coming out. Many of these studies either do not specify ethnicity/cultural demographics, combine all non-Caucasian participants together by labeling them “youths of color,” or represent such a low percentage of African American participants that it is difficult to generalize findings to the community as a whole. In many of the studies discussed in this review of literature, African American participants barely account for 10% of the samples, and are only discussed briefly, if at all, in the results. According to the National Youth Advocacy Coalition in 2002, in the 30 years prior there were 166 academic journal articles and chapters published on LGBT youth. Of those, only 14 articles and 2 chapters focused on non-Caucasian LGBT youth (Holmes & Cahill, 2004). The intent of this study is to
expand upon and explore additional factors delaying the coming out process that may be specific to the African American experience.

**Ethnic Identity Development**

**Minority identity development model.** In addition to the goal of developing a healthy sexual and gender identity/role, African American adolescents must also establish a positive racial identity, despite the negative stereotypes that society has attached to their race (Consolacion, et al., 2004). In doing so, the adolescent often finds him or herself discouraged from exhibiting any sexual orientation other than heterosexuality. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual adolescents find that there are few resources available to them to help validate their identities, and they do not receive the same social support that heterosexual minority adolescents may have received (Consolacion, et al, 2004).

Much like sexual identity development theories, ethnic identity development has also been explored with both stage and fluid theories. Each theory begins with the realization of difference from the majority population and leads the individual to integrating ethnicity into their personality as a whole in a healthy manner (Jamil, Harper, & Fernandez, 2009).

The Phinney Model of Ethnic Identity Development is a three-stage model. The first stage, Unexamined Ethnic Identity, involves the individual recognizing the existence of ethnicity and, in particular, that their ethnicity may be a social minority. During the next stage, Ethnic Identity Search/Moratorium, the individual (typically in adolescence) begins gathering information regarding their own ethnicity, gaining an understanding of their culture, and exploring his/her feelings in relation to the information discovered. In the final stage of this theory, Ethnic Identity Achievement, individuals are able to combine their ethnicity identity with
their identity as a whole in a positive manner and are able to be both aware of and appreciate other ethnicities (Phinney, 1989).

**Black racial identity development model.** In the 1970s William Cross developed the Nigrescence theory and described the transition that takes place during the Black racial identity development (Ritchey, 2014). Cross’ model consisted of five stages: Preencounter, Encounter, Immersion/Emersion, Internalization, and Internalization-Commitment. During the Preencounter stage an individual holds very little emphasis on race and often seeks to assimilate with the Caucasian community; i.e., being raised with and accepting Caucasian westernized ideology (Cross, 1991; Ritchey, 2014). The Encounter phase begins when an individual is forced to acknowledge the ways racism and race relations may influence their life (Cross, 1991). The individual will begin to identity and reflect upon negative beliefs and feelings that they have developed toward the Black community (Ritchey, 2014). It is during the Immersion/Emersion stage that the individual begins to seek out information regarding Black culture, while slowly divesting their previous developed constructs (Ritchey, 2014). Often this stage evolves in conjunction with a sense of anger toward the Caucasian culture and an immersion in Black art, music, and history (Cross, 1991; Ritchey, 2014). As they incorporate and accept their new Black identity, the individual internalizes their newfound feelings and knowledge regarding their culture during the Internalization phase. They actively embrace their own community but are able to establish and retain meaningful relationships with Caucasians who accept and respect their new identity. The individual also begins creating relationships with other oppressed groups (Cross, 1991; Ritchey, 2014). If an individual reaches the Internalization-Commitment stage, they have developed a sense of comfort in their “blackness,” internalizing their positive feelings.
and beliefs regarding the Black community and continuing their interest/education regarding Black culture and racial affairs (Cross, 1991; Ritchey, 2014).

**Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual African American Adolescents**

African Americans make up an estimated 13% of the US population (U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, 2016). The African American culture emphasizes the institution of marriage, family, procreation, community, and religion. In this community, religion is often the primary source of support and refuge; the community generally views homosexuality as a threat to religious values and the continuation of their culture (Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Holmes & Cahill, 2004). Although the African American community is diverse (from many regions, religions/non-religious backgrounds, socio-economic status, etc.), all members share common forms of oppression (a shared history of slavery and centuries of systematic racism). The majority of African American churches openly oppose non-heterosexuality of any kind, and thus followers condemn the LGB lifestyle (Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000). Racial minority adolescents, specifically African Americans, tend to experience an internal conflict when trying to integrate their sexual identity with their cultural beliefs (Holmes & Cahill, 2004; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993). The community stigmatizes their LGB youth as being anti-family, anti-community, and non-propagating, thus causing the LGB youth to feel alienated from their culture and depressed due to a lack of social support (Holmes & Cahill, 2004; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Ritter & Terndrup, 2002). In a survey done by Bonilla and Porter in 1991 of 216 Hispanics, 1,005 African Americans, and 3,760 Caucasian adults, African Americans were found to be less tolerant of homosexuality than Latinos and Caucasians regarding civil liberties and more conservative in their beliefs about the morality of homosexuality (Ritter & Terndrup, 2002). During Lewis’ study of attitudes toward homosexuality and equal rights, 75% of the
7,000 African American participants were prone to believe that homosexual relationships are always wrong. In addition, 33% believed that AIDS is God’s way of punishing people for immoral sexual behavior (2003). While models like those developed by Cass and Trodien have been the standard for describing the transitions from sexual attraction/awareness to full disclosure and integration of sexual orientation, many researchers are unsure if these models are applicable to the identity development of non-Caucasian LGB individuals (Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999).

**Lack of positive social influence.** Because so many African Americans harbor negative attitudes toward the LGB community, there tend to be fewer LGB support organizations/networks in communities that are predominately African American. Youth groups such as the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) and PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) tend to be found in suburban and middle-class Caucasian areas, and not in areas predominantly inhabited by ethnic minorities (Holmes & Cahill, 2004). Washington University Professor Dr. Diana Elze conducted research in 2003 regarding African American LGB teenagers and LGB-related groups. She found that when adolescents are given the opportunity to engage in such groups, teens were significantly more likely to identify as homosexual, and far more likely to disclose their sexuality to their parents, family and peers, than those who had never attended a group (Elze, 2003). In a study completed in 2004, it was found that African American youth tend be less involved in gay-related social activities, endorse less positive attitudes toward homosexuality, and are less comfortable disclosing their sexuality than Caucasian youth. When African American youths were given the opportunity to engage in gay-related social activities/groups, their attitudes toward homosexuality significantly improved;
even more, in fact, than attitudes of the Caucasians in the study (Bowleg, Burkholder, Teti, & Craig, 2008; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter 2004).

In addition to fewer LGB social/support groups, there also tend to be very few positive role models and media representations for young LGB African Americans to look up to. The lack of these positive role models puts pressure on adolescents to conform to heterosexual expectations and forces them to live in cognitive and social isolation (Ford, 2003). While gays and lesbians have gradually become more accepted in mainstream entertainment and media, the majority of characters and actors represented still tend to be Caucasian. Since the Caucasian community tends to possess a more positive attitude toward homosexuality, Caucasian celebrities, media personalities, and athletes feel more comfortable being open regarding their sexuality and are often labeled as being “brave” for disclosing their sexuality to the world. Caucasian youth have a long list of high profile individuals to look up to, increasing their comfort level with their sexuality. In 2012, it was found that Caucasians made up 79% of LGB characters on television, while African Americans only accounted for 9%; none of whom were series regulars (Moore, 2015). Many times, when African American LGB individuals are mentioned in the media it is in conjunction with negative connotations such as being on the “down low” (closeted LGB individuals who engage in same secret sex relationships) or as subjects of stories related to HIV/AIDS (Pitt, 2006). Unfortunately, this is not a new phenomenon. It dates back to the 1970s, during which the few gay male African Americans featured in film and TV tended to be effeminate, eccentric, and socially estranged from their community. Since the 1970s, films and TV series have continued to reinforce these stereotypes by creating gay male characters as comic relief (Edwards, 2013). Edwards noted that it was not until the mid-1990s that film and television writers began creating multi-dimensional LGB
characters who did not adhere to the previously held stereotypes (2013). Savin-Williams’ (2001) found through his research that:

> When compared with previous generations of youths, the proportion who are out is clearly increasing, probably because of the staggering visibility that has been given to individuals with same-sex attractions. It is nearly impossible to open a newspaper or turn on the television without being exposed to the casualness and acceptability with which alternatives to heterosexuality are presented. Popular movies, television shows, recording artists, books, and the Internet have taken the shock out of same-sex attractions (p. 201).

Popular shows such as *Dawson’s Creek, Ellen, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Six Feet Under, Roseanne, One Life to Live, All My Children, Party of Five, Will and Grace, Queer as Folk* and *The L Word* have all made great efforts to provide positive representation, visibility, and demystification of the LGB community (Bernal & Coolhart, 2005; Hart 2000; Netzley, 2010). Despite this evolution, many African American LGB characters are still primarily portrayed as being promiscuous, overtly feminine (for males) or overtly masculine (for females), and typically dealing with issues related to HIV/AIDS (Edwards, 2013). The rare positively portrayed multi-dimensional characters who are LGB of color are usually represented in shows and movies on premium channels such as Showtime and HBO, or specialty channels like Logo and HereTV (which are not available through every cable provider, or come at an additional fee) (Edwards, 2013). *The L Word, Dark Angel, The Wire, Girlfriends, Noah’s Arc, Pretty Little Liars, The Fosters, White Collar, Orange is the New Black,* and *DTLA* are just few of the shows from the last 15 years that have made an effort to provide positive representation, visibility, and demystification of the African American LGB individual (Bernal & Coolhart 2005; Hart 2000; Moore, 2015; Netzley, 2010).
African American LGB adolescents are also witnessing fewer role models in their everyday life than are their Caucasian peers. African American LGB teachers and community leaders are less likely to openly disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity out of fear of losing their jobs and being discriminated against in their community (Majied, 2010). With fewer role models to look up to, less positive representation in the media, and little to no community support, African American adolescents are often left feeling isolated, guilty and ashamed of their natural attraction to the same-sex because of the attitudes and views of those around them.

**Religion and family values.** The African American community, particularly in southern states, greatly embraces religion. A 2004 study found that close to 70% African Americans identify as being religious (Reed & Johnson, 2010). Religions that are frequently practiced in the African American communities are Islam and Christian denominations such as Baptist and Jehovah Witnesses; all of which typically condemn homosexuality as a sin and an abnormality. These faiths often characterize homosexuals as sexual deviants and child molesters, and truly believe that sexual orientation can be changed (Schulte & Battle, 2004). These religions encourage traditional “family values.” Newman and Muzzonigro (1993) defined traditional family values as an emphasis on marriage, procreation, and religion. Families with strong traditional values tend to be less accepting of non-heterosexual communities than less traditional or more progressive families. They also emphasize the importance of traditional gender roles, which can decrease levels of acceptance of anyone who is unable to meet their standards of masculinity or femininity (Lemelle & Battle, 2004; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Ward, 2005).

Traditional churches utilize several Bible verses to justify negative portrayals of homosexuality. In recent studies it has been found that African Americans are more likely to interpret The Bible in a more literal sense than Americans overall (Saad, 2017; Sahgal & Smith,
A 2009 review of religion in the African American community, found that 55% of African Americans vs 33% of general population tend to interpret scripture as the literal word of God (Sahgal & Smith, 2009). In a Gallup News’ 2017 Poll, 29% of non-whites reported believing that the bible was the actual word of God (Saad, 2017). The most popular verses used against homosexuality are Leviticus 18:22, “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination,” and Leviticus 20:13, “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.” (English Standard Version). Another often utilized Bible story is Sodom and Gomorrah, which depicts God terminating an entire city’s population due to acts of homosexuality (Genesis Chapter 19:1-29). In addition to Leviticus and Genesis, there are four other chapter verses cited as justification of negative views on homosexuality by several religious sects. It is stated in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (Berean Study Bible):

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who submit to nor perform homosexual acts, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor verbal abusers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

Romans chapter 1:26 -27 (Berean Study Bible) states,

For this reason God gave them over to dishonorable passions. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. Likewise, the men abandoned natural relations with women and burned with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Judges Chapter 19 verses 22–25 (English Standard Version), implies that the rape/gang rape of a female is more morally acceptable than homosexual acts. It reads:
As they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, worthless fellows, surrounded the house, beating on the door. And they said to the old man, the master of the house, “Bring out the man who came into your house, that we may know him.” And the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, “No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not do this vile thing. Behold, here are my virgin daughter and his concubine. Let me bring them out now. Violate them and do with them what seems good to you, but against this man do not do this outrageous thing.” But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine and made her go out to them. And they knew her and abused her all night until the morning. And as the dawn began to break, they let her go.

In 1 Timothy 1:8–11 (Berean Study Bible), homosexuality is categorized as a murder. It states:

Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it legitimately. We realize that law is not enacted for the righteous, but for the lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for killers of father or mother, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for homosexuals, for slave traders and liars and perjurers, and for anyone else who is averse to sound teaching that agrees with the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted.

In the African American community, church plays a larger role than just a place of worship; it is a place for socialization, entertainment, financial and educational support, and the center of political movements (Goode & Good 2009; Schulte & Battle, 2004; Taylor & Chatter, 1991; Ward, 2005). Because the church plays such a large role in the African American community, its members are both directly and indirectly indoctrinated with anti-homosexual sentiments (Ward, 2005). It has been found that the more involved an individual is in the church,
the more likely they are to have negative attitudes towards the LGB community and the less likely they are to endorse their equal rights (Pitt, 2010; Schulte & Battle, 2004). In the event that an individual who spent their youth in the church no longer attends church, they are likely to continue to live their life according to its teachings and beliefs (Ward, 2005). Through embracing religion, its members adopt the values of marriage, family, procreation, and commitment to community. Therefore, they often stigmatize homosexuality as an affront to their core values and culture. Because of these stigmatizations, the African American LGB individual is often left feeling cognitive dissonance and alienation from their community, family, and culture (Cutts & Parks, 2009; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993).

**Multiple minority discrimination.** African American LGB adolescents face oppression and prejudice from both the mainstream White LGB community and from the heterosexual African American community (Ford, 2003; Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000; Ritter & Terndrup, 2002; Harrison, 2003; Holmes & Cahill, 2004;). If the adolescent is an African American lesbian, she must deal with the above as well as the oppression of sexism (Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000). Because of the double and sometimes triple prejudices they face, African American adolescents tend to have a prolonged Identity Confusion stage, with more difficulty in the Identity Consolidation stages when developing their sexual identity, when compared to Caucasian American adolescents. The adolescent who may already be experiencing social racism will often limit his or her disclosure out of fear that they will have to choose between their cultural community and being LGB (Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000; Harrison, 2003). Limitations on disclosure mean that these adolescents are unable to receive the proper support that they so desperately need (Ford, 2003). Without a sense of community in either their ethnic or the LGB culture, these adolescents are at higher risk of suffering from depression, guilt,
feelings of shame, or self-hate, which will subsequently make it more difficult for them to
disclose their sexual identity (Ford, 2003; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993).

**Possible Effects of an Incomplete Process**

Internalized oppression, the “down low,” and mental health. Without proper support,
challenges and interruptions to an individual’s sexual identity development can drastically affect
an individual’s quality of life and mental health. Unsupported individuals are susceptible to
internalized oppression, psychological issues, and the torment of living a secret life (Balaji, et al
2012; Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Parks, 2001; Szymanski & Gupta, 2009).

Research has shown that internalized oppression, whether it be in response to racism or
homophobia, is more psychologically damaging to an individual than external oppression, (i.e.
harassment and discrimination) (Szymanski & Gupta, 2009). Pheterson (1986) has defined
internalized oppression as:

The incorporation and acceptance by individuals within an oppressed group of the
prejudices against them within the dominant society. This type of oppression is likely to
involve elements of self-hatred, self-concealment, fear of violence and feelings of
inferiority, resignation, isolation, powerlessness, and gratefulness for being allowed to
survive. And is the mechanism within an oppressive system for perpetuating domination
not only by external control but also by building subservience into the minds of the
oppressed groups. (p.146)

Through the effects of internalized oppression, individuals often suffer from increased risk of
depression, lower self-esteem, and shame (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Parks, 2001). Lack of
familial and community support have been linked to an increased probability of internalized
oppression among African American LGB adolescents (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009). This can
often lead the adolescent, and later the adult, to live two separate lives. The individual may attempt to live life as heterosexual when in the company of family and certain community members, while revealing their true identity online, with specific friends, and/or away from their community, as a way for them to live as their true self while also maintaining their positive status in their family and community (Balaji, Oster, Viall, Heffelfinger, Mena, & Toledo, 2012; Choi et. al. 2011). This is often described as “role flexing,” “putting on a persona,” “adjusting to their surroundings,” and/or being on the “down low” (Balaji, et al, 2012; Lapinski, Braz, & Maloney, 2010). This dual life often increases the risk of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse, and also decreases the likelihood the individual will obtain health care and accurate information regarding sex risks, due to fear of being discovered (Lapinski, Braz, & Maloney, 2010; O’Donnell, Meyer, Schwartz, 2011; Selvidge, Matthews & Bridges, 2008).

Challenges occurring during an individual’s coming out process have also been linked to various mental health issues such as adjustment disorders, anxiety, substance abuse, and depression, as well as higher family conflict, lack of social support, loss of home and employment, and reluctance to access health care for both preventative care and treatment (Bowleg, Burkholder, Teti, & Craig, 2008; Choi et. al. 2011; Choi et. al. 2013; Mays, Cochran, & Roeder, 2003; De Santis & Vasquez, 2011; Selvidge, Matthews & Bridges, 2008; Wong, Schrager, Holloway, Meyer, Kipke, 2013). LGB adolescents who have been victimized are more likely to suffer from feelings of guilt, shame, self-loathing, poor psychological development, and poor self-esteem, as well as symptoms of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic disorder, substance abuse, social isolation, and suicidal ideation/Attempts (Button, O’Connell & Gealt 2012). LGB individuals also tend to be at a higher risk for suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and self-injurious behaviors. This risk increases when individuals are forced to withhold their sexual
orientation from those closest to them (Bostwick et al., 2014; Rickard, 2014; O’Donnell, Meyer, & Schwartz, 2011).

**Summary and the Current Study**

The current literature on LGB adolescence, while slowly becoming more diverse, is still lacking in research specific to the African American community; similarly, the sparse literature on LGB African Americans tends to neglect the adolescent population. Between 1972 and 2002, only 8% of studies focused on non-Caucasian LGBT youth and despite increases in research inclusive of non-Caucasian LGBT youth in the last 20 years, African American adolescents still tend to make up less than 10% of the sample participants (Holmes & Cahill, 2004). Research on the LGB community in general concludes that isolation and rejection from loved ones, fear of victimization in the community and at home, and lack of appropriate resources are a few major influences that can impact an individual’s coming out process (Carrion & Lock, 1997; Consolacion, et al, 2004; Ford, 2003; Galatzer-Levy & Cohler, 2002; Goode & Good 2009; Harrison, 2003; Holmes & Cahill, 2004; Misawa, 2010; Proctor & Groze, 1994; Robinson, Espelage & Rivers, 2013). In the African American community, family, traditional values and religion tend play a large role in the daily lives of members (Goode & Good 2009; Lemelle & Battle, 2004; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Schulte & Battle, 2004; Taylor & Chatter, 1991; Ward, 2005). Unfortunately, while most find these things comforting and supportive, they can feel oppressive to African American individuals who are coming to terms with their LGB sexuality development. Traditional values and religion often create rules and structures that allow for, and sometimes validate, intolerance toward the LGB community (Cutts & Parks, 2009; Holmes & Cahill, 2004; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Pitt, 2010; Ritter & Terndrup, 2002). Dual minority status and a lack of access to supportive resources in the African American
community may also make adolescents feel less comfortable coming out to their friends, family, and community (Ford, 2003; Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000; Harrison, 2003; Holmes & Cahill, 2004; Newman, Muzzonigro, 1993; Ritter & Terndrup, 2002). The intent of this study is to further examine coming out influences that have been mentioned in previous research, as well specifically exploring influences that may affect the specific community of LGB African American adolescents.
III. Methodology

Introduction

This study utilized the qualitative research methodology known as a phenomenological approach. The phenomenological approach allowed for the investigation and interpretation of various themes in order to address possible delays in the coming out process of gay and lesbian African American individuals. This chapter will address the rationale for using this approach; the validity, reliability, and ethical concerns related to the approach, and the participants, procedures, and data analysis that was used in conjunction with the approach.

Rationale for the Use of Qualitative Research Methodology

Qualitative research has been defined as “an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world” (Van Maanen 1979 p. 520). More recent and equally concise definitions of qualitative research have been offered, such as Merriam (2009) stating, “Qualitative researchers are basically interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 13).

To understand the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research, one must be aware of the four epistemological perspectives. The first, Positivism, understands research as a vehicle to predict, control, and generalize findings. For Positivists, research involves experimental and quasi-experimental means, and reality can be viewed as objective and external (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). The next perspective is Critical/Advocacy/Participatory. Through this perspective, change, emancipation, and empowerment are achieved through the use of Neo Marxist, feminist, participatory action research, critical race theory, or ethnography (Creswell,
The Postmodern perspective accepts that the world is no longer rational, and scientific method and certainties no longer hold true. Postcolonial, post-structural, postmodern, and queer theory are several of the types of approaches that a postmodernist would apply to research intended to deconstruct, problematize, and question the world (Merriam, 2009).

Finally, the purpose of Constructivist/Interpretivists is to understand, describe, interpret, derive meaning, and generate theory. These are achieved through the use of ethnography, phenomenology, hermeneutics, ground theory, naturalistic inquiry and qualitative research. Constructivists assume that open-ended questions can be used to derive meaning from an individual’s shared experience regarding their interpretation of their engagement with the world (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). They also accept that reality is a contextually bound social construct, and there cannot be a single observable reality (Merriam, 2009). They also assume that the “basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community” (Creswell, 2009 p. 9).

Phenomenology is both a type of qualitative research and a twentieth century school of philosophy (Merriam, 2009). “From the philosophy of phenomenology comes the focus on the experience itself and how experiencing something is transformed into consciousness,” explains Sharan Merriam (p. 24). Regarding qualitative research, phenomenologists believe that meaning can be derived and mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced by numerous individuals (Merriam, 2009). The job of the phenomenologist is to depict the essence or basic structure of an experience, and they often focus on intense human emotions such as love, anger, betrayal, fear, depression, etc. (Creswell, 2009 & Merriam, 2009). To derive the basic structure of meaning from an experience, researchers interview a small number of individuals who have had prior experience with the phenomenon that the researcher is studying (Merriam,
In order to capture the purest essence and basic structure of the phenomenon, the researcher must “bracket,” or set aside his or her own experiences, assumptions, and biases in order to fully understand and interpret the participant’s experiences (Creswell, 2009 & Merriam, 2009). In addition to “bracketing,” phenomenologists also utilize phenomenological reduction in which they isolate the phenomenon by analyzing the data provided by the interviews and organizing it into themes (Merriam, 2009). Through phenomenological reduction, the researcher is able to interpret, derive common experiences, and develop meaning (Creswell, 2009 & Merriam, 2009). In the end, “The reader should come away from the phenomenology with the feeling, ‘I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that’” (Merriam, 2009, p. 28).

Interviewing is a primary tool used by phenomenologists. Interviews allow participants to provide relevant and historical information, especially when the investigator cannot directly observe the participants’ experience. Interviews also provide the researcher with control over the direction of questioning and information that is gathered. Unfortunately, interviews also provide investigators with indirect information filtered through the views of interviewees; allowing for dishonesty, omission, and incomplete responses. Another disadvantage to this method is that information is provided in a designated place rather than a natural field setting, possibly causing participants to be more guarded/filtered in their responses. In addition to the setting of the interview, the simple presence of the researcher can cause biased responses. Lastly, not all individuals are equally articulate and perceptive, possibly creating an imbalanced intake of responses (Creswell, 2009).

There are several advantages and disadvantages to using a phenomenological research design. Phenomenology can be applied to a large range of situations and tends to be flexible as
new ideas emerge. It gives the researcher the ability to examine change over time and can contribute to the development of new theories (Fellows & Liu, 2008). One disadvantage to using a phenomenological approach is that it is limited in its generalizability. Creswell (2009) states that, “The value of qualitative research lies in the particular description and themes developed in context of a specific site. Particularity rather than generalizability is the hallmark of qualitative research” (p.193). In order for phenomenological research to enhance generalizability, a study would have to be replicated using a different setting and participants resulting in similar themes and interpretations (Creswell, 2009). Other disadvantages to phenomenology are that acquiring data can time consuming, interpretation of data can be rather difficult, and there’s the possibility that there may not be clear patterns within the data (Fellows & Liu, 2008).

Based on the underlying purpose of this study, a Constructivist perspective and a phenomenological research design would be most beneficial. A phenomenological approach was utilized to understand and describe several individuals’ experience of the phenomenon of “coming out”. Using a phenomenological research design provided the researcher an opportunity to interview a small number of participants who have experienced “coming out” with a semi-structured inquiry and analyze their shared narratives to identify the essence and meaning of this specific human experience. For the purpose of this study, five to ten (Creswell, 2014, p. 239) gay and/or lesbian African American individuals were to be asked to describe their experience of being an African American adolescent preparing to “come out” to their friends and family. Phenomenology is well suited for studying complex human experience (Merriam, 2009). Specifically, this study will investigate: a) what, if any, emotions affected the coming out process and, b) how past experience has affected participants’ current emotional health. Coming from a Constructivist perspective and using the phenomenological approach will allow the
researcher to derive meaning from the narratives while illuminating the participants’ unique experiences. Such an approach may enable the researcher to create relevant materials to assist those who work with this population.

**Validity and Reliability**

All researchers must be aware of the level of validity and reliability inherent in their study design. The validity and reliability of qualitative study is largely dependent on the ethics of the investigator/researcher (Merriam, 2009). To ensure qualitative validity and qualitative reliability, the researcher must employ certain procedures/strategies to check for accuracy, credibility, and neutrality, and to increase consistency and transferability for possible replication of the study (Creswell, 2014; Golafshani, 2003).

A number of strategies can strengthen the qualitative validity of a study. Of these, the following approaches were utilized for this study: Audit Trails, Peer Review/Debriefing, External Auditors, Rich Thick Description, and Reflectivity (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). An external auditor reviewed the entire study from the beginning proposal to the final published product. This individual reviewed and critiqued the research for design errors, ethical risk, and inconsistencies in coding, data analysis, interpretations, etc. In addition to having an external reader, several colleagues were consulted regarding the process, procedures, raw data, interpretations, coding, etc. Colleagues enlisted to conduct peer review were graduate students in the process of completing, or who had recently completed, their own dissertations.

Audit Trail and Rich, Thick Description require high levels of documentation. To adhere to an audit trail, the researcher created a detailed account of all methods, procedures, and decisions made in regards to and during the study (Merriam, 2009). Similarly, to complete the rich, thick description, a detailed account described the settings and situations in which
participants shared their experiences (Creswell, 2009). The completion of both the audit trail and rich, thick description were designed to not only increase the study’s reliability and validity, but also to make the study more reproducible.

The final tool utilized for this study was reflectivity. Researchers need to not only be aware of, but to clarify and state their own possible biases in regards to the topic. During the discussion section of the final paper, the researcher offers an honest narrative of how her gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and personal experiences may have influence/affected interpretation of the data.

To enhance the qualitative reliability of the study, a researcher must be meticulous in documenting the procedures and steps taken throughout the study. All transcripts have been assessed for accuracy and an external audit check has identified obvious mistakes. Double-checking the definition of codes verified that codes used stayed true to the stated definitions throughout the study. Finally, utilizing a secondary reader to crosscheck codes insured accuracy (Creswell, 2014).

Possible Ethical Concerns, Risks, and Benefits

To decrease ethical concerns that could arise during data interpretation and reporting, the researcher endeavored to present all findings and interpretations in unbiased language at an appropriate level of specificity, used language that is sensitive to labels, and acknowledged participants appropriately in the study (American Psychological Association, 2001).

All efforts were taken by the researcher to prevent harm to participants. Each participant was required to sign an informed consent form. The informed consent addressed the identification of the researcher, the identity of the sponsoring university, participant selection, the purpose of the study, definition, benefits, and risks of participating, guarantee of
confidentiality; assurance that participants could withdraw at any time; and contact information for the researcher (Creswell, 2009; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; & Merriam, 2009).

In addition to presenting the informed consent, the researcher explained and addressed concerns of confidentiality in-depth with each participant. All participants were notified of what identifying information would and would not be included. All names were replaced with aliases that the researcher chose for this study on interview notes, final write up, publication, and the dissertation defense presentation. To ensure the participants’ names and alias were not decoded, the researcher kept the document containing the aliases and participants’ names list in a password-protected Word document on a password-protected computer. All hand-written interview notes were kept in a lock box to maintain confidentiality. It was explained to potential participants that information such as age, gender, region of residence (present and past), sexual orientation, and family of origin structure would be included on interview notes, final write up, publication, and the researcher’s dissertation defense presentation. Participants were notified that after the study’s publication and defense presentation and following the American Psychological Association’s requirements that data be preserved for five years, all interview notes and data collected would be shredded and properly discarded.

One possible risk to the participants was emotional distress due to discussing or reading the published results regarding a difficult moment(s) and event(s) in their past. The study design stated that in the event that a participant became distressed during the interview, the interview would be stopped and participants would be given the option of continuing (once they were no longer in distress) or withdrawing from the study. Referrals to local mental health agencies or local private practice therapists who specialize in treating LGB specific issues were available for
all participants, in order to address any residual issues that might surface during the interview. Had an unforeseen risk arisen, resources and referrals were available for said participants.

There were several possible benefits for individuals participating in this study. Participants may have experienced a more in-depth awareness of personal challenges and strengths that they endured and developed during their adolescence. Insight gained through participating in the study may have prompted participants to seek therapeutic treatment to heal past wounds, to reestablish or enhance relationships with family and friends, and/or to volunteer in positions that would allow them to engage with and support LGB youth. Individuals may have experienced a sense of healing by receiving the opportunity to share their story and possibly help others through similar struggles.

Participants

The sample of individuals for this study were African American LGB “young adults” -- defined by Armstrong (2008) and Broderick & Blewitt, 2002 as being between the ages of 18 and 35 -- who disclosed that they are homosexual to their friends and family during their adolescence, ages 12-20 (Armstrong, 2008; Broderick & Blewitt, 2003). All heterosexuals and non-African American gay and lesbians or anyone who came out before 12 years old or after the age of 20 years and 11 months were excluded from the study.

The researcher sought to recruit 5-10 participants from social service agencies such as the Los Angeles LGBT Center, Antelope Valley OUTreach Center, and The San Diego Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center, as well as through LGB social networking sites, and personal connections. Recruitment flyers were emailed/distributed to various agencies and individuals who have knowledge of or who come in contact with potential participants meeting the specific criteria of this study. Interested potential participants were instructed to
contact the researcher through either email or the Google Voice number provided on recruitment flyers.

Seven individuals responded to the recruitment advertisement posted in various LGBT agencies and on social media. Participants were interviewed in several private rooms in libraries or offices and provided their experiences of how being African American affected their coming out process. The participants’ ages ranged from 19 to 35 years old. Their childhood hometowns represented various regions of the country: Southern California, Northern California, Maryland, Mississippi, and Virginia. One participant reported currently being in a committed romantic relationship. Three participants reported identifying as bisexual, and the remaining four identified as homosexual. One participant identified as female and the other six identified as male. Two participants reported completing some college, two earned bachelor’s degrees, and three had completed masters programs. Five participants identified as continuing to belong to the organized religion in which they were raised, while the remaining participants described themselves as agnostic. All participants were out to at least some of their family members and friends; not all had made disclosures at work or school. See Table 1 (Appendix E) for participant demographic data.

Procedures

Once potential participants contacted the researcher, the researcher confirmed that the individuals qualified for the study and provided the participant with a brief explanation of the nature and purpose of the study. The researcher began building rapport with each potential participant during the initial contact and continued building rapport throughout the interview process. The researcher explained confidentiality, safety, approximate length, and potential risks of participating in the study. Participants were informed that in order to provide confidentiality,
no identifying information would be used; instead each participant was provided with an alias, and all interview notes would be kept in a lock box. Upon the completion and publication of the study, all data will be kept in a locked file cabinet for at least five years, in accordance with the American Psychological Association (2001) guidelines, before being shredded. Participants were asked if they felt that they were emotionally healthy enough to discuss past experiences that may be painful to explore. A date, time, and private location convenient for the participant were determined to conduct the interview.

All participants were asked to sign the Informed Consent Form provided by the researcher. All participants were informed that no identifying information would be used in research findings. Participants were informed that all interviews will be recorded and transcribed to increase the validity of study and were asked to sign a consent form. Each participant was given the opportunity to ask questions that they had regarding the study/process. They then completed a demographic survey and a semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interview was a planned, but flexible format, designed to obtain descriptions of specific experiences from the life of the participant. Interviews were completed face-to-face in a neutral, agreed-upon environment such as public library study rooms and available therapy offices. Each interview was conducted in English, lasted approx. 20-60 minutes, and were recorded and later transcribed. The interview inquired about stories regarding the individual’s experiences prior, during, and after their coming out process. The full semi-structured interview questions can be found in Appendix D. Open ended questions included:

- Tell me about the time leading up your first coming out disclosure.
- When did you first know/think you felt attracted to members of the same sex?
- What were your initial feelings about possibly being homosexual/bisexual?
• How long was the transition between knowing you were homosexual/bisexual and wanting to tell someone? Please elaborate on what may have created any possible delays.

• Who was the first person you told and why? Please describe your relationship with that person. How old were you? What was the experience like? What was their response?

• What are/were your family’s views on homosexuality?

• How did your family and friends react?

• What factors prevented you from telling people right away?

• Is there anyone to whom you continue to avoid coming out, or are you out to everyone in your life? Please describe.

Once the researcher completed the interview, each participant was thanked for his or her time and participation. For their participation in this study, participants were given the choice of a Starbucks gift card or an AMC movie ticket worth the price of a single admission.

**Data Analysis**

“Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 175). In order to “make sense” of the data, one must consolidate, reduce, and interpret what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read (Merriam, 2009). Creswell’s six interrelated stages were utilized to analyze and interpret qualitative data (2009). After the interviews were completed, the researcher transcribed all of the interviews, resulting in 20 pages of data, and organized demographic raw data. The researcher then set upon multiple reads of each interview to obtain a general sense of the information, and to begin to identify possible themes and concepts through the use of highlighters and sticky notes. With each read of the interview, the
researcher labelled or highlighted quotes or sections that depicted concepts that seemed to be reoccurring across interviews. Descriptions of the categories and themes were created. Upon completing the coding process, the researcher then had a colleague audit the findings to increase the validity of the identified themes. Through comparing the interviews and coding, 11 prevalent reoccurring themes arose, from a total of 26, and were used to elucidate the findings of this study. Two tables were created based on the demographic data and the themes. Narrative passages from each interview were used to convey the findings in regard to each of the 11 themes. In addition to discussing the themes, interview quotes were used to elaborate upon and bring clarity to the conclusions of the research.

While analyzing the data, the researcher made efforts to maintain reflexivity (self-awareness and objectivity) of personal experiences, biases, preconceptions of the research matter, and any previous research findings or theories, in an attempt to allow for a clear interpretation of the participant’s experiences. Prior to beginning the study, the researcher consulted with a colleague and discussed her own experiences in both the African American and LGBT community, her personal experience of helping LGBT adolescences in both personal and professional settings, her familial and friendship ties to both communities, and what preconceived biases she has developed. During the interview and analysis, the researcher kept a log to record any time she felt her personal bias effecting the process. She found herself feeling emotional reactions during several interviews and while listening to the interviews, as the participants discussed their fears of rejection, isolation, and the unacceptance that they experienced as child and teenagers. She empathized with their journeys and she felt for the children they once were. In an attempt to be transparent, the researcher discussed her bias and
personal connections in the discussion section, in order to inform the reader as they read the results of this study.
IV. Results

The seven individuals who responded to the recruitment advertisements posted in various LGBT centers and on social media were interviewed about their experiences of how being African American affected their coming out process. They ranged in age from 19 to 35 years of age. Six participants identified as male and one as female. They were from various regions of the country: Southern California, Northern California, Maryland, Mississippi, and Virginia. Only one of seven participants reported being in a long-term romantic relationship. Three participants reported identifying as bisexual, while the remaining four identified as homosexual. All had experience with higher education. Five participants reported membership in an organized religion, and the remaining two identified as agnostic. Only two participants disclosed being out in all arenas of their lives (family, friends, and work/school), and the other five reported being out in varying degrees. See Table 1 (Appendix E) for participant demographic data.

The researcher anticipated the interviews would last 60-90 minutes, which was stated in the participant’s consent form. The actual interviews ranged between 20 and 55 minutes and took place during June and July of 2017.

Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Table 1 (Appendix E) provides a descriptive analysis of the demographic information provided by each participant via demographic questionnaire. Below are brief participant profiles to provide the reader with better picture of each participant. All identifying information for each participant has been redacted throughout this project, and each participant chose a code name based off of a list of superhero alias names provided by the researcher.
Barry Allen is a single, 19-year-old, African American male college student. He is the youngest of three children and the only son. He grew up in a suburb of Los Angeles County. He is currently attending an undergraduate program full-time and lives in a dormitory. He identifies as bisexual and agnostic. He reported having come out to several friends and only one family member.

Danny Rand is a single, 33-year-old, African American bisexual male. He is the youngest of three boys, and currently lives with his mother to help raise his nephew in a suburb of Los Angeles. He has some college experience and is currently employed as a hospital administrator. He was raised Southern Baptist and during high school converted to Mormonism. He reported coming out to some friends, family, and work.

John Diggle is single, 31-year old, African American homosexual male. He has several siblings and was raised in the Baltimore, MD area. Mr. Diggle completed eight years in the U.S. Marine Corps before completing his bachelor’s degree in accounting and is currently working as a postal carrier in Texas. He was raised in and continues to practice Christianity. He reported being out to most of his family, all of his friends, and none of his coworkers.

Matt Murdock is a single, 35-year old African American homosexual male. He is the youngest of two children and was raised in Jackson, Mississippi. He was raised in and continues to practice Christianity. Mr. Murdock completed his bachelor’s degree and currently works as a shift supervisor in San Diego, CA. He reported being out to all of his family, friends and coworkers.
Peggy Carter is a single, 30-year-old African American bisexual female. She is the eldest of three children and grew up in various cities in Southern California. She is currently residing in San Diego and working fulltime as a behavioral therapist at non-profit organization. She identifies as agnostic. She reports having come out to some friends, family, and acquaintances at work/school.

Steve Trevor is a 31-year-old African American homosexual male. He is in long-term committed relationship. He is the eldest of two children and was raised in the Northern California Bay Area. He was raised in and continues to practice Catholicism. Mr. Trevor earned his master’s degree and is currently working as a human relations specialist at a technology company. He reports being out to all of his family members, friends and coworkers.

Tony Stark is a single, 32-year-old African American homosexual male. He is a middle child among seven children and was raised in Virginia. He currently resides in Orange County, CA and works as a paralegal. He was raised Christian and continues to practice Christianity. He reports being out to all of his family, some of his friends, and none of his coworkers.

**Themes**

Throughout the interviews, numerous common themes became apparent in relation to the time periods before, after, and during the participants’ disclosure of their sexual orientation. The eleven most common themes are consolidated on Table 2 (Appendix E). The top four themes that appeared throughout the seven interviews were: unaccepted, fear or rejection, religious reasons, and African American ideal status.
Theme #1: Unaccepted. Feeling unaccepted due to verbal interactions or being directly rejected by friends or family members was a major theme that frequently appeared in several participants’ interviews. This was exemplified by parents discussing their negative viewpoints regarding homosexuality/bisexuality prior to the participant making their disclosure, as illustrated the following quotes:

It’s mainly on my dad’s side and they weren’t really for it. My dad was talking to me, and he was telling me about when he was younger, they would always get into fights all the time because their mom was a “stud.” So they would always have to fight and everything else because they were defending their mother. And I think that he built up some resentment toward her and I didn’t want that toward me. I needed my dad, or so I thought.

Mr. Diggle had been hearing tales about his father’s resentment toward his grandmother being lesbian for much of his life and to this day, as a 30-something year old man, he is still resistant to coming out to him because he fears his father will never accept it. Similarly, Miss Carter heard negative things specifically regarding being bisexual, which left her fearful.

I grew up in a home that accepted homosexuality and obviously, heterosexuality, but bisexuality was kind of unacceptable. In the rare incidents that bisexuality was mentioned, it was referred to as, “being greedy” and “confused.” So initially, I was just really confused and scared of being rejected and made fun of by my family.

Several participants experienced and described their feelings of non-acceptance and direct rejection during/after their first disclosure. The following participants’ disclosures to their family members were met with a lack of acceptance. According to several individuals, this changed their relationships with each family member permanently. Mr. Diggle’s disclosure to his
mother altered their relationship to this day. More than a decade later, she continues to deny that part of him.

It’s super scary. Um, well I remember when I told my mom, like we had this long conversation and she was just like, she gave me this stupid answer and I wanted to choke her. Like her response was like, “Maybe you just need to talk to somebody.” And I was like “What? What are we going to talk about?” And she was like, “You wanna call Uncle Kevin?” “No, I don’t wanna call Uncle Kevin so I can tell him my business. So he can talk about it with Aunt Di, and she can talk about it with grandma, and then everybody talking about me?” And that was really her answer for everything, “You wanna talk to Uncle Kevin about it?” “No, I don’t!” Going back to the whole religious thing, my uncle, Uncle Kevin is the bishop so yeah, with his own church and everything. So we were always in church. She told me that, “I’m not accepting that.” Which makes our relationship difficult at times, but she’s my mom. But like I said before she pretty much acts like I never came out to her most of the time.

Mr. Murdock came out to his grandmother while she was in the hospital because he couldn’t let her die not knowing him as whole person. She died a week and half later never accepting him for who he is.

‘Grandma I need to tell you something.’ And she was like “What?” and I was like, “Well I’m gay.” And she was like, “Hmmm…no, you’re not.” And I was like, “yes, I am.” And then she got up and she leaned over and said, “I feel sorry for you.” And in that moment, I felt hurt by her reaction because it was like something everyone knew I had struggled with for such a long time so when I finally came out like they still weren’t accepting of it.
Mr. Stark recalled coming out to his brother and being condemned to hell. I said, “Hey I have to tell you something.” He said, “What? What’s wrong?” and I was like “Well, I’m gay.” And he was like, “You weren’t gay when I left.” And I was like “Yeah, I’ve always been gay.” And he said, “No you weren’t gay when I left. That’s some foolishness. I’m going to come home and fucking fix it.” And I asked, “fix what?” and he’s like, “I’m gonna fix this shit. My brother ain’t fucking gay.” And I was thinking he’s literally spent our entire lives calling me gay and the minute I come out this is his reaction? What the hell? Now you have an issue with it. Oh, and he told me I was going to go to hell.

**Theme #2: Fear of rejection.** Most participants described fearing being rejected by their family of origin, their primary social groups, or their community as whole, while some participants spoke of just a general fear of rejection. Several participants’ fears were rooted in the knowledge that their community or family held negative viewpoints regarding the LGBT community, or because they had witnessed the rejection of someone from their family or community. Miss Carter feared the loss of both her family and friends. “When I first started having feelings for my classmate, I was scared that my parents weren’t going to be supportive and at 15 I remember having (what now seems irrational) the fear that they may stop loving me. I definitely was afraid the friend that I was falling for was going to stop being friends with me. She was super Catholic and was just barely beginning to accept our gay friends at school.”

She went on to explain that at 14 she witnessed her best friend, and individual of Latin descent, being disowned for their homosexuality, so no matter how irrational the fear of her own parents abandoning her might have been, it felt real. This was enough to keep her in the closet.
For Mr. Stark, the fear was not irrational; he witnessed first-hand his parents’ reaction to having a homosexual child, and it scared him.

My sister came out when she was 15-16, so I already had seen what coming out at that period of time can do. I mean my parents kicked her out. And even though I knew what it was, I wasn’t going to come out. Just no possible way was I coming out. I mean I’m different…I felt trapped. I knew I wasn’t going to stay at my parents’ house forever. I knew I wasn’t going to live in like isolation and fight my feelings because I knew they weren’t going away. But I knew at that time there was no way I was going to be put out on the street. No, I’ll keep it to myself.

**Theme #3: Religious reasons.** As discussed in the literature review, close to 70% African Americans identify as being religious (Reed & Johnson, 2010). For several of this study’s participants, religion played a large part of their childhood, and/or continues to be an important part of their life. Unfortunately, it also has played a role in intensifying their anxiety regarding coming out or kept them from making disclosures to important people in their lives.

Danny Rand disclosed that the fear of losing certain people from his church has, to this day, prohibited him from coming out to them. He stated, “The only people I’ve actually avoided telling have been my Mormon sponsor family. I mean it probably wouldn’t be that big a deal to them, but I’m not sure. Due to their…our faith there is a serious chance that I could lose them, and I don’t wanna lose them from my life.”

While discussing how being African American may have hindered his coming out process, Tony Stark explained to the researcher how his church dealt with those they believed were sinners.
Yes, growing up in a black church, sitting there all day. I mean every Sunday, oh God. I remember this one kid, he decided he was going to come out and they made him stand in front of the church and public say it and apologize. And that was crazy to me. That was just crazy. Like wait, hold up, are you guys serious! Like that’s just evil. There was also a couple that got married at the church, it turned out she was pregnant when they got married, but they didn’t tell the church that. So the church made them get up and publicly apologize to the church for their sin of having sex out of wedlock. What? Guys really, I don’t even know what to say about my people sometimes. Especially the black church. Man, yeah it definitely affected it. I wasn’t standing up in front of anybody and apologizing for anything. And you know what, the thing about it was, I knew if it ever happened I would have gotten kicked out of church. Cuz they’ll kick you out of church. I knew I was getting kicked out cuz I wasn’t apologizing for shit and I was a smart aleck child. You can’t force me, you can’t beat it out of me, “Oh you’re kicking me out, that’s fine I didn’t want to come to church every Sunday anyways.

Theme #4: African American ideal status. The African American ideal status in this study refers to an individual adhering to traditional gender roles and upholding the beliefs and ideals that are often embraced by African Americans (such as family values, procreation, culture, style, activism, etc). Every participant in one way or another discussed how they felt like they either didn’t measure up to the African American ideal or how the African American community had shunned them for being considered different.

Prior to his first disclosure Steve Trevor reported that he contemplated how those of his own race would feel or think about his sexuality and the ideals they hold to be important.
…thinking outside of my immediate family and about some of my extended family that are more Afro-Centric and has the whole African King and Queen mentality; black men and women need to be together, so that they can continue our pure race of awesomeness. And anything that prevents the furthering the linage, you know such as a man and a man or a woman and a woman, who aren’t able to have kids are counter to their ideas. So that was definitely something I considered and I was like, okay, I know that they’re not going to be supportive and they weren’t.

He had to make a decision on whether or not the opinion of those family and many in the African American community was worth hiding who he truly was any longer than the three years he already had.

Tony Stark described that one struggle he has experienced with the African American community is that they don’t see him as being black because he’s gay.

Black people will have Black Lives Matter, but anything that goes in-between that just doesn’t exist. They don’t see me as black first, they see you as gay first, and everything else around that. I just feel like black culture will always feel that way. If you are anything outside of what it means to be black, you are not black. I don’t know why I feel that way I just do. They see the homosexuality first, and they don’t see that I’m fighting the same struggle as they are, they don’t see that.

He went on discuss the how was treated by the African American children in his school because he did not fit in to their idea of what a black teenager male should be.

I mean I wasn’t super masculine, but everyone else around seemed to be. And I went to a fairly diverse school, but I tend to primarily get picked on by people of my own race. So it made not have many relationships with people of color and I hung out with mostly
white people. And of course, then I got called “white washed” but it wasn’t that I didn’t want to hang out with people like me, it was that they weren’t accepting of me. I just couldn’t be myself around them because “fag” would come out or go “gay,” “sissy,” or “punk” would come out, and the same thing wasn’t happening when I was hanging out with my white girl friends. I mean if they were calling those things, they weren’t calling it to my face. But the black people were so, it caused a rift in relationships with people of color for me, especially in high school.

Miss Carter explained how her relationship with African Americans was always strained, and being bisexual was just one more way she was going to be considered “different.”

I have never really been accepted by the African American community, and that includes most of my extended family members. I was always accused of listening to the wrong music, I was wearing the wrong clothes and make-up, I spoke too “proper,” I was hanging out with the wrong crowd, and I wasn’t religious. So coming out was just going to give my extended family and the black kids at school just one more reason to distance themselves from me.

Unfortunately for Miss Carter this has prohibited her from ever fully coming out; she is still in the closet to all of her extended family.
V. Discussion

This study explored several individual’s experiences prior, during, and after their coming out process, and whether being African American may have affected that process/experience. The researcher investigated the feelings and thoughts each participant had during the aforementioned time period through a short series of questions (Appendix D). Seven individuals were interviewed through the use of a six question, open-ended, semi-structured interview that was created by the researcher and informed by previous research on the coming-out process among adolescents and LGBT attitudes/acceptance in the African American community. Based on the interviews, 11 themes appeared frequently. The top four of those themes were Unaccepted, Religious Reasons, Fear of Rejection, and African American Ideal Status.

Fearing Isolation and Rejection

“I knew at that time there was no way I was going to be put out on the street. No, I’ll keep it to myself,” recalled one participant. One of the major factors that affects an individual’s coming out process is the deep-seated fear that they may lose their family’s love and support by coming out (Carrion & Lock, 1997). A 2009 study found that adolescents were still being kicked out of their homes, and estranged from their families, because of their LGBT status (Potoczniak, et al.). This study explored this factor from the African American experience, which had been limited in the previous research. “Yes, I had to muster up enough strength and courage to look people in the face and say who I was. That was very difficult because again, I was afraid of the rejection. I was afraid of how people would respond to me,” Mr. Murdock responded, in response to questions regarding how African American identity affected how and when he made his disclosures. Several other participants discussed how the fear of rejection from both their
family and friends was a hindrance to coming out. The families and communities that held more traditional family values and religious beliefs typically also had histories of either verbalizing their disapproval of homosexuality or had previously rejected individuals based on their sexuality.

Isolation can take many forms, such as social, emotional, or informational detachment, all of which can cause confusion, frustration, and depression for the individual (Holmes & Cahill, 2004; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993). Isolation occurs when one of two things happen; the adolescent feels it is unsafe for him or her to come out to their friends/family, or the fear of rejection itself can cause isolation for the adolescent. Because of their youth, adolescents lack independent resources and may have considerable difficulties accessing support outside of their families of origin (Holmes & Cahill, 2004; Goode & Good 2009). Participants in this study clearly reflected this lonely dilemma. Two participants discussed how they could not be friends with peers of their own ethnicity, due to feeling different and cast-out from their own ethnic group. One in particular disclosed that he spent his adolescence befriending the few Caucasian females at his school because they seemed less judgmental, but he was always afraid that they too were just judging him in his absence. One interviewee said, “Yes. In Jackson, Mississippi there were no other people like me, so I just felt like I was alone.” This participant felt isolated due to a lack of community. He went on to disclose that others were afraid to be his friend, due to the fear that others would think that they were also homosexual and would ostracize them.

Only one of the seven participants discussed having access to adequate support during their pre-disclosure period. Mr. Trevor credits the opportunity to be a member of an LGBT youth group as giving him the strength to make his first familial and peer disclosures. Participants from states other than California disclosed that there were no other out LGB adolescents in their
community to befriend, which created a sense of isolation. One participant from the south responded to the question regarding their initial feelings about being homosexual by saying, “Just no possible way was I coming out. I mean I’m different…I felt trapped.”

When the participants discussed their feelings of isolation and rejection, the researcher felt an immense amount sadness for them. At the end of one interview she replied, “I wish I could have been there with you. I wish we could have been friends. I wish I could go back and hug that very young version of you.”

**Substance Abuse**

Though the topic of substance abuse was not explored during the interviews, several of the participants mentioned that some of their first experiences in the LGBT community and their only social connection to the community involved frequenting LGBT bars.

**Resources and Positive Social Influences in the African American Community**

While there were no direct questions related to social influences, participants did discuss their experience with, or their need for, resources and social influences while they were adolescents. In 2003 Dr. Elze of Washington University found that when given the opportunity to engage in LGBT groups, teens were significantly more likely to identify as homosexual, and far more likely to disclose their sexuality to their parents, family and peers, than those who had never attended a group. When African American youths were given the opportunity to engage in LGBT-related social activities/groups, their attitudes toward homosexuality significantly improved; even more, in fact, than attitudes of the Caucasians in the study (Bowleg, Burkholder, Teti, & Craig, 2008; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter 2004). One participant illustrated this occurrence,
Spectrum, The Marin Spectrum, that’s what it was, and they had a support group for gay and lesbian youth, and that was the catalyst. Once I met them and I saw the people and everyone was ok and it was a thing and they were all together, you know it was just very supportive and made me realize that there was a light on the other side. At that point, it was a matter of days that I came out to my parents, just because they gave me the motivation and understanding that I could do this.

For him, the opportunity to engage in this LGBT youth group both normalized the situation and gave him the courage to come out to his parents. His experience with this group was so positive that he also stated, “If I ever become a wealthy person, they’re getting money, that’s for sure,” so that he could provide others with the same support.

More than one participant brought up the lack of positive African American social influences in the media when they were children and adolescents. However, they all became fairly animated when discussing how shows like *The L Word, Queer as Folk, and Noah’s Arc,* and movies like *Rent,* all provided positive representation, visibility, and demystification of African American LGB individuals, much like Bernal & Coolhart (2005), Hart (2000), Moore (2015), and Netzley (2010) postulated.

**Implication of Findings**

This study provides a small glimpse into the how the African American culture could affect the coming out process. In the previous research the emphasis on African American adolescents has been limited, and this study has expanded upon African American experience of coming out and the factors that may hinder the process. Based on the interviews, geographical location, and religious affiliation may play a large part in whether or not being African American affects an individual’s perception, development, and disclosure of non-heterosexuality. The
participants from California, a known liberal state, expressed fewer feelings of isolation and none expressed fear of victimization, unlike those from the southern states.

**Study Limitations**

This section will discuss the limitations to this qualitative study. One limitation of this study is that it examined individuals’ feelings and perspectives from a retrospective viewpoint. Human beings are not always capable of recalling events, especially emotionally stressful ones, accurately. Individuals often forget details and sometimes memories change over time (Kim, Pellman, & Kim 2015). Participants who were in their 30s were asked to recall events that occurred 12-20+ years ago, such as their first discloser, first sexual attraction (for some this occurred when they were young children), and other details regarding their sexual orientation development that occurred during their adolescence.

There were several demographic characteristics that limited this study. Recruitment was conducted in local LGBT centers and several local LGBT Facebook groups, which presented a limitation for gathering data geographically and to those who are actively social in the LGBT community. Few women answered the advertisement or were interviewed, which limits the data to a more male-centered perspective. An additional limitation is the somewhat narrow age range of the participants. This study’s participants were mostly in their 30s, with the exception of one 19-year-old.

Another possible limitation of this study is the fact that the researcher identifies as a bisexual, African American female who came out within the explored age range being studied. She also has a history of being active in the LGBT community. Prior to beginning the interview process, the researcher spoke with a professional colleague regarding her experience, personal bias, and possible countertransference that might occur during the interviews. While the
researcher kept on hand lined paper for journaling her own reactions, she found that it was a lot easier than she originally thought to stay removed from the subjects and their experience. Despite attempting to remain separated from the study, the researcher’s relationship with the research and its core themes remains a limitation because her experience, beliefs, and values may have influenced the study.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

This study needs to be replicated on a larger scale (more participants, a wider age range, and a wider geographic area) to gain a clearer picture of how ethnic identity, specifically the African American community, can affect sexual orientation development and disclosure. In addition to more participants and a larger recruitment location area, future research should include more females, lesbians, and possibly transgender African Americans. Another factor that might be further explored is whether having a friend or family member disclose has any impact upon an individual’s subsequent disclosure process.

Of interest as well would be a study specifically researching current African American adolescents’ perceptions, disclosures, and development of sexual orientation, to determine whether these factors have changed from the generation that came before them. What has changed and what changes still need to be made to increase the safe and smooth transition of adolescents through their sexual orientation development? What factors have enhanced any changes in perception and acceptation of the LGBT community within the African American community?

The literature could benefit from exploring the African American attitudes in different regional areas that have a GLADD, GSA, PFLAG, and/or other gay and lesbian community support networks in place, versus those which do not. Do these social networks decrease the
stigma and increase the acceptance in African American communities, or is the stigma and intolerance too deeply ingrained within the community to be influenced by changes in access to social support?

**Conclusion**

The intent of this study was to further examine coming out influences that have been mentioned in previous research, as well specifically exploring influences that may affect the specific community of LGB African American adolescents. African Americans continue to be underrepresented in the current research on LGBT issues, especially with regard to adolescents (Holmes & Cahill, 2004). Fear of rejection from their loved ones; fear or victimization at school, home, and in the community; isolation; and a lack of appropriate resources have been shown to impact an individual’s coming out process in studies in which the primary subjects are Caucasian (Carrion & Lock, 1997; Consolacion, et al, 2004; Ford, 2003; Galatzer-Levy & Cohler, 2002; Goode & Good 2009; Harrison, 2003; Holmes & Cahill, 2004; Misawa, 2010; Proctor & Groze, 1994; Robinson, Espelage & Rivers, 2013). African American adolescents often also face oppression from within their African American community, especially from those who embrace traditional values and religion. Dual minority status and a lack of access to supportive resources in the African American community may also make adolescents feel less comfortable coming out to their friends, family, and community (Ford, 2003; Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000; Harrison, 2003; Holmes & Cahill, 2004; Newman, Muzzonigro, 1993; Ritter & Terndrup, 2002).

Utilizing a semi-structured interview, participants were able to discuss and examine their coming out process from a different perceptive than many had previously. The interviews sought to understand how being African American affected their sexual orientation development and disclosures, and if those early experiences affected them as adults.
The themes that emerged from this study were Unaccepted, Religious Reasons, Fear of Rejection, Anxious, Acceptance, Avoiding, African American Ideal Status/Masculinity, Denial, Alone/Isolation, Not Pressured to Come Out, and Self-Hatred. The study shows that African American culture and religion can affect an individual’s sexual orientation development and coming out process.

“I think it would be different if black people were accepting of their own in this regard. And I think these issues prevent more black people from coming out and leads to more STDS.”

Steve Trevor, research participant
References


http://dx.doi.org/10.1089/apc.2012.0177

http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0021-843X.114.3.471

http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2013.819204


http://dx.doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2013.301749


http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15574090903167422


http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10964-006-9071-4


http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1359104597023005


Choi, K.H., Han, C., Paul, J., and Ayala, G. (2011). Strategies for managing racism and


identity development. *Journal of Homosexuality, 47*(2), 109-126.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0015780


Studies, 9*(1), pp. 59-79. http://dx.doi.org/10.3149/jms.0901.59

and Psychotherapy with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients* (pp. 225-247). Washington

http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J367v01n03_06

among gay-bisexual-questioning (GBQ) Male ethnic minority adolescents. *Cultural
http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0014795


http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J082v51n01_03


http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0881-5245(97)90082-1


Lapinski, M.K., Braz, M.E., & Maloney, E.K. (2010). The down low, social stigma, and risky sexual behaviors: Insights from African-American men who have sex with
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00918361003712020

*Journal of Homosexuality. 47*(1), 39-45. http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J082v47n01_03

*Public Opinion Quarterly, 67*(1), 59-78. http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/346009

http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1989.tb02486.x

http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/20798333


http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J056v15n02_03


http://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/1052.


http://dx.doi.org/10.1542/peds.2012-2595


and mental health: Examine identity and development in lesbian, gay, and bisexual people (pp. 13-35). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association


http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2011.00583.x


http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15327795jra0801_3


Appendix A: Recruitment Advertisement

I am a doctorate student collecting data on barriers/factors that cause delays in the coming out process for African American adolescents. My study has been approved by the Antioch University, Santa Barbara, Institutional Research Board.

I am looking for 5 to 10 African American gay, lesbian, or bisexual individuals between the ages of 18 and 35 years old who disclosed that they are homosexual/bisexual to their friends and family during their adolescence, ages 12- of 20 years and 11 months. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the barriers that prevent African Americans from disclosing their sexual identities to those in their family and community during their adolescent years.

The interview should take no longer than 90 minutes. Participation is greatly appreciated and will be compensated with a Starbucks gift card.

Please contact Sade Carswell, MA, at the phone number or email below if interested in participating in this study.
Sade XXX-XXX-XXXX or XXXXXXXXXX@gmail.com
Appendix B: Adult Consent for Participation in Research

Antioch University, Santa Barbara, Institutional Review Board
602 Anacapa St,
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 962-8179

The Study of Delays in the Coming out Process of African American LGB Adolescents

You are being asked to participate in a research study. However, before you consent to being a volunteer, we will want you to read the following and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure that you understand what your participation will include.

INVESTIGATOR

The name of the student conducting the research is Sade Carswell, MA. The faculty member who is supervising the research is Dr. Betsy Bates Freed, Psy.D.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of the barriers that prohibit African American adolescents from disclosing their sexual orientation before adulthood. Many studies have been conducted regarding sexuality and adolescence but there is not enough research that is specific to the African American population. The goal of this study is to get a clearer picture of the major barriers to coming out, in order to better understand their effects and be able to educate our society, and to protect our gay and lesbian adolescents, both physically and mentally.

DURATION OF PARTICIPATION AND NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

If you agree, participation will take 60 to 90 minutes of your time and you will not need to return unless you would like to speak with the researcher again to ask questions or provide additional information about your experiences. About 5 to 10 individuals will be participating in this study.

PROCEDURES DURING THE STUDY
If you choose to participate in the study you will be asked to fill out, or verbally answer a questionnaire about your personal characteristics. The second portion of the study will ask you to answer questions related to your experiences with disclosing your sexual identity, starting from when you first identified to yourself and then to your friends, family, and community. Your entire interview will be recorded on audiotape, and all instruments will be visible. No recording will take place without your knowledge and written consent. By signing this form, you are consenting to have your voice recorded. All recordings will be kept in double-locked containers to ensure your privacy.

**RISKS**

The risk in this study is that you may be discussing unpleasant feelings, thoughts, or experiences. They may be related to your experience of coming out or remind you of traumatic events from your past. This may in turn make current symptoms worse or initiate anxiety, depression, or posttraumatic experiences. You may stop or start the interview or audio recording at any time, without penalty. Resources and referrals for local mental health professional will be provided, in the event that the discussions of the research materials are distressing. In addition, further contact will be encouraged with your current therapist as needed.

**BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH**

The benefits of the interview may include an increase in positive feelings about yourself and others. You may find an increase in awareness or insight into personal challenges as well as positive changes in your relationships with others. Further research may be developed as a result of the interviews.

**ALTERNATIVES TO THE RESEARCH**
If you choose to participate in this research, there is no other alternative procedure other than what has been described. However, you do not have to participate in the research study and you may choose to withdraw your participation at any time without any consequences.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

You have the right to privacy, and all information identifying you will remain anonymous and confidential. Your answers on all questionnaires, recordings, and accompanying paperwork will be coded with aliases. Only the primary researcher will have access to the actual names. No identifying information will appear on any published materials. Any information obtained in connection with this research that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed without your permission or as required by law. The results of this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at professional meetings, as long as you are not identified and cannot be reasonably identified from it. However unlikely, it is possible that under certain circumstances, data could be subpoenaed by court order.

**QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH**

If you have any questions, you may contact Dr. Betsy Bates Freed, Psy D at (805) XXX-XXXX, ext. XXX or XXXXXXXX@antioch.edu.

**SUBJECT COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION**

As compensation for this study, you will have the choice between a movie voucher or a $10 Starbucks gift card, provided by the researcher.

**PREVIOUS RESEARCH PARTICIPATION**

If you have participated in previous research studies with in the last three months, please indicate this below.

I have participated in the following research studies:
PARTICIPANTS RIGHTS AND RESEARCH WITHDRAWAL

Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw once the study has started. You will not lose benefits to which you are otherwise entitled nor will you be penalized. We have tried to explain all the important details about the study to you. If you have any more questions that are not answered here, the researcher will be happy to give you more information.

SIGNATURE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My signature below indicates that I have read, or had the information read to me by the researcher. I have had a chance to ask questions to help me understand what my participation will involve. I agree to participate in the study until I decide otherwise. I acknowledge having received a copy of this agreement and a copy of the Subject’s Bill of Rights. I have been told that by signing this consent form, I am not giving up any of my legal rights.

_______________________________________________________ DATE_________________
SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

_______________________________________________________ DATE_________________
SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR
Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire

Name: _______________________________ Date________________________________

Phone Number: ________________________

Code Name: ___________________________

The above information will be detached immediately following the interview and placed in a secure location. Your name and personal identifying information will be kept confidential. Data collected will be recognized only by the code name.

Code Name: ___________________________

1. Age: __________

2. Gender: ____Male     _____Female    ____Other

3. Marital Status:
   ___ Single    ___In Relationship    ___Married    ___Divorced

4. Current Religious Affiliation:
   ___ Baptist    ___Catholic
   ___ Jewish    ___ Christian
   ___ None    ___ Other (Please Specify): __________________

5. Parent’s Religious Affiliation:
   ___ Baptist    ___Catholic
   ___ Jewish    ___ Christian
   ___ None    ___ Other (Please Specify): __________________

6. Occupation: __________________________________________
7. Highest level of Education
   ___ High School      ___ Some College
   ___ College Grad     ___ Master’s Degree
   ___ Ph.D. or other advanced degree

8. Parent’s highest level of Education
   ___ High School      ___ Some College
   ___ College Grad     ___ Master’s Degree
   ___ Ph.D. or other advanced degree

9. Are you out to your:
   Family: ___ Yes ___ No      ___ None ___ Some ___ All or Almost All
   Friends: ___ Yes ___ No     ___ None ___ Some ___ All or Almost All
   Work/School: ___ Yes ___ No ___ None ___ Some ___ All or Almost All

10. To whom did you come out first:
    ___ Sister     ___ Brother    ___ Mother      ___ Father
    ___ Male Friend ___ Female Friend ___ Other (Please Specify): ___________
Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. Tell me about the time leading up to your first coming out disclosure:
   a. When did you first know/think you felt attracted to members of the same sex?
   b. What were your initial feelings about possibly being homosexual/bisexual?
   c. Your family’s views on homosexuality
   d. Were your family’s views on homosexuality consistent with your community’s views? Please describe.
   e. How long was the transition between knowing you were homosexual/bisexual and wanting to tell someone?
   f. Please describe any factors prevented you from telling people right away.

2. How did being African American affect your views on your own sexual orientation?
   a. Did it affect how and when you made your disclosures? If so, please describe.

3. Describe the first time you came out to someone.
   a. Who was the first person you told and why? Please describe your relationship with that person.
      i. How old were you?
      ii. What was the experience like?
      iii. Their response?

4. Describe what it was like to come out to your family:
   a. How you felt before, during, after.
   b. Their response?
   c. How would you describe your relationship with your family before and after coming out?
   d. What is your relationship with your family like currently? Did it change after you came out? If so how?
   e. How, if any, did your family’s views changed since you’ve coming out?

5. How did your early experiences of first coming influence the way you came out to others?

6. Is there anyone to whom you continue to avoid coming out, or are you out to everyone in your life? Please describe.
## Appendix E: Tables

### Table 1: Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alias</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Sexual ID</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Disclosure Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barry Allen</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Agnostic</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>A few friends and family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danny Rand</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Mormon</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>Some family, friends, and work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Diggle</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>All friends, some family/school, &amp; none work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt Murdock</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td>B.S.</td>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>All friends, family, and work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peggy Carter</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Agnostic</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>San Diego</td>
<td>Some family, friends, and work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Trevor</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>In relationship</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>SF Bay Area</td>
<td>All friends, family, and work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony Stark</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Southern Baptist</td>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td>A.A.</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>All friends and family.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2: Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unaccepted</td>
<td>Homosexuality is not accepted within their family or community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Reasons</td>
<td>Religion played a role in delaying their coming out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of Rejection</td>
<td>Fear of being rejected from either family, friends, or community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious</td>
<td>Expressed general anxiety or stress about their sexual orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>The disclosure was met with acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding</td>
<td>Participant continues to avoid coming out whether to specific person or in certain situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Ideal Status</td>
<td>Traditional gender roles (i.e. masculinity) and ideal traits of African American race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>Participant or family member is in denial of their sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone/Isolation</td>
<td>Participant expressed feeling isolated or alone due to their sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not pressured to come out</td>
<td>Participant expressed not feeling pressured into coming out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Hatred</td>
<td>Participant expressed hating themselves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>