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Spiritual Well-Being of Black LGBT Individuals When Faced With Religious Homonegativity

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MA, Loyola University-Chicago, 2004

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) individuals in the United States often face homophobic sermons and messages within their traditional religious settings. This phenomelogical research study was designed to document and understand the lived experiences of Black LGBT individuals' spiritual well-being in the face of homonegativity, and to identify the ways in which they cope with these experiences. The qualitative interview data from 9 participants were interpreted through the lens of feminist theory and Pargament's theory of the psychology of religion and coping. Recurring themes were coded from the participants' interviews using the QSR Nvivo 10 software program. Interview themes included change in faith community, experiencing familial acceptance or discord/rejection due to sexual orientation, feelings of abandonment by God/religion, negative experience in a religious setting due to sexual orientation, emotional reactions, maladaptive coping, adaptive coping, and religious and/or spiritual reconciliation. The results of this study provide insight into the challenges that Black LGBT individual experience with religious homonegativity and they ways in which they cope with these stresses and challenges. This study promotes positive social change by providing a better understanding of the impact of Christian religion on the mental and spiritual well-being of the Black LGBT individual. These findings can be used to inform therapists and psychologists who are seeking treatment strategies for their Black LGBT clients. The findings suggest there is an educational component that also could benefit family, friends, and religious leaders who want to be present and accepting of the Black LGBT community.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my brother, James. He has been my inspiration for even daring to conduct this research. James opened my eyes and heart to a phenomenon that I will never personally experience.

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I would like to thank Dr. Nina Nabors, who provided me with guidance, patience, and understanding and for being the best dissertation chairperson. Thank you, Dr. Brian Ragsdale, for your time and assistance as a member of my dissertation committee. A big thank you goes out to my adult children, Melvin and Tishina, who always reminded me that I could and would finish my dissertation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Historically, the Black Church in the United States has been an important institution in laying a religious and spiritual foundation. Black churches have traditionally served the needs and interests of Black individuals (Isaac, Rowland, & Blackwell, 2007), including for issues of desegregation, politics, morality, and spirituality (Johnson, 2008). However, Black LGBT individuals often face homophobic sermons and messages within their traditional religious settings (Harris, 2008; Jeffries, Dodge, & Sandfort, 2008). For example, some African-American churches exclude same gender-loving (SGL) individuals and/or view them as hell-bound and sinful (Moore, 2008). Surveys about Black opinions on GLBT issues have found that 31% of Blacks discourage homosexuality (Pew, 2013). These homophobic messages have been associated with decreased spiritual well-being among Black LGBT individuals and an inability to reconcile one's sexual orientation with one's spiritual identity (Halkitis et al, 2009; Heermann, Wiggins, & Rutter, 2007).

A survey of 2,600 Black LGBT individuals and published by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force revealed that 52% of the individuals surveyed stated that their religious institutions impacted their beliefs (Harris, 2008). This percentage was significantly less than the same study's finding that 74% heterosexual Blacks reported the church was very important to them. Harris (2008) stated that there are several reasons for homophobia among Black communities and churches. Religious beliefs, historical sexual exploitation, and racial survival consciousness have been purported as historical

explanations of homophobia in the Black community (Ward, 2005). Some evidence has suggested that religious organizations are the most oppressive groups for Black gay men (Pitt, 2010a). The findings of religious oppression and homonegativity by clergy and congregants towards LGBT individuals in some religious institutions have generated some concern among scholars (e.g., Schuck and Liddle, 2001).

Problem Statement

Despite this concern, little research has examined the lived experience of Black LGBT individuals in their traditional organized religious practices. Moreover, little understanding exists on how Black LGBT individuals are able to integrate their sexual orientation with their religious background, and if there is a conflict that impacts their spiritual well being. Previous evidence suggests that a conflict between sexual orientation and religious faith can lead to internalized homonegativity, suicidal ideation, shame, and depression (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). The potential significance of these findings is magnified by the issue that some Blacks are less likely than Whites to seek out specialized outpatient counseling treatments (Snowden, Wallace, Kang, Cheng, & Bloom, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to understand the lived experiences of Black LGBT individuals. It specifically was designed to examine these individuals' spiritual well-being when they face homonegativity within traditional organized Christian religions, and the ways in which they cope with these experiences.

Nature of the Study/Research Questions

This study used a phenomenological approach that employed several questions designed to elicit participants' lived experiences as Black LGBT individuals who left a traditional organized religious setting. The use of a phenomenological approach assisted in giving a voice to the lived experience of Black LGBT individuals in this study. This approach afforded me the ability to have an intellectual and personal exchange with participants leading to an understanding of the phenomena being studied (Paul & Frieden, 2008). A phenomenological method was best for use with a study because it helps with the exploration of the meaning of the participants' lived experience (Wertz, 2005). Other research methods would not have explored in depth the lived experience of the phenomena of the Black LGBT individual within traditional organized religious settings. As a researcher, I wanted to know the lived experiences of Black LGBT individuals with respect to spirituality and/or Christian religion, and to determine if Black LGBT individuals experience and cope with homonegativity within traditional organized Christian religions. Black SGL individuals in general have a documented difficulty in reconciling their sexuality with their religious beliefs (Pitt, 2010a, 2010b).

Theoretical Frameworks

Pargament's (1997) theory on the psychology of religion and coping and feminist theory guided this study (Brown, 2010; Greene, 2000) . Pargament argued that religion could provide coping strategies for stressful situations in some individuals' daily lives, either through acts of conservation or transformation. In the context of this theory, conservation refers to the protection or maintenance of what is of significance;

Transformation describes the process wherein the previous values are no longer feasible and attempts are made to change what was previously of significance. Through the theory of religion and coping, I expected that in hearing the lived experiences of the Black LGBT individuals who participate in this study there would be both stories of conservation and transformation.

Hill and Pargament (2003) explored advances in how religious and spiritual beliefs can impact one's physical and mental health. Some social scientists have suggested that some individuals garner health benefits from support by members, leaders, and clergy of churches (Hill & Pargament, 2003). Leading a spiritual or religious life does not always have health benefits, however. There are interpersonal struggles that can arise between the individual, their family members, significant others, members of the church, or other religious entities (Hill & Pargament, 2003). In addition, there are the internal struggles that can occur which involve an individual's virtues, feelings, and actual behavior (Hill & Pargament, 2003). These researchers noted that attachment theories suggesting that having a secure attachment to God might help in stressful situations and everyday circumstances. They also suggested that this attachment could cause an individual to develop lower levels of physiological stress and loneliness.

Measurements of one's closeness to God have been developed by a number of researchers (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Hall & Edwards, 1996; Kass et al., 1991; Maton, 1989b; Pargament, 1988). These instruments measure one's perceived closeness to their God/gods and have been used as indicators of mental and physical health (Hill & Pargament, 2003).

This research was also guided by feminist theory, as it is applicable within a therapeutic relationship and as a means of personal empowerment. Feminist theory is an outcome of the women's empowerment movement that initially focused only on women and gender. However, it has become more inclusive and useful for all people (Brown, 2010). Feminist therapy has a background of being egalitarian, which in itself can empower the client through both the therapist and the client being equal in the relationship (Brown, 2010). As applied to this research study, feminist theory allowed me as the researcher to be cognizant of the equal relationship that I established with the participants. These equal relationships were established through several methods of interacting with the participants, as suggested by Brown (2010). The participants had a voice in how they were addressed (i.e., their first name, last name, or title) and they also had an option as to how I was addressed. As much as possible, the locations where the research took place (LGBT centers, participants' homes, or churches) were individually determined by both the participants and myself.

One of the major components of feminist therapy is to let the issue of trust evolve in the therapeutic relationship (Brown, 2010). I explained the role of confidentiality in the research, and through my actions toward the participants their trust would be earned, in accordance with the suggestions of Brown (2010). Black lesbians and bisexual women face discrimination; however, they still strive and thrive, and therapists must be aware of this resiliency that they possess (Greene, 2000). Individuals who are empowered can face life challenges and potentially respond to them with a sense of well-being (Brown, 2010). Black LGBT individuals who are empowered can integrate their heritage and

culture with their sexual identity without negating their spirituality (Brown, 2010). Being empowered can assist the Black LGBT individual who is seeking a sense of spiritual well-being that can lead to negating, coping with, and counteracting internalized and external homonegativity. These theories are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

Operational Definition of Key Terms

Affirming Faith Experience: Acceptance of an individual's sexual orientation and behavior in a faith based community (Lease, Horne, & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005).

Christian Ally: A Christian heterosexual individual who is also supportive and affirming of the LGB individual (Borgman, 2009).

Christian Identity: An individual who identifies as having Christian-based beliefs (Borgman, 2009).

Homonegative: An expression or belief that is negative towards a SGL individual (Rye & Meaney, 2010).

Homophobia: A fear of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (Ward, 2005).

Internalized Homonegativity: An anti-gay social attitude that is self-directed (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009).

Non-affirming Faith Experience: An experience in a faith-based community that is not accepting of an individual's sexual orientation and behavior (Lease, Horne, Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005).

Organized Traditional Religion: An organized traditional set of doctrines that dictate how the group should outwardly express their faith (Lease, Horne, & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005).

Same Gender Loving: A term used to describe people who have an emotional and physical attraction to someone of the same gender (Smith, 2009).

Spirituality: A term that describes seeking for meaning and a connection with others to self-transcendence through authenticity (Lease, Horne, & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005).

Assumptions

Following are the assumptions I made for this study. It was assumed that each of the participants had previously had a non-affirming faith experience that negatively impacted their spiritual well-being. This assumption was based on the experiences of the researcher's family members who are of the LGBT community and have had non-affirming faith experiences and the researcher's own awareness of homonegativity within some religious settings. It was also assumed the participants would answer truthfully.

Limitations and Delimitations

Following are the limitations and delimitations of the study. The limitations of this study included the participants being selected from one geographic location; as a result, the findings might not be generalizable to Black LGBT individuals in other regions of the country. This study was further limited by the small number of 10 participants, which might decrease its generalizability to all Black LGBT individuals. This research was open to all religious groups, yet only Christians responded. Therefore,

this research may not be generalizable to other religious groups. There was also only one transgender individual included in this research, so a study with only transgender individuals may yield different results. The results may not be generalizable to LGBT individuals of other races who have had homonegative experiences in a traditional organized religious setting or to Black LGBT individuals who have not experienced homonegativity in traditional organized religious settings.

With respect to delimitations, as only Black LGBT participants were interviewed for the study to address a gap in the literature, the results are limited to this racial LGBT group. In addition, as a qualitative methodology was used leading to a small number of participants, the findings are bound to these participants solely as opposed to a larger group of Black LGBT individuals. A final delimitation is the region of the country from which the participants were selected.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is it will add to the limited information available concerning the spiritual well-being of the Black LGBT individual. In addition, this study was designed to provide therapists with information that would be useful in treatment strategies for the Black LGBT individual. Schuck and Liddle (2001) stressed the importance of therapists being able to assist the LGBT client with issues of conflict between their sexual orientation and their religious beliefs. A therapist who is informed and aware of how these conflicts impact the mental and spiritual well-being of their clients will be better prepared to work with this population (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). In addition, therapists who are aware of how other Black LGBT individuals have resolved

their issues of religious and sexual orientation conflict will be better equipped to assist future clients (Halkitis et al., 2009; Schuck & Liddle, 2001).

This study's implications for positive social change include creating a better understanding of the impact of Christian religion on the mental and spiritual well being of the Black LGBT individual. They also include providing information for the therapists and psychologists who are seeking data that would be beneficial for informing their Black LGBT clients' treatment strategies. Additional potential implications for positive social change include providing positive information for the Black religious LGBT individual that may want data on how others have reconciled their sexual orientation with their religious beliefs. Gathering information on this population's spiritual well-being, or lack of, can assist in the therapeutic relationship and aid in the healing process of negative religious experiences (Schuck & Liddle, 2001).

Summary

A Black LGBT individual's spiritual well-being is an important aspect of their overall psychological health. However, there is a dearth of research on how members of this demographics' spiritual well-being are impacted by traditional organized Christian religion. This study used a phenomenological research method in order to record and analyze the lived experience of Black LGBT individuals, their perspectives of their spiritual well-being, homonegative experiences in organized traditional religious settings, and strategies that they have used that have helped them to cope with these experiences. Chapter 2 contains the literature review, Chapter 3 discusses the methodology and

procedures, Chapter 4 presents the results, and Chapter 5 provides discussion,

conclusions, and recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

There is a lack of research addressing the impact of homonegative experiences in church on the spiritual well-being of the Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered individual. The limited extant research on this topic has indicated that Black LGBT individuals experience segregation and discrimination from organized religious institutions (Heermann, Wiggins, & Rutter, 2007). A study by Jeffries, Dodge, and Sandfort (2008) that examined religion and spirituality among North American Black bisexual males suggested that future research on this topic should include and focus more on the religious and spiritual aspect of the Black LGBT individual. This research study delved into the lived experience of Black LGBT individuals in religious settings and if there was any impact on their spirituality. The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to understand the lived experiences of Black LGBT individuals, their spiritual well-being when they face homonegativity within traditional organized Christian religions, and how they cope with these experiences.

Overview

The organization of this chapter begins with a description of the theoretical foundation and a brief discussion of the distinction between religion and spirituality. The following section addresses spirituality and the impact it can have on a person's well-being. The next section discusses Christian religion and how affirming and non-affirming religious experiences impact the LGBT individual. Included within this section will be a discussion on Christian religion and the Black LGBT individual. Then there will be a

discussion on homonegativity and the potential detriments it can cause. A section on sexual orientation identity will follow. The next section discusses how LGBT allies integrate and resolve their Christian identity and how this helps to support LGBT individuals.

Literature Search Strategy

Due to the scarcity of available information on this topic, the literature search for this dissertation examnied peer-reviewed articles across broad domains. The search for articles began in December 2009 and extended through July 2011, using various resources: Walden University's EBSCO databases, SAGE Premier 2010, LGBT Life with Full Text, SocINDEX with Full Text, PsycARTICLES, and Thoreau Search by Subject were searched. The key words searched were: Black LGBT individual, LGBT, homosexual, sexual orientation, organized religion, traditional religion, religion, spirituality, spiritual well-being, gay, homonegative, church, African-American church, and Black church. This gave me a very broad range of articles with a large number of articles, although not usable for my topic. To narrow my search, I inserted two or more words from my research question into the search engine, allowing me to find more pertinent articles. Once I found 25 articles that were suitable for my literature review, I checked the reference sections and was able to find additional articles. I also did an Internet search in which I found a couple of articles that were pertinent to my research.

There were a total of 75 journal articles that I used for my dissertation. A significant portion of my research articles stemmed from these journals: *Journal of Homosexuality*, *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *Counseling and Values*, *American*

Psychologist, *Pastoral Psychology*, *Journal of Bisexuality*, *Black Theology*, *Journal of Death*, *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services*, *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, *Nova Religio*, *Sociology of Religion*, *The Journal of Ministry and Theology*, and *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion*.

Theoretical Foundation

Pargament's theory of religion and coping is what drove this research. Religion is important to most Americans (Pew, 2008). It serves as an important method of coping with a variety of issues that people face on a day-to-day basis (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Lease et al., 2005). Pargament (1997) described religion as being a shelter from the world. I used this theory as the catalyst in moving forward with this research and assisting me in understanding the coping strategies or lack of strategies that the participants used.

Pargament's original theory of religion and coping lists three reasons to study religion and coping from a psychological perspective. The principles of Pargament's (1997) theory of religion and coping are summarized as:

1. Studying religion and coping can teach us about coping situations that reveal the dark side of the human condition as well as the more valiant side. The religious dimension was often not a part of the studies that were done, even though religion was often present in some aspect.

2. Studying religion and coping can also teach us more about religion. Some people have a difficult time relating the abstracts of religion to their personal lives on an everyday basis. When they experience a crisis or coping situation

they may be able to rely on their reservoir of religious resources and may or may not be able to contend with the situation.

3. Studying religion and coping has a practical side. When people are facing problems and difficult times, they might generally be more flexible. Shaking people up prior to getting them to change is a method that is used in many religions and therapeutic approaches. Crises are opportunities for people to make changes to how they previously viewed and dealt with situations. It is a chance for the individual to choose a different path than what they were on.

Pargament (1997) also discussed how the psychology of religion and coping would not fit every issue and situation. This researcher gave an analogy of a child with a hammer as a new toy and how the child tends to bang on square objects with the hammer attempting to make them fit into a round hole. The comparison was to the psychology of religion and coping, and how in psychological settings, religion should not be pounded into a person to fit as a source of dealing with stressful situations and coping. Religion, for many, can run the gamut of being helpful in joyful situations as well as painful ones, and can benefit individuals in ordinary and extraordinary situations (Pargament, 1997). The premise of this theory is to understand how the integration of religion and coping can be a function of an individual's worldviews, practices, and methods of how they cope with stressful situations. Understanding an individual's worldview is as equally important as how they integrate aspects of their lives. By applying this theory to the experiences of the participants in this study will assist in understanding their worldview and their coping strategies.

Feminist theory was used to assist in the understanding of the LGBT individual's worldview. Through the lens of feminist theory, the participants and therapists delve together into analyzing, questioning, and relating (Brown, 2010). Feminist theory originated from the feminist movement and a need to be inclusive of cultures that were marginally regulated to the patriarchal social systems (Brown, 2010). This marginalized segment of society included, but was not limited to, people of color, gender variant people, poor people, Euro-American women, immigrants, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people (Brown, 2010). Feminist practice also has at its roots a concern for the understanding of patriarchy and its cultural and historical roots (Brown, 2010).

Within the feminist therapeutic system, all aspects are taken into consideration, including the diagnosis and how the therapist and client relate (Brown, 2010). A strong point of feminist theory is the usage of an interdisciplinary practice; encompassing women and men from other psychotherapeutic disciplines in caring for people's well-being (Brown, 2010).

Distinction Between Spirituality and Religion

The manner in which a person makes meaning and forms conclusions concerning the issues, challenges, and viewpoints of their world is their worldview (Pargament, 1997). There are a wide variety of definitions of spirituality (Love, Bock, Jannarone, & Richardson, 2005) with many of them viewing spirituality as a function of a person's inner connection with an entity that provides a sense of well-being. In the United States of America, some definitions of religion lean more toward a practice of a set of stable rules, or a dogma, that is formed by one or more individuals who determine how the

prescribed doctrine must be adhered to. For example, Love et al. (2005) proposed a definition of spirituality that focuses on meaning making, forming a connection with others and self-transcendence. Hill and Pargament (2003) asserted that spirituality is a part of a religious experience that it is subjective and personal to the individual. Smith (2009) described the difference between religion and spirituality as spirituality being a motivator through optimism, hope, and faith, while describing religion as oppressing because of misinterpretations of Scripture that lead to faulty doctrine (p. 119). Lease et al. (2005) stated the meaning of religion has morphed into an institutional and doctrinal expression of faith. The use of surveys can further assist with the distinction between spirituality and religion.

Bender (2007) noted that survey instruments that measure spirituality generally ask questions concerning the person's intrinsic experiences, psychological well-being, and self-identification; whereas, religious survey measurements are based on questions concerning a person's extrinsic activities, participation in the church, and adherence to doctrine or community that they are affiliated. The survey shows very distinct differences between spirituality and religion; however, these terms are often used interchangeably and inconsistently (Zinnbauer et al., 1997).

Zinnbauer et al. (1997) conducted a study on how individuals, including religious and spiritual believers, define the terms religiousness and spirituality. One of the findings of their research was the inconsistency of how religion and spirituality are defined. How an individual perceives and incorporates spirituality and religion can determine how they see the world. The practice of religious beliefs can have an impact on an individual's

worldview, especially when they are experiencing stressful circumstances (Pargament, Magyar-Russell, & Murray-Swank, 2005).

Spirituality and its Impact on Well-being

Most individuals have some spiritual ritual that they participate in that brings them comfort and peace in times of challenges, for example, praying and meditating. Having a spiritual ritual can have a very positive impact on one's well-being. Heermann, Wiggins, and Rutter (2007) suggest having a spirituality that is strong, and well-grounded, generally has a positive impact on a person's well-being. They discussed how a LGBT individual could integrate their sexual orientation and religion or spirituality in a way that could have a positive outcome. One case study was presented using Socratic questioning combined with cognitive theory (Heermann, Wiggins, & Rutter, 2007). The Socratic questions that were asked of the participant were used to get the participant to think critically and draw his own conclusions. One of the questions was, "What about Jeffrey's identity and persona would be cause for rejection by these church peers" (Heermann, Wiggins, & Rutter, 2007). The counselor was able to recognize the cognitive distortions that plagued Jeffery through his answers, and suggested bibliotherapy (Heermann, Wiggins, & Rutter, 2007). Jeffery's cognitive distortions led him to internalize a belief that anyone who was not gay would judge him negatively, including his counselor (Heermann, Wiggins, & Rutter, 2007). The counselor recommended that Jeffery read *The Feeling Good Handbook* (Burns, 1990) to assist with addressing the cognitive distortions and other distressing thoughts. In subsequent sessions, Jeffery and

his counselor worked on a variety of issues including finding a church that was inclusive and accepting of his gay identity (Heermann, Wiggins, & Rutter, 2007).

Love et al. (2005) researched the spiritual experiences and identity interaction of 12 lesbian and gay college students in their late teens to late 20s at two public universities in the mid-west. Love et al. noted that spiritual identity that is developed and expressed in the mid-teens could affect achieving a strong religious foundation, which in turn may make it more difficult to develop a spiritual identity. The topic of multiple identities was encountered in participants who were, either, reconciling their sexual identity with their spirituality, not being able to do so, or not having yet dealt with this issue. Love et al. made a comparison between biracial and bisexual identity with the participants attempting to integrate their sexual orientation and reconcile multiple identities (sexual orientation and spirituality or religious identity). All the participants in this study were Caucasians, and transgendered individuals were excluded, thus this study might not be generalizable to the Black lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) individual.

Affirming and Non-affirming Religious Experiences

Some LGBT individuals have affirming faith experiences. Lease et al. (2005) conducted a study with 583 Caucasian LGB individuals who had affirming faith experiences within their traditional organized religious communities. The study consisted of 343 men and 240 women who were affiliated with a faith group (spiritual or religious group) (Lease et al.). The researchers were interested in the relationship between four different areas: current faith affirmation experiences, psychological health, internalized homonegativity, and spirituality (Lease et al.). Their hypothesis was positive faith group

experiences should lead to improved psychological health. They used an 18-item measurement that assessed internalized homonegativity, spirituality, and psychological health (Lease et al.). This was based on the Caucasian LGB individual's attitude and experiences associated with their membership in an organized faith group (Lease et al.). These researchers concluded that having affirming faith experiences are beneficial to the Caucasian LGB individual. This study highlighted the importance of religion and spirituality in the Caucasian LGB individual's life through positive affirming faith group experiences, which can also assist in the elimination of internalized homonegativity. This study might not be generalizable to Black LGB or transgendered individuals, whether they had affirming or nonaffirming experiences with their faith group, due to the lack of participation by Black LGB or transgendered individuals in the study.

Henrickson discussed how authority in some traditional religions could cause an estrangement between LGBT individuals and religion (2009). He stated that he recognized that all religious traditions do not have moral or theological difficulties with homosexuality. Henrickson went on to discuss how there are three primary sources of religious authority and how some portions of each are embedded within religious traditions. Scripture, tradition, and reason are the primary sources that he cited. As examples of the importance of these, Henrickson related how a lectern that is in the center of the church with a large Bible highlights scriptures, large chairs on an ornate altar can dictate tradition, and a simple space with a speaker's platform or pulpit speaks of reason. His discussion of the use of these three sources of authority is a way of

determining and establishing whether members in some religious settings are considered to be in good standing with their religious dogma.

Schuck and Liddle conducted a study of religious conflicts experienced by lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals (2001). Their study consisted of 66 respondents who were gay, lesbian, and bisexual. The participants consisted of various ethnicities: White, Black, Latino, Multicultural, and three who did not specify. The researchers' primary question was whether the participants had a conflict with their sexual orientation and their Christian religion. According to their results, participants stated that some sources of conflict mentioned were passages in the Bible that condemned homosexuality, prohibited all non-marital sex, and religious teachings against homosexuality (Schuck & Liddle, 2001).

Kubicek et al. conducted a mixed method exploration of the role of religion and spirituality in the lives of young men who have sex with men (YMSM) (2009). These participants were taken from the Healthy Young Men (HYM) study. The qualitatively grounded theory study had 36 respondents from three ethnic groups. Twelve young men had high levels of religiosity, 12 had high levels of spirituality and low levels of religiosity, and 12 young men had both low spirituality and religiosity. The quantitative study was conducted from 2005-2006, $N = 483$, and was a two year longitudinal study with a cohort that was ethnically diverse consisting of YMSM in Los Angles. The participants had to be: (a) Between 18-24 years of age; (b) Self-identified as gay or bisexual or uncertain of sexual orientation and/or had sex with a man; (c) Self-identified as White, Black, or Latino of Mexican descent; and (d) Residing in LA county for at least

6 months. Kubicek et al. noted that one of the difficulties of the age of the respondents was that they were in the midst of identifying their sexuality, which could have interfered with their religious or spiritual identity process (2009). The findings of this research varied depending on the denomination in which the respondents were affiliated, their family's views on homosexuality, and whether they had been exposed to homonegative messages at home or in a religious setting (Kubicek et al., 2009). Some of the religious and non-religious affiliations that were noted were Eastern Religions, Muslim, Protestant/Christian, Wicca, Scientologist, Pagan, Agnostic, and Atheist. A large number of the respondents in the qualitative research described having internalized homonegativity, believing that their sexuality would cause them not to be saved (Kubicek et al., 2009). Over a period of time, most of the respondents developed an individualized spirituality that included a belief that God was loving and nonjudgmental (Kubicek et al., 2009).

Wilcox (2002) looked at a study that was conducted over a four-year period from 1995-1999. This study was conducted at five Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) located in California with a focus on two particular Christian churches for intensive portions of the project (Wilcox, 2002). Wilcox interviewed 72 participants that included leaders of the church, pastors, as well as attendees and former affiliates of the churches (Wilcox, 2002). Wilcox found that the conflict that exists between lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identity and traditional Christian views makes for a human dilemma that questions how the LGBT individual is to live (2002). Some LGBT individuals choose not to be a part of any organized traditional religions, instead choosing to maintain an

individual sense of spirituality. This study may not be generalizable to other MCC congregations due to the vast theological diversity within the MCC denominations.

Maher (2006) conducted research with 468 gay and lesbian religious groups, described as Jewish, Lutheran, Catholic, and Baptist within the time frame of March 1989 through June 1993. The researcher's criterion for a 'gay and lesbian religious group' was a group that had either 50% or more gay or lesbian membership or focused on religious issues pertaining to gays (Maher, 2006). There were six questions that were asked, ranging from the history of the group to the future of the group (Maher, 2006). Some questions were not answered due to the contact person not knowing the answers concerning the history of the group (Maher, 2006). In addition, other questions were answered inaccurately due to the contact person's limited knowledge of the organization (Maher, 2006). Through his research, Maher discovered that these groups existed for numerous reasons, including but not limited to, a social and support outlet, worship opportunities, educational resource, political goals, providing community service, and leadership in the gay and lesbian community. The major limitation of this study was that Maher only interviewed one contact person from each group, limiting accurate and complete information; however, he was able to ascertain some reasons why the groups existed.

Historically, Black churches have been strong advocates of social justice; however, when it pertains to issues of gay and lesbian rights, these same churches often ostracize the Black gay and lesbian Christian (Maher, 2006). The various groups that were part of this study had different future needs; some hoped for acceptance in

mainstream religions, some thought they would become more active in the lives of those who had been oppressed, others wanted to make a difference in the spirituality of the heterosexual individual, and still others wanted to develop spiritual leadership to a wider community (Maher, 2006).

There were a variety of messages that the participants in these studies received from family and in church settings. Kubicek et al. (2009) found that the respondents in their research suggested their level of spirituality and faith determined how the homonegative messages were received. Non-affirming experiences, whether they were in a religious setting or not had the potential to have a negative effect on an individual.

Homonegativity and the Potential Determinants

Experiencing homonegativity has the potential to cause some LGBT individuals to be depressed, experience internalized homonegativity, and have other detrimental effects. Several studies have been conducted throughout Europe and the United States to determine how the LGBT individual is impacted by homonegativity.

Ward (2005) researched a variety of sources on Black churches in the USA and discussed how some of these churches are perpetuating homophobia. Black churches have been extremely influential on the Black individual's life, even when they no longer are affiliated with a church as an adult (Ward, 2005). Ward's review was based on an analysis of literature, conversations with clergy, and lectures focusing on socio-cultural issues pertaining to several fields, history, gender studies, politics, and theology. Ward (2005) suggested that there are sources of homophobia within the Black community, other than the church itself. Religious beliefs, historical sexual exploitation, and racial

survival consciousness have been purported to be historical explanations of homophobia in the Black community (Ward, 2005). Historical sexual exploitation is viewed as a result of how Black sexuality was exploited during and after slavery by whites, the demonization of Black sexuality, and the denigration of Blacks through a variety of means by whites (Ward, 2005). Ward related that Western and traditional African religious beliefs have contributed to homophobia (2005), and that there is a racial survival consciousness that stems from racism, racial stereotypes, and the struggle against white domination of the Black man (Ward, 2005).

Griffin's book, *Their Own Receive Them Not (2006),* is an analysis that provides background information on Black homosexuality, LGBT churches, and information on overcoming homophobia for Black church leaders who are seeking change. Harris (2008) states that a flaw of this book is the way in which it appears to communicate that all Black churches are homophobic, while at the same time saying that it is those same church leaders who are seeking ways to confront homophobia. Griffin (2006) discusses the translation of the Bible passages that some Christian churches use to promote homophobia and how these translations have evolved over the years.

A Whosever Church: Welcoming Lesbians and Gay Men into African American Congregations (Comstock, 2001) states that there are churches that do welcome gay men and lesbians. Almost in direct contradiction with Griffin's ideology, Comstock interviews church leaders who work at welcoming LGBT individuals (Comstock, 2001).

The final review is a compilation of various writings titled *Spirited: Affirming the Soul and Black Gay/Lesbian Identity* (James & Moore, Eds, 2006). Black lesbians and

gays telling their stories of pain and sorrow mingled with joy, and turning to religious

institutions that are not within the mainstream of churches is the focus of this book

(2006). Here it is noted how some traditional Black church leaders have difficulty with

the issue of sexuality of any sort, which in turn causes some lesbian and gay individuals

to turn away from the traditional Black church (James & Moore, Eds, 2006). Even though

these books are all about the struggle that Black LGBT individuals face, they are told

from three different perspectives. *Their Own Receive Them Not* (Griffin, 2006) is based

on the perspective of one person who utilizes a variety of references. *A Whosever*

Church: Welcoming Lesbians and Gay Men into African American Congregations

(Comstock, 2001) is based on interviews of a number of religious leaders who welcome

lesbian and gay individuals into their religious communities. Lastly, *Spirited: Affirming*

the Soul and Black Gay/Lesbian Identity (James & Moore, Eds., 2006) is a compilation of

narratives by Black lesbian and gay individuals who are telling stories of their struggles

and experiences in finding their religious identities. Harris's (2008) review of these three

books concerning the interaction of homosexuality and the Black Church related there

were extreme struggles within the Black Church, especially in the historically African

American Protestant denominations with homosexuality (Harris, 2008). This struggle was

most evident in the early 1980s when Autoimmune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) was

being diagnosed in the gay population affecting a large number of gay men (Harris,

2008). These reasons stem from negative perceptions from the white population

concerning Black's sexuality, sexuality in general, and deviant sexuality (Harris, 2008).

Homonegativity exists in some European countries as well. Stulhofer and Rimac (2009) conducted a study on the large influence of disapproving attitudes in various European countries towards LGBT individuals. Their analysis was primarily focused on the effects of the past, present, and future towards homonegativity (Stulhofer & Rimac, 2009). The impact of tradition focused on the religious aspect where it was observed that the Protestant countries were not as sexually repressed as Catholic and Eastern Orthodox countries (Stulhofer & Rimac, 2009). It was thought that three situations would impact modernization: education of a large number of people, growth in city living, and financial growth (Stulhofer & Rimac, 2009). The impact of post-modernization on homosexuality would likely be due to post materialism and immigration (Stulhofer & Rimac, 2009). The European Value Study (EVS) was the instrument that was used; the sample size was 41,000, participants were 18 years and older, there were 112 questions, and the interviews were conducted in the participant's homes. There was a wide range of homonegativity in Europe based on the analysis of Stulhofer and Rimac (2009). Scandinavian countries were the most accepting of homosexuality (Stulhofer & Rimac, 2009). On the other end of the spectrum were the Eastern Orthodox countries, with the most homonegativity (Stulhofer & Rimac, 2009).

Homonegativity can occur in any setting or location, not just in religious settings (Harris, 2008; Ward, 2005). Regardless of where the homonegativity experience occurs, it can have a detrimental affect on the individual. American Black LGBT individuals are not the only group of people to experience homonegativity. Experiencing any type of negativity can be a hindrance to a person's identity development. Identifying one's sexual

orientation can be hampered when there is the possibility that acceptance from others may not be possible.

Sexual Orientation Identity

The role of religion can impact the LGB individual's family member's reaction to the sexual orientation identity of the LGB individual (Lease & Shulman, 2003). Lease and Shulman surveyed 88 family members of LGB individuals to see how their religion impacted their acceptance of the family member's sexual orientation, and to see if there was any conflict in their integration of the two. The family member's ages were from 20-80, and the mean was 50 years (Lease & Shulman, 2003). The participants were asked demographic, Likert-type, and opened ended questions (Lease & Shulman, 2003). The Likert-type questions assessed the role of religion, religious views on homosexuality, and decisions regarding the participant's religious beliefs (Lease & Shulman, 2003). The open ended questions pertained to acceptance, religion's role and the integration of religion and acceptance of the sexual orientation and identity of the family member (Lease & Shulman, 2003). The participants in this study were acquired through Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbian and Gays (PFLAG) chapter coordinators, listservs, e-mail, and word of mouth (Lease & Shulman, 2003). Grounded theory was used to analyze the qualitative data. Some of the participants' religions and religious views changed over time; however, at the time of the sexual orientation disclosure, 69% of the participant's religions were not accepting or somewhat accepting of homosexuality, 6% where neutral, and 19% were somewhat or absolutely accepting (Lease & Shulman, 2003). At the time of this study, some participants had not been able to reconcile their

religious doctrines and their family member's sexual orientation (Lease & Shulman, 2003). Some took the stance of spirituality as opposed to their organized religion, while others choose to put the message of God's love over the religious dogma their churches taught, and still others chose to either leave their churches or reduce their involvement (Lease & Shulman, 2003).

Jeffries, Dodge, and Sandfort (2008) conducted a qualitative study with a grounded theory analytical approach. The participants were 28 Black bisexual men between the ages of 18-44, selected in New York City from a larger study ($n = 31$), *HIV Risk and Prevention Among At-Risk Men Who Have Sex With Both Men and Women* (Jeffries et al., 2008). Jeffries et al. (2008) only used socio-demographic characteristics. These men were recruited from a variety of locations where gay men were known to frequent in that area (Jeffries et al., 2008).

The Jeffries et al. (2008) research questions were:

1. What is the nature of religious experiences among bisexual Black men? How do they negotiate religious convictions in light of their sexualities; and

2. How do bisexual Black men characterise [sic] their spiritual convictions? In what ways does spirituality work in tandem to, yet distinct from, institutional religion? (p. 466).

Religion and spirituality were very important to the men in this study. However, most of them expressed that their religious community did not know of their sexual orientation. Some felt it would not have made a difference, some were unsure, and others felt they

would have been ostracized if their bisexuality were known (Jeffries et al., 2008). Some

religious communities that these men were affiliated with did not frown upon fornication

with a female; however, sex with a man was cause for being condemned (Jeffries et al.,

2008). Four of the participants' sense of spirituality was useful in helping them to cope

with the hostility they felt from some religious people (Jeffries et al., 2008). Several of

the bisexual participants were told by family and friends they were "confused" and "sick"

for having an attraction to both sexes (Jeffries et al., 2008). This study could not be

generalizable to the Black lesbian, gay male or transgendered population.

Another study that discusses the sexual orientation identity of the gay male is a

phenomenological methodology that has a focus on five white male participants who

ranged in age 35 to 55 years (Paul & Frieden, 2008). The premise for their research was

an interest in why some gay men embrace their sexual orientation and others do not.

These researchers recruited participants at a LGBT community center in the US south

(Paul & Frieden, 2008). The process was to learn about the lived experiences of the

changes regarding the influence of context, culture, and history these participants went

through as gay men. Five themes emerged that were important to the participants (Paul &

Frieden, 2008):

1. Crisis or Pain as Related to Development;

2. Importance of Relationship or Connection to Others;

3. Experience of a Dual Identity Related to Gay and Straight Worlds (or the
   Old and New Selves);

4. A New Construction of Spirituality; and

5. The Journey to Acceptance as Worthwhile. (p. 36)

The researchers identified that each participant in this study managed to embrace their

sexual orientation and assimilate their gay identity into their whole being (Paul &

Frieden, 2008). The men in this research study admitted that their earlier religious beliefs

had changed due to their acceptance of their gay identity (Paul & Frieden 2008). This

change was due in part to the judgmental messages they received during their affiliation

with their previous Christian denominations (Paul & Frieden 2008). Several of the men

chose to make a distinction between religiosity and spirituality in order to maintain their

connection with God (Paul & Frieden 2008).

Some LGBT individuals choose not to divulge their sexual orientation due to the

concern that in some religious settings their church leadership, church peers, and family

members, might not be accepting of their sexual orientation. Knowing that there are

individuals within the religious setting that are accepting and consider themselves allies

can assist the Black LGBT individual with self-acceptance. These same allies may often

times face the same struggles with messages that condemn the LGBT population.

Christian LGBT Allies

Some Christian heterosexuals are in conflict with being an ally of the LGBT

community. Borgman conducted a qualitative study addressing LGB heterosexual

Christian allies' resolution of conflicts and integration of their dual identities (2009). A

phenomenological approach was used in order to understand what it meant to the

participants on their quest to becoming a Christian ally to the LGB individual (Borgman,

2009). There were eight women and three men between the ages of 29 and 55 who were

PhD level counseling and clinical psychologists (Borgman, 2009). Borgman noted that there were five core aspects of the results: "experience of conflict, analytic process of resolving the conflict, characteristics of being, experiences influencing conflict and resolution, and professional, expression of being a Christian LGB ally" ((2009, para 6, pp 511). Participants had varying questions and conflicts between being a Christian and an ally of LGB individuals (Borgman, 2009). Borgman discussed how this led them to the process of conflict resolution. There were three domains that were evident during the process of resolving these conflicts: exploration and acceptance of self, their Christian-based beliefs, and their sexual orientation beliefs (Borgman, 2009). He stated that the contribution of this study was to suggest that, in the future, ally development should make considerations of external factors and different worldviews. This study may not be generalizable to people of different employment backgrounds, to those not in conflict, and those who choose not to integrate these dual identities (Borgman, 2009). Future direction would be to look at the differences among race, ethnicity, gender, religious orientations, and geographic environments (Borgman, 2009).

Methodology

Creswell (2007) describes the various methodologies of research design in his book. He discusses narrative, ethnography, grounded theory study, case study, and phenomenology. Creswell (2007) and Moustakas (1994) state that phenomenology is based on the lived experience of the individual.

Jeffries, Dodge, and Sandfort's (2008) qualitative study of 28 Black bisexual men was a grounded theory approach which is one of the theories that Creswell (2007)

discusses as an effective methodology for a qualitative study. This methodology afforded the researchers a larger number of participants than necessary for a phenomenological study. The questions that were asked were very similar to the questions that I will be asking my research participants. The major difference between my research and this one is the methodology, number of participants, and the population that will be researched. My research will be extended to Black lesbian, gay, and transgendered individuals as well as bisexual men and women.

Paul and Frieden (2008) conducted a qualitative phenomenological study that consisted of five Caucasian gay male participants. This small number of participants afforded the researchers the ability to do a more in depth interview. This particular methodology is in line with the study that I am proposing to conduct. My research will be conducted with Black gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered individuals. A small number of participants are what is required for a phenomenological study based on findings by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2007). This will afford me, as the researcher, to develop themes based on the participants lived experiences.

Summary

Research concerning the Black LGBT's experiences with homonegativity within their religious setting and how it impacts their spiritual well-being is very sparse. There has been some research; however, it is not inclusive of Black LGBT individuals. The research that I am proposing will be inclusive of the Black male gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered individuals who have experienced homonegativity within their religious setting.

Understanding the distinction between religiosity and spirituality will be an important factor within this study. Definitions from several published peer reviewed researchers are stated and the participants will be given the option of stating their definitions of the two words. Discussing the impact of spirituality on a person's well-being is also an aspect of this proposal. How does an affirming or nonaffirming religious experience impact a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered individual? Several journal articles discuss how affirming (Lease, Horne, & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005) and non-affirming (Schuck & Liddle, 2001) religious experiences can either help the LGBT individual integrate their sexual orientation with their religious beliefs or not. When this integration does not take place, then a result can be internalized homonegativity, depression, suicidal ideation, or a host of other negative outcomes. Homonegativity has the potential to keep the LGBT individuals from being authentic to themselves. Harris (2005) reviewed three books that discussed how homonegativity within the Black church has affected the Black LGBT individual's self-esteem, religious connection, family relationships, and their sexual identity. Jeffries, Dodge and Sandfort (2008) related how some of the participants in their study continued to frequent churches that were homophobic, though these participants did not reveal their sexual orientation to the congregants. Some of the participants were able to continue in these situations due to how they were able to compartmentalize their sexual orientation (Jeffries et al., 2008). The participants who did divulge their sexual orientation identity sometimes were able to do so with Christian LGB allies. Christian allies that were participants in a study that

Borgman (2009) conducted also had to develop a means of integrating their religious identity with the sexual orientation of LGB individuals.

The major differences in the research studies that are in this proposal and my proposed research are: (a) The participants will all be Black; and (b) I plan to have at least one of each, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered individuals. Currently, there is a dearth of research that is specific to Black LGBT individuals and their lived experience with religion, spirituality, and homonegativity. Adding to the research is important due to the implications of providing information that may be useful to clinicians, therapists, the Black LGBT community, as well as family, and friends.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomelogical research study was to understand the lived experiences of Black LGBT individuals, specifically, their spiritual well-being when they faced homonegativity within traditional organized religions, and the ways in which they coped with these experiences. Pargament's (1997) theory of religion and coping guided this research study as well as feminist theory (Brown, 2010).

The focus of this chapter was on the research design, role of the researcher, research questions, context, ethical protection of participants, selection of participants, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Design

This research study used a phenomenological approach to explore in depth the phenomena of the lived experience within a traditional organized religious setting of the Black LGBT individual. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenology has perception as its basis, which is the primary source of knowledge. The term *transcendental phenomenology*, defined as the scientific study of the phenomena of how people consciously see things, is also used by Moustakas..

The narrative methodology is the closest to the phenomenology method (Moustakas, 1994); however, using narrative methodology would have combined my views with those of the participants in a collaborative narrative, which was not desirable. Using case studies, ethnographies, or grounded theory research methodologies would not have afforded the participants the same opportunities to describe their experiences in

depth as the phenomenological method. Case studies occur when the researcher delves into the depths of a program, an event, and activity through detailed information (Creswell, 2003). Ethnographies are the study of a cultural group in its natural setting over a period of time (Creswell, 2003). Grounded theory is when the researcher conducts a study that would derive a general abstract theory grounded in the viewpoints of the participants. With phenomenological research, the participants had the opportunity to describe their lived experience resulting in developing patterns and relationships of meaning through the researcher's coding of the information (Moustakas, 1994).

A qualitative approach is best used with a phenomenological method as it lends itself to the exploration of the meaning of the participants lived experience (Wertz, 2005). This afforded me the opportunity to have an in-depth interview with each participant so that they were able to give as much detail of their experiences with homonegativity in a religious setting as they felt comfortable to do. The use of qualitative research methods assisted me in coding and developing themes from the interviews of the participants, as suggested by Creswell (2003).

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was to formulate open-ended questions that assisted in understanding the phenomena of the Black LGBT individual's lived experience within the traditional organized religious setting. It was also imperative for me to collect the participant's meanings, keeping in mind how the information was used to create an agenda for social change, as suggested by Creswell (2003). In addition, it was necessary for me to explain the process of data collection and analysis, informed consent, how the

data was used, locating a comfortable and confidential location, and establishing a

contract as suggested by Moustakas (1994), in addition to recognizing and addressing any

bias that I had.

I took steps to address several self-reported biases that might have influenced my

research. Initially, when I began my literature review, I only searched for articles that

would prove there was a need for this research. However, after reading several articles

and realizing that my bias was only allowing me to look for articles that showed a need

for this research, I expanded my search for articles that were pertinent to this study from

all aspects. Another bias that I have is being sympathetic with the Black LGBT individual

when they have experienced homonegativity within a religious setting. In order to

prevent this bias from influencing my research, I periodically wrote self-reflections on

how it was shaping my research. I also had discussions with my dissertation committee

chairperson. I also used semistructured interview questions, member checking, and the

QSR NVivo 10 computer program for coding assisted with validity.

Research Questions

This study used a phenomenological research approach in order to explicate the

lived experience of Black LGBT individuals with respect to spirituality and how they

experience and cope with homonegativity within traditional organized religions. The

primary research question, which investigated the participants' lived experiences with

respect to spirituality, was crafted to on research by Halkitis et al. (2009). "…In this

study we address three key research questions. First, in what public and private acts of

devotion do LGBT adults engage? Second, to what extent do LGBT adults distinguish

between religiosity and spirituality in quantitative measures of these constructs? Third, what are the meanings that LGBT adults ascribe to the terms spirituality and religiosity (Halkitis et al. 2009, p. 252). Heermann et al. (2007) stated that religion and spirituality have different meanings; therefore, it was imperative to find out if the participants in this study defined them the same or differently.

The second primary research question asked how Black LGBT individuals cope when faced with homonegativity within traditional organized religions. The rationale for this question was that some LGBT individuals have not reconciled their sexual orientation with their religious beliefs (Love et al., 2005). Love et al. (2005) described three distinct categories of reconciliation: undeveloped, unreconciled, and reconciled.

Primary Research Questions

1. What has been the lived experience of Black LGBT individuals with respect to spirituality and/or religion?

2. How do Black LGBT individuals experience and cope when faced with homonegativity within traditional organized religions?

This study also included a number of secondary questions intended to help answer the primary research questions. The close-ended questions used pertained to demographic information, age, sexual orientation, previous and current religious affiliation, education, socio-economic status, and relationship status. In addition, there were open-ended questions that were used to elicit additional information from the participants about their lived experience of homonegativity within a religious setting (Creswell, 2003). The full listing of interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Context

Access to participants was gained through the snowball method. The first step for the participant recruitment process began with contacting members of a Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) congregation located in the Southeastern Region of the United States. and by contacting an organization devoted to LGBT rights in the same area. Flyers were distributed by me to the churches and organization via email with an overview of the research study and included information on how to contact me. This written communication stated that no monetary reward would be given for their participation; that names and demographic information would be anonymized; and that the sessions would be recorded with a portable audio recorder. These steps were taken in accordance with Moustakas (1994), who outlined five key components to locating and selecting study participants. These components were that participants should:

- have experienced the phenomena being studied,

- want to better understand the meaning of the phenomena,

- be willing to be involved in a lengthy interview with a possible follow-up,

- give permission to be audio taped or video taped, and

- agree to the data being published in a dissertation and possible other publications (p. 107).

Ethical Protection of Participants

This research study did not begin until the Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted me permission to do my research. The IRB number

assigned is 07-22-13-0110080. In addition, following the established ethical procedures

ensured participants were protected.

Creswell (2003) noted that there are numerous ethical issues to be considered, and

asked whether the problem being addressed is going to benefit the participants. Another

ethical issue that was addressed was to make sure that the participants understood the

purpose of the study in the same context as the researcher, which was satisfied through

the consent form and resulting discussion as suggested by Creswell, 2003). In data

collection, it is important to respect the participants and the location where the research is

being conducted (Creswell, 2003). The participants in this study had choices as to where

the interviews were being conducted: a LGBT center, a Metropolitan Community

Church, or a location of their choice other than their home. Protection of the

confidentiality of the participants in the data analysis and interpretation of the research is

important (Creswell, 2003). During the process of transcribing and analyzing data, it was

stored on my personal laptop, and I was the only person who had access. Each participant

was assigned a pseudonym, and I was the only one with access to identifying

information, which was stored in a separate location in my home office. Transcribed data

was kept secure on a flash drive stored in a safe deposit box in a bank. Data will be kept

for a period of at least 5 years, as required by Walden University. Once the required

period is completed I will destroy the flash drive, first erasing all the information and

then breaking the flash drive. In the writing and dissemination of the research, it is also

an ethical consideration to use language that is unbiased to the participant's sexual

orientation, religion, gender, age, racial or ethnic group, or disability (Creswell, 2003: Moustakas, 1994).

There are additional ethical standards that were required: informed consent that was understandable to the participant, confidentiality, establishment of clear agreements with participants, and development of procedures that established full disclosure, purpose and requirements of the research (Moustakas, 1994). Based on these requirements I let the participants know they could decline to participate at any time, or change their minds. All the participants signed and received a copy of the informed consent. See Appendix B for the Informed Consent Form.

Selection of Participants

Participants were chosen to participate based on their sexuality and race. Inclusion criteria were: participants were gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered, as well as Black. They had also experienced homonegativity within a traditional organized religious setting determined by the initial survey and were at least 18 years of age. They were able to read, speak, and understand English. See Screener Form Appendix C for inclusion criteria.

This qualitative phenomenological research study had 10 participants. The rationale for this number was that the depth of the inquiry of the participants would not allow me to interview any more than 10. Allowing the participants to delve into the narrative of his/her life without constraints was the important factor of hearing the experience. Once saturation had been achieved, the recruitment process ceased (Moustakas, 1994). The information collected described the phenomena of how the Black

LGBT individuals had or had not been able to cope with homonegative messages they had received from members of traditional organized religions.

Data Collection

The data collection process began by interviewing the participants who were chosen to participate in this research study. The research study was approved by Walden's IRB, the data was collected via a digital, hand held audio recorder. I had allocated a time frame of three months for data collection. That afforded me the opportunity to meet with participants on several sessions, if necessary. In order to have accommodations that would offer privacy and confidentiality, my chosen locations were a LGBT center and a MCC church, or the participant's preference of a location other than their home (Moustakas, 1994). The options provided an opportunity for the participant to choose a location where they felt the most comfortable.

Data Analysis

I used QSR NVivo 10 software to analyze the data that was collected from the participants. Recurring themes were coded from the participant's interviews through the NVivo software program ensuring internal validity, and eliminating the need for a second coder. The data was checked and rechecked for 100% accuracy by going over the audio recording and comparing that with the transcribed data. In addition, there was member checking by the participants in order for them to ensure that their information was correct and for them to be able to make any necessary corrections. One participant requested to make changes; however, the participant did not respond when I inquired about the changes. In addition to the NVivo software, I used Moustakas's (1994) modification of

the Van Kaam method of data analysis. Moustakas's modification used the complete transcription of each participant, which I transcribed. The first step was based on horizonalization where relevant expressions were listed and grouped together. The next step required the expressions to meet the two requirements of reduction and elimination, which leads to knowing the invariant constituents (consistent/unchanging words or phrases). This asked the questions of whether the participant had experienced the phenomenon that was being researched, and could the expression of the phenomena described be labeled. Next it was necessary to label and categorize the themes of the described experience. The fourth step was the validation process. The steps to validating my research began with checking the invariant constituents and themes that were developed against the participant's record. This determined whether: (a) they were definitive matches; (b) they were not definitive matches but were comparable; or (c) if a or b did not apply, then they were deleted from the research. The next step was developing an Individual Textural Description for each participant based on his or her invariant constituents and themes (Moustakas, 1994). Construction of a Textural-Structural Description was completed for each participant based on their invariant constituent and themes and the essence of their phenomena. The final step consisted of developing a Composite Description incorporating all of the participants' experiences.

Summary

This phenomenological research study was designed to gather pertinent information from a segment of the population who had experienced homonegativity within a traditional organized religious setting. There were several main questions and a

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couple of subset questions that were designed to assist the participants in discussing their experience. I used QSR NVivo 10 to analyze and store the data that I received from the participants who had been selected though the snowball effect. My research was conducted in the Southeast of the United States.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of this phenomenological study documenting the experiences of Black LGBT individuals who have experienced negativity in a religious setting. It provides an overview on how the participants were recruited; describes the data processing process and use of QSR NVivo 10 and emerging data; details how the themes were generated; and presents the coding of the participant's interviews. It also includes a brief description of the participants and discussion of key demographic details for the participants. It also discusses the research questions in light of the themes that were generated.

This study used a feminist theory lens and analyzed the themes in a narrative form in which the common themes were presented based on the participants' experiences. Through their answers to the sub-questions, the participants gave expression to and communicated understanding of their lived experience of being Black LGBT individuals who have experienced negativity in a religious setting. The experiences in the participants' own words relay their thoughts, feelings, and understanding of the phenomena of religious homonegativity and the challenges that this presented to them. The primary research questions that guided this project were:

1. What has been the lived experience of Black LGBT individuals with respect to spirituality and/or religion?

2. How do Black LGBT individuals experience and cope when faced with homonegativity within traditional organized religions?

Data Processing

Flyers (see Appendix D) were posted in various locations and announcements were made in Metropolitan Community Churches in a Southern state. Participants who met the criteria for the study (see Appendix C) and agreed to participate were provided the date, time, and location established for their interview. Ten participants were interviewed and coded as Participants A through J. Unfortunately, however, the audio recording for Participant J was corrupted; as a result, that information was not input into QSR NVivo for coding purposes, leading to a revised participant group of nine participants. These participants were interviewed in various locations of their choice, which included a Metropolitan Community Church (Participants A, B, D, E, G, H), the pool area of their apartment complex (Participant C), outside a restaurant (Participant F), in the common area of their apartment complex (Participant I), and in a friend's apartment (Participant J). Informed consent (see Appendix B) was discussed and signed by participants and myself and demographic information was recorded (see Appendix E).

The interview questions were used in order to gather the lived experience of the participants with negativity in a religious setting. I digitally recorded the interviews, transcribed them into a Microsoft Word document, and imported the Word document into QSR NVivo 10 on my personal secure laptop. All participants were emailed a secure copy of their transcribed interview (see Appendix F) with explicit instructions to make any and all necessary changes to the transcribed interview. One of the participants requested changes be made to their interview transcription; however, I did not receive

their edits after requesting them, so I ultimately proceeded to code all of the interviews using my own unaltered transcriptions.

NVivo 10 and Emerging Data

The process of generating themes and the coding of the participant interviews were completed in stages. I was able to understand more of the participants' experiences through listening to the interviews while transcribing them. During the interviews, I did not take notes; however, after the interviews I wrote down my feelings and observations as a method to remind myself not to internalize the experiences of the participants, thus facilitating objectivity. I read each transcribed interviews three times: once to compare to the audio recordings, a second time when the coding began, and a third time to ensure context and data accuracy.

In the NVivo software, themes are classified as nodes. The parent node is the main node; whereas, the child node is the information that has been coded under the parent node (theme). There were 8 Parent Nodes generated, four for each research question. Several reports in the NVivo 10 software were generated based on the coding of the transcribed interviews and the generating of nodes. The reports that were generated were: Coding Summary by Source (see Appendix H), Coding Summary by Node, and Node Summary, and Node Structure (see Appendix I). The Coding Summary by Source report shows the nodes by participant, along with the statement that the node is based on. A sample of this 43-page report is included in Appendix H. The Node Structure report lists the Parent Node along with the Child Node statement.

Participant Profiles

The 10 people interviewed each identified as being Black, LGBT, and having experienced negativity in a religious setting. The gender distribution of the participants, after excluding one transgender participant whose recording was corrupted, consisted of four women, four men, and one person who identified as transgendered. Participant A is single, attended college in the South and continued to live in the area after graduation. Participant B is single, was raised in the Baptist denomination and converted to Islam as an adult due to his perception that Islam was more accepting of same sex relationships. He later converted to a nondenominational religion when he realized that his perception was incorrect. Participant C is partnered and was born and raised in the Northeast, and moved south as an adult. Participant D is single, has lived in various parts of the United States, and currently lives in the South. Participant E is single, identifies as spiritual, and attends a non-denominational church. Participant F is partnered with children and was born and raised in the South. Participant G is married, was born and raised in the Northeast and moved to the South as an adult. Participant H is partnered, spent some time in another country, and currently lives in the South. Participant I is single, raised in the Midwest and she currently lives in the South. Participant demographics are summarized in Table 1.

Each of the participants stated that they agreed to participate in this study after finding out about it through posted flyers, church announcements, word of mouth, or friends. The participants were raised in various Christian denominations even though all did not attend church on a regular basis. Nine of the participants identified their religious

preferences as non-denominational Christian and one identified as Seventh Day

Adventist.

Table 1

Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Sexual Orientation	Previous Religious Affiliation	Current Religious Affiliation
A	Female	49	Bisexual	Pentecost/Baptist	Non-denominational
B	Male	57	Gay	Baptist/Islam	Non-denominational
C	Female	56	Lesbian	Baptist	Non-denominational
D	Male	42	Gay	Christian	Christian
E	Male	48	Gay	Catholic	Non-denominational
F	Female	41	Lesbian	Baptist	Baptist
G	Female	49	Lesbian	Jehovah's Witness	Non-denominational
H	Male	31	Gay	African Methodist Episcopal Zion	Non-denominational
I	Transgendered Female	48	Heterosexual	Baptist	Non-denominational
J	Transgendered Male	26	Heterosexual	Baptist-Holiness/Seventh Day Adventist	Seventh Day Adventist

Responses to Research Questions and Themes

This study explored the lived experience of Black LGBT individuals who

experienced negativity in a religious setting. The lived experiences of the participants in

this study were varied but similar, highlighting the negativity that they experienced

religiously by those in authority, whether it was a religious leader or parental figure. The

participants discussed their definitions of religion and spirituality, which they cited as

having assisted them in becoming more aware of their spirituality. The themes that were

highlighted were derived from the participants' experiences. The interviews began with

two interview questions, which provided the context and understanding of the

participants' views on religion and spirituality. The participants discussed their definitions of religion and spirituality and how religious negativity impacted on them.

Religion

The participants all had different thoughts and beliefs on what religion was and what it meant to them. Several of the definitions were consistent with the practice of a set of doctrines (dogma), and other definitions were likened to personal beliefs. Due to the impact that religion has had on the participants, all of their definitions are included as this sets the tone of how their lived experiences contributed to their worldview.

"Religion is a faith. It's a comfort. It's a belief to make you succeed; to give you strength through trials and things that you go through. That's religion" (Participant A).

"A personal relationship with God. The way one relates to God personally, on the personal basis, their walk with God" (Participant B).

"My definition of religion is a place where I feel free to worship God, and it has many different entities, but we only serve the same one God" (Participant C).

How do I define religion? How do I define religion? That's a good question. To me, religion is a, I guess, a named denomination of practices that have a commonality to them, Catholicism, Mormonism, Judaism. Where they have similar practices within that scope. Christian with some variations, but that's a hard thing to define. I just think it's got a set pattern of beliefs and responses, and I don't know how to say it. Just for example, in Catholicism, in some aspects, the confession part of Catholicism, you know, going to confession is a part of Catholicism. Judaism we've got Hanukkah, the tradition of Hanukkah, so there is

a spiritual belief, but it also has set patterns and rules, but I don't want to say rules but… (Participant D).

And Participant E had a similar view of religion, "I define religion as a whole, as a group of principals, practices, doctrine, created for large groups of people to follow and for individuals to find balance and peace within."

"Religion is first of all love and understanding, it seems to me. No agenda, no color, and it is about the understanding of people of all walks of life" (Participant F).

"Religion is. . . I would define it as what my personal beliefs are, within my relationship with God, and my own personal study, and walk and journey with the Bible" (Participant G).

I define religion as first of all being personal. I have a personal relationship with God. I think as I've been a member of MCC that thought has grown so now I feel as though it's the sense of community, and I have family here, but it's still based on a relationship with God. But I do love the fact that I'm accepted here, for me being me (Participant H), and

Religion is a basis of philosophy, it's how, in my opinion, for religion for me it's how I was raised, the doctrine that I was raised by. Which with religion, it can be confusing because there are a lot of different doctrines to say whose doctrine is right, that is the conflict. Religion, because of the different doctrines and interpretations. Interpretations have pushed a lot of people away from religion. It was a big obstacle or element of my depression, my major depression, because of me being transgender, some religious people doomed me to hell. That was a

major problem for me, so to define religion, it's an interpretation, but it's a faith that you have within to avoid the different doctrines. I live the best life that I can because I have a one-on-one religious relationship with God. I say my God because, again, it's individual based (Participant I).

The participants' definitions of religion were based on their experiences and how they were able to come to an understanding of what religion meant to them on a personal level.

Spirituality

Equally as important to this study as religion is spirituality and how the participants define it. "Spirituality is within. It's something that is in side of you, to let you know what's right, what's wrong, and which way to go, and which way not to go" (Participant A).

"To me it's a closer connection with the divine. It's getting to know the higher power in a very personal way" (Participant B).

Spirituality is inside. It's personal. If my spirit doesn't feel something for instance, if I'm in a room with some people and their spirit doesn't mix well with mine, I know I need to step away from them. It's how I feel internally, how my spirit speaks to other people, how in meeting people I can tell right away that this person is not for me. That's how I define spirituality (Participant C).

To me, spirituality is a belief in the connectedness between people, but also in a higher power that guides our lives. That there is a force in the universe that really, I want to say controls everything, but there is something higher than us that helps

us to, helps us when we need it, but also wants us to move forward on our own in some cases. I would say I'm much more spiritual than religious in a lot of ways (Participant D).

Spirituality for me is an individual journey in harmony with the greater universe and humanity. So spirituality, for me, puts me in balance with people, plants, animals, God and allowing me to think of my higher purpose as life is unfolding in front of me (Participant E).

Spirituality is freedom . . . free to be who you are without passing judgment, acceptance of peace and grace. Spirituality is Love. When I stopped being ashamed of myself as a lesbian, the freedom to love and accept others came freely without bondage. Spirituality is Love (Participant F).

Spirituality that would definitely fall in line with my relationship with God. I feel I'm very much a spiritual person, more so than a religious person because of that relationship with God, and I know that I have his spirit around me always so that that's my spirituality (Participant G).

I was, I considered myself spiritual for a long time. I grew up in religion. My grandmother is a pastor of an AME Zion Church. My mother is a deacon. My stepdad is a deacon. They're the ones that raised me. So I've been kind of forced in the church my entire life, but I've always felt as though I didn't belong. So once I got to college, I stopped going to church altogether because, in my mind, I was not accepted there and it was just best for me to have a distant relationship with God. So I was just spiritual. I knew that I loved God. I knew that God loved me,

but I knew the church didn't accept those facts, especially since my stepdad, he

was raised Roman Catholic. So those feelings were kind of ingrained in me so I

had my own personal relationship with God, but not in any type of sense as going

to a church or any church, I stopped (Participant H).

Spirituality, in my opinion, is something that is within. It is something that moves

you, and the spirit will convict you if you're doing wrong. It will also give you a

sense of appreciation when you do right. To me that's what spirituality is

(Participant I).

Six of the participants' views of spirituality were heightened due to their negative

experience with religion; whereas, three participants did not equate their negative

experience with an increase/decrease in spirituality.

Primary Research question 1. What has been the lived experience of Black LGBT

individuals with respect to spirituality and/or religion? The resulting themes for

research question 1 were: change in faith community, experiencing familial acceptance or

discord/rejection due to sexual orientation, feelings of abandonment by God/religion, and

negative experience in a religious setting due to sexual orientation. Each theme with

examples is described below.

Change in faith community. All of the participants made a change in their faith

community due to their negative experience in a religious setting. Five of the participants

discussed their experience. "In the midst of it, the change, immediate change I made was

withdrawing myself from the church. What I did, although I had a one-on-one personal

relationship with God, I was not attending church" (Participant I).

I have gone from church to church, and I guess it depends upon the denomination what not, I've always heard those kind of remarks, and I've changed my affiliation to Islam also because I felt it was more like a brotherhood, and I thought that they were more open to embrace people enough, and that's why I had to go from denomination to denomination, and some of them were okay as far as accepting me and some were not (Participant B).

I would say for the first 20 years of my life it was a very set thing. My mother and father went to a Church of Christ. It was very rigid, very adamant. There were things that just weren't done or talked about or . . . being gay was one of them. And for the first 20 years of my life, I really tried hard to stick to that aspect of religion. You know I still believe in Jesus Christ. I still believe in that. But when I came out at 21, there was a real shift in that for me, and I would say probably for about five to six years after coming out, there was no religion or spirituality in my life at all (Participant D).

So at first, any kind of Jehovah's Witness I would kind of shun away from them, but it was fairly quickly afterwards that I was like, you know what, it's not their fault, they don't know any better. So what it did is it built my faith. It made it even broader because, again, I knew that Jesus wasn't that type of man, and it just made me dig deeper into myself to say, well you know what God, maybe you sent me there for a reason. Maybe I was there for a lesson to know that you are mightier than that and I took that and here I am today. So it did, it actually made it better for me (Participant G).

I shutdown completely. Before I came to St. John's, I hadn't been to church since I think it was 2001 or 2002. The only reason I came to church was because of my partner trying to convince me to come to church, because . . . that was what, three years ago, a little over three years ago. Even when we first started dating he told me he was a member of a church that was accepting of gay people. I said, 'Oh', that's a lot. Okay. You're not going to set me up. I'm not going back there again. I'm not going to get that same set up (Participant H).

Some pastors are not able to respect the gender identity of a person if it doesn't fit their perspective. This is the experience of a transgendered individual when she inquired about becoming a member of a church, and why she left that particular church.

Church related, absolutely. It was church related in that I was an individual that could have been a candidate to become a member of that church. When that pastor started praying, and he started disrespecting me announcing me as this brother, and pray for this brother. I did everything in my power, in my control, to not lash out and be disrespectful to a so-called man of God. So that was a major issue for me. Matter of fact, he called me back the next day and left a voicemail to say he had further information on my inquiry to show me something in the Bible that proved that I was sinning. I didn't want to even answer 'cause I was done speaking to him at that point due to him disrespecting me in such a manner (Participant I).

Experiencing familial acceptance or discord/rejection due to sexual orientation. Three of the participants discussed specific interactions that they had with family members concerning their sexual orientation that had an impact on them. One

participant had what she considered a very positive reaction from her family when she told them she was a lesbian.

> I went to my daughter and I said, 'Sweetie, I'm going to start going to MCC more regularly. It's a church where I feel comfortable and I can praise God and not feel looked upon negatively,' and she was, 'Okay ma, that's where you want to go.' My own sister, see, it became bigger for me with my own immediate family, my oldest sister I came out to, she said welcome back because she knew I had been with a woman before. She said I knew you weren't happy in that marriage. She knew and I did. My second oldest sister said, I introduced my partner to them and they love her. My brother who's younger than me, but he's my big brother, he's my big brother, said as long as she makes you happy I'm happy. So yeah, so it was more important, the important piece of that was my family accepted me. Which they all did (Participant C).

This participant discussed his experience when he told his parents that he was gay and how they reacted.

> My parents really weren't happy with me coming out, and they said a lot of things, and tried a lot of things that were faith-based that really drove me away from church, and drove me away from spirituality at all I think. It led to a lot of things that I'm still dealing with today, but I don't know, it's been an interesting experience. So for example, my father took me to a pastor at another church to talk about God and what the Bible says about religion, about homosexuality, and then he took me to a Christian counselor, you know, so everything that he did had

some tinge of a certain Christianity to it. And tried hard to get me to come back

to God, which is what he would say, and you know, live right, 'not live in that

lifestyle' are the words he used a lot of times. That was 20, 22 years ago, and we

still talk, but he hasn't spoken about my homosexuality in 20 years. So you know,

I still believe in God, and I still believe in Jesus, and I think that's hard for him to

reconcile. He doesn't understand how I can believe in God and Jesus and yet be

gay. So-- (Participant D).

This participant recounted the last time she saw her mother alive.

Yes, the last time I saw my mother she had kicked me out of her life the last four

years . . . So I sat in the living room, and that was basically for just guests, so

when they got my mother dressed and I went in and I saw my mother, and it was a

big blur and that was December 12, 2010. One week later, as I was pulling in to

work on December 19, my mother passed. My brother sent me a text message

saying that she's now deceased. Our meeting that we had on the 12th was a big

blur, my mother continued to cry. People after would ask, well did you come to

peace? I really didn't at that time. I couldn't understand why she was crying. I

just knew everything was a blur. I didn't know if she was crying because she had

kicked me out of her life. I don't know if she was crying because of my gender. I

don't know why. I had a lot of harsh feelings towards my mother (Participant I).

Negative experiences due to a person's sexual orientation can occur in any

setting, not just religious settings (Harris, 2008; Ward, 2005). Kubicek et al. (2009)

suggested that non-affirming (negative) experiences, whether in a church setting or not,

had the potential to have a negative effect on gay young men. A participant discussed how her mother "put" her out of the house due to gender identity, "She had old Southern understanding and she is a product of her environment. I loved her, but she doomed me to hell because of my gender" (Participant I). Another participant discussed how her/his parents tried a number of things that were faith-based in order to "fix" her/his sexual orientation (Participant D).

Feelings of abandonment by God/religion. Three of the participants relayed feelings of being abandoned by God, family, and friends because of their sexual orientation.

I just felt like, I felt like God had abandoned me. I felt like He didn't love me, and I couldn't help who I was, and I spent many years praying not to be gay. And I just thought well if I'm praying not to be gay, but I am gay then that means that God isn't answering my prayers so he doesn't really exist, and doesn't care (Participant D).

There was no in between. God didn't love me because I like women. God hated me. God's going to send me to the burning fire of hell because I love women, and what I learned in coming into MCC is that God loves us all (Participant C).

Another religious obstacle that I had, my mother. Again, she was born in 1923 in Georgia. She had old Southern understanding and she is a product of her environment. I loved her, but she doomed me to hell because of my gender. I shared shortly in 2002 I was actually suicidal, and I was in the hospital and my mother called me and I ended up sharing information, and when I got out of the

hospital, she said you know you're going to hell, you're an abomination to hell (Participant I).

I was very close with maybe five of the other female Jehovah's Witnesses. And you know, we go door-to-door as a Jehovah's witnesses. I wasn't allowed to do any of that. You basically had . . . they still wanted you to come to the Kingdom Hall, but you would have to sit in the back of the Kingdom Hall. Like I said, only the men could talk to you, and only the men; basically, the headmen could talk to you, how'ya doing and how are things going and things of that nature. But we couldn't associate. I couldn't eat with any of them, if they saw me coming they would have to go the other way. And again, it did, it made me feel disappointed and hurt and my reaction was I think I stayed maybe two Sundays after that because we would go Thursdays and Sundays. So I think I stayed maybe two more Thursdays and Sundays, and I said this is not something that God would approve of, and knowing the Bible like I know, I knew Jesus would never have treated anyone like that, so I left never to return (Participant G).

Negative experience in a religious setting due to sexual orientation. Each participant had their own unique experience of being a Black LGBT individual and experiencing negativity in a religious setting. Most notable was how some pastors and/or congregants would preach against homosexuality or speak negatively about them, "I have noticed some pastors who tend to do that because they kind of look down on the homosexuals and they always preach against them" (Participant B). "You know it's not God like, you know you're going to hell, you better get your mind right, don't let the devil

lead you to a reprobated mind, you're going straight to hell, you know the word"

(Participant C). And,

> Eventually my parents, my mother, said she couldn't keep it to herself, she had to talk
> to someone, and she talked to a neighbor of ours who I had known for years and who
> I still talk to. But she would see me in church and she used to be very inquisitive
> about my life, and how are you doing and what's going on, and she just kind of said
> hello and kept on walking. Or people would blatantly come up to me and go, 'Well
> you know you need to, you're hurting your parents, you need to be right with God,'
> and so I haven't been back to that church in 15, 17 years so… (Participant D).
> So it was clear to me even as a kid, without any understanding of how I would grow
> and develop as a child of God to be gay and loving, it was clear to me from the
> earliest understandings within the Catholic Church that was not okay. To have love
> options was not okay in the Catholic Church (Participant E).

To some extent each participant had either a strong religious background or a deeper

longing to be connected to a religious setting.

> I was invited to a local church here in Raleigh, North Carolina, and I began going
> to this church and I loved it. They accepted me. I even got on the hospitality
> team with this church. It was then about 2006, 2007, it was then when I learned
> and I accepted Christ back into my life. That church did that for me. And
> because I felt so good about what was happening with me internally, I wanted to
> make sure I kept what was happening on the outside of me externally going. So I
> approached the church board with a question of membership. It was then when an

interview was set up and questions were asked, demographic questions about my age, those sorts of things, and when it came up to my sexual orientation, I chose the route of telling the truth. And I did that, and when I told the truth I was immediately escorted out of the church. I was told that, I was told that I was no good and that there is no place for people like me in this world. And this was a church that, that I had given nearly two and a half to three years of service because they loved me, and I loved that church even more because I learned how to accept God back into my life. I learned how that I was okay being a gay woman and loving Jesus was still okay. But when I took that next step that I wanted to be a member of this church my sexuality became an issue (Participant F).

I loved growing up in church. I loved church. I was always singing. I had my cousin by my side, and we would sing together and have duets as small children. And then being an Army brat, we moved around a lot so our family kind of got away from church. Once we got back into church though, I felt this negativity towards me because I became outspoken about my sexuality. And I was going to fight for my beliefs so I was kind of pushed aside. The next time, I don't know if this is going to be one of your next questions. My mom finally came and invited me to go back to church. She said it was a special Sunday, and I want you to come and join us for church. So I got dressed up and drove all the way down to Fayetteville to go to church, and it turned out the entire sermon was all about homosexuality and how you're going to burn in hell. So it was catered towards

me. Everyone else there was straight. So it was catered towards me and that's why

she wanted me to go. It's a special Sunday, special Sunday (Participant H).

Prior to coming to MCC I was in the closet, because the churches that I come out

of, Zion Baptist, Church of God in Christ and City of Joy, all demean and it was

hell or heaven. There was no in between. God didn't love me because I like

women. God hated me God's going to send me to the burning fire of hell because

I love women, and what I learned in coming into MCC is that God loves us all.

We are all created equally and I also learned to understand the Scriptures a little

more clearly. The one that stands out for me is the greatest gift is love, so that's

my experience (Participant C).

For the most part prior to St. John's, I would actually have to say negative. In the

Jehovah's Witness religion it was totally against homosexuality. It was totally

against women, in general, in nature, in regards to a lot of religious aspects. Prior

to that, to me growing up as a Baptist even going to church in the end, and I'm

talking about when I was older as an adult once the pastors and certain people in

the congregation knew of my sexuality as being a lesbian a lot of people would

treat me differently. You can feel and see the negativity (Participant G).

Most of the participants had negative experiences within a church or by people of

authority within the church. A number of the participants were told by a pastor or

assistant pastor of the church they were attending that their sexual orientation was a sin.

My reaction was not to answer that phone call when he called me back the next

day. My reaction was to sever all ties and not to go back to Calvary Church again

based off of the interaction that I had with the associate pastor. It was very painful because again I know how I feel about God. I know that I'm a good person. I know that I live to do for some other people, for other people. That's my motto: to do something for somebody every day (Participant I).

I was raised in New England, Roman Catholic, so up north. There was a lot of hierarchy, structure. I was raised in Catholic school so it was uniforms and nuns. It was rigid, judgmental, harsh, and non-inclusive. So growing up in that Catholic Church, and then understanding that God, who created the universe, intended for me to be Black and gay and dynamic and different, it was not comfortable or in harmony with that rigid judgmental . . . what I heard being raised in the Catholic Church (Participant E).

The negativity that the participants experienced ranged from their parents to their religious leaders. The participant who was raised in a Catholic setting had experienced negativity not just due to his sexual orientation, but also as the way in which he understood Catholicism to be rigid and unyielding. These experiences had a very strong impact on how they viewed their faith community.

Primary Research question 2. How do Black LGBT individuals experience and cope when faced with homonegativity within traditional organized religions? The resulting themes for research question 2 were: emotional reactions, maladaptive coping, adaptive coping, and religious and/or spiritual reconciliation.

The participants discussed a variety of coping styles they used and emotional reactions they experienced. They related that some were effective, and some were not

positive for them, including addictions, and one stated she went wild sleeping with men and women.

Emotional Reactions. This participant was able to rely on their religious upbringing to give them solace during the religious negativity they experienced as an adult. "The deep religious roots that were instilled in me as a child helped me cope with the religious issues that I was facing" (Participant I).

Joy. When asked directly about how she coped with the negativity in a church setting this participant said, "Gladly. I coped with joy because, you know, in church, especially in these straight up churches, they always speaking about heaven and everybody wants to go to heaven" (Participant A).

Shutting down. "But I shut down after that last experience for a long time" (Participant H).

> Yes, well I'll kind of take you through. It's a complicated thing. I think when I abandoned the spirituality, when I abandoned the religion that there was because I enjoyed going to church. I was one of those kids I loved going to church. I loved biblical movies. I loved all of that stuff. But I went looking for something to fill that space, and fortunately for me it wasn't, it wasn't unsafe sex. It was trying to connect with people. You know I tried to find people, you know, in some of those cases when I was growing up there were bars that you went to. We didn't have the online stuff that we do now, so I would go to bars and meet people. So part of that being in that environment was drinking. And thinking that that was kind of fulfilling the spiritual piece that I was looking for in a lot of ways. But over time,

it didn't work anymore. It did not solve the problem that I thought it was going to do. (Participant D).

Anger. Two of the participants discussed being angry with God or a family member due to their treatment by others:

I was angry at God mainly because I felt that here I am, a person who's trying to live right, and I accepted Christ back in my life and it felt good, and now you're telling me that I'm not accepted. Even though I knew another man told me that I wasn't accepted. I felt like he was led by God to tell me that I wasn't accepted and that's what I believed in at the time. So I shut down. I shut down a lot for months (Participant F).

Another participant was angry with his mother because he felt she had gotten him to come to church under false pretense. "After I left church that Sunday, I was mad. I was very mad because she set me up, and she knew what she was doing, so I actually didn't talk to her for a full month (Participant H).

Being angry because you're not accepted for who you are or not feeling accepted by family, friends, or God can be devastating. These two participants felt rejected one by God and the other by his mother, which caused them both to withdraw. One participant sunk into a major depression, partially due to religious and her mother's negativity towards her being transgendered.

Depression. It was hurtful, and my reaction . . . I was in . . . I started my depression in 2002, deep depression. Recognizing it, so this was in 2006, and I didn't come out of my depression until 2012, so it was midway, so I painted a

timeline so it was midway. So I was so sunk in my depression and one of my leading factors in my depression was the religious aspect so that was very hurtful. Some family members thought that I was going to go back into depression because I felt that I was going to carry this to my grave that my mother and I could never get along (Participant I).

Religious and parental negativity due to this participant's gender identity led her into depression that lasted for about 10 years. This participant was the only one in this study that related depression as an outcome of the negativity she experienced.

The participants in this study chose a variety of methods as coping mechanisms. All were not positive. Their descriptions of what they did and how they managed are indicators of what their experience of coping meant to them at the time.

Maladaptive coping.

Addictions. Three of the participants turned to alcohol or drugs in their attempt to cope with the negativity they were experiencing.

It was uncomfortable to the point that I think when I finally got to college I was wild. I turned really, really wild. I started drinking, and I think the reason that I was drinking was that I couldn't go to church and worship 'cause I was raised to go to church and worship. I didn't know about St. John's when I was here. I didn't know about MCC. I felt like I was the only one, and I did feel like I was not normal but yet, and still I got the Holy Spirit inside of me and I still feel like I'm not normal (Participant A).

This participant described how he turned to drinking in order to cope with negativity in a religious setting due to his sexual orientation.

I think that was a big coping mechanism for me for about 10 years. I was really drinking, going out, and I just realized about nine years ago that I just couldn't do it anymore. It wasn't doing what I thought it was going to do, and I recognized that I had a severe addiction, and I came into the program of AA. Again that really, I think that saved my life. It really saved my life. I would honestly say I didn't really cope, I just filled it with something else that was not healthy. You know what I mean (Participant D)?

Another participants also turned to drugs and alcohol, "Yes, yes, yes. My sexual orientation has a lot to do with me being in recovery (Participant E).

Promiscuity I went to drinking, and I was having sex with every body. I was definitely having sex with men because I was like, even when you get a funny feeling and it wasn't right, you still don't want to accept that's who you are because society puts you down, and you know that you're different. You know that you're different, and you don't want to let that cat out because back then . . . I'm 49, when I was 20 something years old, twenty something years ago, they were beating up gays on the street. If you went to a gay club and you went out, you were taking a chance of coming out that gay club because people were waiting just to beat you up as if they were Klu Klux Klan, waiting for a Black person to walk down the street. You know, to feel macho, like you've done something so nobody wanted to be gay back then, nobody wanted to let people

know what they were. What was inside of them that they like the same sex? What's wrong with you girl? Something's wrong with you, and then here we go. They want to send you to church, to the pastor, and the pastor wants to put his hands on you and pray for you, and you've got such a demon inside you, you know. But the demon don't never come out. Maybe for a couple hours you feel like the demon is gone, and everything, but then all of a sudden, when you walk down the street you're looking at the same sex again (laughter), you know, so it's pastors just shouldn't be preaching about that, they should just be preaching about the positive things. You know what? God looks at all of us the same. It says in His own image. I figure if we all believe that he died and rose up on the third day, hey, we're in his arms. We're in his midst, you know, and that's even what addicts and anybody homeless. People . . . it's all the same. Nobody's better than nobody, so I really don't believe in pastors doing that. I won't go to a church that does that (Participant A).

The participants in this study came to the realization that the coping mechanisms they chose were more negative than what they were experiencing in their Christian religious setting.

Adaptive Coping

Recovery. Three of the participants discussed being in recovery or being clean. "No, well yes, because when I came to know myself, and I had been in a lesbian relationship in my active addiction days. I've been clean 20 years now, July 5 was my anniversary…" (Participant C).

I just realized about nine years ago that I just couldn't do it anymore. It wasn't doing what I thought it was going to do, and I recognized that I had a severe addiction, and I came into the program of AA. Again, that . . . Really, I think that saved my life. It really saved my life. I would honestly say I didn't really cope. I just filled it with something else that was not healthy. You know what I mean (Participant D)?

I'll mention recovery a third time because it's allowed me to find spirituality. It's allowed me to find a path to a great God of my understanding, and for those folks who are Black and gay, and who are told that they are bad or not good or unwelcome by a religion. That's harsh, and it's real, and it's overwhelmingly prevalent here. And I've lived in the Northeast, the Midwest, and the West Coast (Participant E).

The participants who discussed being in recovery from an addiction were open about how their sexual orientation and religious negativity led to their addiction. They also discussed how being in recovery allowed them to become more aware of the importance of having a spiritual connection, thus helping them to become connected to God.

Self-Acceptance. Four of the participants discussed being able to counter internal homonegativity due to societal, religious, and family discord due to their sexual orientations. "After years . . . I'm 49 now. I'm starting to actually now, I'm starting to accept who I am because there's this homosexual era gone" (Participant A).

I would just have to laugh it off, and I'd have to go somewhere and pray and say Father forgive them for they know not what they do, and I would say no matter what, I'm just the same person before you know me, even after they think they know me, I'm still the same person, and I don't see why their feelings should change. I'm still me. I've also had the other side of me that I couldn't quite understand about being homosexual, and it seems like it was a conflict one time when I had to learn how to bring it all together, but like I said, in this church right now, I can bring it all together. I can serve God and have a position in the church, and I do feel comfortable because there are others like me. I thought [I was] all by myself at one time, but I feel that God is giving me an answer now, and I see a future now for me. A good future (Participant B).

Let me tell you something, 'cause I'm just bold in God. See, I know that God loves me. I don't care what nobody says. First of all, nobody has a heaven or hell to put me in, and all men are sinners, so if I'm sinning in hell, I'm going to lift up my eyes and I must going to be okay because I'm free to live. I'm free to be me. Yes, I belong to God, me and my partner both. When I took her home in 2011, I walked tall, held her hand, introduced her, she said to over 200 people. I know everybody in the town, yes, and I stand firm. I'm a proud lesbian. I'm proud. I'm out of the closet. I'm no longer in bondage. You know what I mean? Not only am I set free from drugs, but I've been set free from my sexuality. I know who I am. I'm okay with being a lesbian, and I'm not a lesbian that's out trying to get every girl she sees. I have a partner, and a partner only, that's it (Participant C).

I feel that that experience was meant for me at that time, because even though I

accepted Christ back into my life at that church, and I'm grateful for that, it was

time, it was for, it was my journey, and God gave me that journey to grow and

make me a better person, that I am today (Participant F).

When the participants developed self-acceptance, they were able to become more

aware of their journey and more comfortable with who they are. The participants were

able to discuss what they viewed as coping mechanisms even though some were

addictive behaviors or depression. Based on the participants' experiences, they were able

to move forward in what they considered positive changes in light of the negativity they

had lived through. Self-acceptance and recovery appeared to be the catalyst for the

participants moving towards spiritual well-being.

Religious and/or Spiritual Reconciliation. Three of the participants found

solace in attending non-denominational MCC churches, while two participants didn't

want to attend a church where the congregation was primarily LGBT.

Now with me being at MCC it makes me feel better, because I can wear what I

want to wear. I can talk to people the way I want to talk to. I'm around other

people that are going through the same thing that I'm going through, and that

think the same way. You know, it makes me feel comfortable for me to come to

this church, but at another church, I don't think I would go back to another kind of

church tell you the honest truth (Participant A).

Yes, and I didn't want that, and of course, here at MCC it's totally different, totally

different. So when people say, "Oh, so do you go to a gay church?" No they're

straight people at my church, gay lesbian, bisexual, transgender. We're all here

and we can all participate and do what God has called us to do, no matter what,

and that's what I love (Participant G).

And the spirit was so high I was like, uum, I may consider where I'm going. So I

fasted for three days and I asked God to lead me. You know I'm dating this

woman that's going to MCC, and the Bible says that we should be in the same

house if we're going to be together 'cause then the two shall become one, so we

need to be under the same teaching. And so I fasted for three days, and then I said

okay God, where do you want me to go, and God said follow your heart and I

heard him in my inner ear. He said, 'Follow your heart.' So I went to my daughter

and I said, 'Sweetie, I'm going to start going to MCC more regularly. It's a

church where I feel comfortable and I can praise God and not feel looked upon

negatively,' and she was, 'Okay ma, that's where you want to go" (Participant C).

"The Catholic experience was very negative and uncomfortable as far as my

orientation. The church that I'm in now it's okay and comfortable, and I have not sought

to be part of a church that is primarily serving GLBT" (Participant E).

Two of the participants have chosen not to attend church on a regular basis,

leaning more towards their idea of being spiritual.

I would say yes, when I moved to DC that was the first time I had ever gone to a

gay friendly church. I didn't even know they existed. It was a MCC church, and I

can't remember where it was in DC, but part of being in AA was going to these

meetings in different places, and one of them was in this church in DC. I thought,

I remember walking in thinking that this is a gay friendly church. I don't understand that because I still had this belief of what the Bible had been taught to me from all my life. So I think the biggest thing was just searching out places that I felt supported me. I read a lot. I continue to read a lot more. I began having really deep discussions with the people about their faith and what they believed. I just started seeking out more information and seeking out people that could help me with that information (Participant D).

So as I grew in my faith, you know, now I understand again that, you know, that God loves me unconditionally, unconditionally. And again during that time, I stayed away from the church, but I did have a relationship with God on an individual basis, and again, when the pastor from Metropolitan Baptist Church came to console my brother and I with the passing of my mother, he kind of opened my eyes a little bit when he said well, a lot. I can't even say a little bit, but he opened my eyes by saying I don't believe that you're going to go to hell because of your gender. If you believe in Jesus, Jesus died for you, that you're okay, and then that coupled with the reading of Joel Osteen's book, coupled with other events when I met the pastor from the Wake Forest Baptist church, these positives kind of brought me back into the church. So now I visit a few churches, there's a few churches that I visit now. Now, I had another encounter. I was over at Barnhills bookstore back in March doing a book signing. A 90-year-old Methodist pastor, a former Methodist pastor, came to the book signing and I judged, okay? When I saw this gentleman, I'm like, and he told me that he was a

Caucasian former Methodist pastor who is 90 years old. I said, 'Oh gosh, he's going to read me the riot act.' I was totally wrong. What he told me, he said, 'First of all, I want to tell you it is a sin for you not to be who you are. Gender is not a choice, so I accept you and I applaud you for being who you are,' and that was just something that just totally, you know (Participant I).

After years of facing religious negativity, some of the participants were able to find a place of worship where they felt comfortable and welcomed. Having clergy who were welcoming and accepting of who they were was extremely important to the participants. Even though some of them have decided not to attend a church at this point, they have chosen to read, study, and have conversations around religion and same sex relationships.

Three of the participants discussed decisions that they made in how they chose to move forward in participating in a religious setting.

So I think the biggest thing was just searching out places that I felt supported. Me, I read a lot. I continue to read a lot more. I begin having really deep discussions with the people about their faith and what they believed. I just started seeking out more information and seeking out people that could help me with that information. I was blessed to have people who did that, and I was getting sober at the time, so I think I was clearheaded enough to accept that information. Now, I will say, there are sometimes I still struggle. There are times I still struggle with does God really love me? Does He really care about me? Is who I am okay, but most of the time I'm pretty happy (Participant D).

But I, so my response was just to not go through it to no longer, be Catholic and to start searching, my response was just to search for some other faith communities, and recovery has allowed me to not have resentments towards that experience. Today I get to be okay with people and religions and institutions where they are, and if it doesn't work for me, but I don't have to judge it as right or wrong. I can let it work for somebody, but it didn't work for me (Participant E). Oh yes, actually we made, I made tons of changes. Now, going forward in my life, in everything that I do, it's important that the churches and the schools know that myself and my children are from a same sex family and there should not be any discrimination. I request meetings all the time to make sure that we are treated fairly. I don't want anything on a silver platter, but I want equal opportunity as the next person does. And then also, by doing this, I feel like I am teaching my children that you do not settle for the first no in your life. Just because someone said no to you, don't stop going to church or don't stop doing something that you love. It was then that I realized the hurt and the pain that I received from them telling me no that I couldn't be a member of the church, is when I realized how much I love Jesus because it hurt so much for me (participant crying). For somebody to tell me that I couldn't be a member, for me, I equate it to me not being in that church was saying like I don't love God, and I knew that that was a lie because I knew I loved my God and the Lord that I serve, so it hurt. I couldn't understand why would you do that, so today in my life, I sing twice a day, every morning and every night. I sing a song just between me and my God

because I let him know how much I love him every day. And I appreciate every

struggle and every happiness that He places in my life (Participant F).

The participants who became assertive with their religious needs were able to find

a place of worship that they were comfortable in, and welcomed without any pretense

from the congregation or the clergy.

Summary

The results of the study revealed the phenomenology of Black LGBT individuals

who have experienced negativity in a religious setting. The nine participants of this study

had their worldview changed due to their lived experience of negativity in a religious

setting. Based on their definitions of religion they related that religion is primarily a set of

rules and regulations that are adhered to by the followers of a particular denomination.

When it pertained to spirituality, their definitions where more of a personal relationship

that they developed with an entity that was unseen, yet present in nature. The resulting

themes were change in faith community, experiencing familial acceptance or

discord/rejection due to sexual orientation, feelings of abandonment by God/religion,

negative experience in a religious setting due to sexual orientation, emotional reactions,

maladaptive coping, adaptive coping, and religious and/or spiritual reconciliation.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This study addressed a research gap concerning Black LGBT individuals who have experienced negativity in a religious setting. The purpose of this phenomelogical research study was to understand the lived experiences of Black LGBT individuals' spiritual well-being in the face of homonegativity and the ways in which they cope with these experiences. The results highlighted the experiences of nine Black LGBT individuals who sought to reconcile their negative experiences and sexual orientation with their religious beliefs. Black churches have been strong advocates of social justice, but sometimes ostracize Black LGBT Christians (Maher, 2006). The participants' description of their lived experience with negativity in a religious setting and how they coped was detailed, emotional, and expressive, with each one being similar yet different. There were eight themes that were generated from the participant's interviews. These eight themes were change in faith community, experiencing familial acceptance or discord/rejection due to sexual orientation, feelings of abandonment by God/religion, and negative experience in a religious setting due to sexual orientation, emotional reactions, maladaptive coping, adaptive coping, and religious and/or spiritual reconciliation.

Interpretation of the Findings

This study added to the understanding of the Black LGBT individual's experience of negativity in a religious setting. This was accomplished through the rich descriptions of the participants in this study. The primary research questions that guided this project were:

1. What has been the lived experience of Black LGBT individuals with respect to spirituality and/or religion?

2. How do Black LGBT individuals experience and cope when faced with homonegativity within traditional organized religions?

The results of this research study is religious homonegativity can have a detrimental impact on the spiritual well-being of the Black LGBT individual. All the participants in this study expressed how the religious negativity had impacted their lives, which resulted in them having addictions, feelings of abandonment by God and/or family, promiscuity, depression, and changes in their faith community. These results were supported by existing literature, substantiated, and discussed in this research. Pargament (1997) discussed how religion could help with coping mechanisms in a positive manner keeping in mind that a strong religious faith does not always protect one psychologically from negativity. All of the participants found religious acceptance after their negative experience, although this process took up to 20 years for some of them.

All of the participants in this study were Black and reported having experienced negativity in a religious setting due to their sexual orientation. Several of the participants discussed how they were treated differently after their sexual orientation had been revealed. In addition to negativity in religious settings, four of the participants discussed how their parents reacted negatively to their sexual orientation. One participant in particular related that, despite more than two decades of being "out," he still couldn't discuss his sexual orientation with his parents or introduce his partner to them.

All of the participants in this study discussed having Bible verses told to them that they felt were being used against them because of their sexual orientation. This aligns with Schuck and Liddle's (2001) findings on the religious conflicts experienced by lesbian, gay, and bisexual (transgendered excluded) individuals, in which participants discussed passages in the Bible that condemn homosexuality, passages that condemn premarital sex, and religious teachings against homosexuality (Schuck & Liddle, 2001).

Religion has been an important aspect of humankind throughout the ages (Ward, 2005). Several researches have noted the importance of religion as a method of coping with day-to-day stresses (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Lease et al., 2005). It was important for the participants in this study to differentiate religion and spirituality (Paul & Frieden, 2005). A common definition of religion describes a set of rules, or dogma, of a prescribed doctrine that is adhered to by one or more individuals. Most of the participants made a strong distinction between religion and spirituality. For the most part, they agreed that religion included a strong set of rules and regulations that people adhered to in order to be a member of that particular denomination.

Black churches, regardless of her dogma, has long held a very important and influential role in the lives of Black individuals and families (Ward, 2005). The Church has been the empowerment of Black people through cultural and social forms of expression for over 250 years (Ward, 2005). When it pertains to matters of sexuality, however, and especially concerning same sex relationships, Black churches have not been in the forefront of having open and welcoming conversations. Ward (2005) described the strong influence that Black churches have on Black individuals, even if

they no longer attended church. The participants in this study were all strongly influenced by Black churches, even if it was due to a negative experience. A few of them stopped attending church after they had been confronted with negativity due to their sexual orientation. The participants discussed how this negativity was based on an interpretation of some Bible verses and how homosexuality was viewed. All of the participants also, at the time of the study, attended different churches than they attended as children. These findings are consistent with Heermann et al.'s (2007) findings on segregation and discrimination that Black LGBT individuals can face from organized religious institutions. Lease et al. (2005) suggested that not all LGB individuals have non-affirming faith experiences. The study results of Lease et al. did not align with the results of my study in that all 10 of the participants who were interviewed had non-affirming faith experiences.

Kubicek et al. (2009) conducted a study of religion and spirituality of gay young men. The results of this study indicated that a large number of the participants described having internalized homonegativity, where they devalued themselves, experienced internal conflicts, and felt self-hatred (Kubicek et al. 2009). Several of the participants in my study described having feelings of being different, yet they were not described as internal homonegativity. The participants in my study differentiated from the literature in that they were all Black and included lesbian, gay men, bisexual, and transgendered. Interestingly, even though they related to having negative experiences in a religious setting, all nine of the participants described still being involved in a religious practice, but having developed more of a spiritual connection with God then they had previously.

Heermann, Wiggins, and Rutter (2007) suggested that having a strong spirituality that is well grounded could have a strong impact on a person's well-being. The participants in my study developed a strong spirituality that assisted them in overcoming the religious negativity they had experienced. All of the participants gave a definition of spirituality that was based on their personal experience. Spirituality is part of a religious experience that is subjective and personal to an individual (Hill and Pargament, 2005). Spirituality as defined by the majority of the participants in this study used key words such as individual journey, relationship with God, higher power, or something that is within. This was an indication that their concept of spirituality was more personal than their concept of religion. Paul and Frieden (2008) conducted a study where they discussed why some men embrace their sexual orientation while others do not. Several of the men choose to make a distinction between religiosity and spirituality in order to maintain their connection with God (Paul & Frieden, 2008). The participants in this study chose to make that distinction as well, in order to maintain their spiritual perspective in a relationship with God, which helped them to develop and maintain a strong spiritual well-being.

The participants have had a wide variety of experiences as Black LGBT individuals with spirituality and/or religion. Some of the experiences have helped them to grow into their spirituality. Having negative experiences surrounding their sexual orientation can be detrimental to a LGBT individual, which can cause internalized homonegativity, depression, and have other detrimental effects (Kubicek et al. 2009).

Hill and Pargament (2003) related there is a strong indication that there is a link between religion/spirituality and health. Suggested by attachment theory, having a strong connection with God can offer comfort in stressful situations (Hill & Pargament 2003). The religious/spiritual individual may seek to have a strong connection with God as a way to cope with negativity in a religious setting. The participants in my study indicated the importance that being involved in a religious setting had been to them prior to their sexual orientation being known. Through the discussion of their experiences they detailed how the religious negativity impacted their well-being or lack of leading to feelings of abandonment, maladaptive coping, and emotional turmoil that was stressful and resulted in a disconnection with God.

The impacts that the negative experience had on the participants were life-altering. None of the participants are members of the church family or denomination that they grew up in. Paul and Frieden (2008) conducted a study with five white gay men on their sexual orientation identity. The men in this research study discussed how their religious beliefs had changed once they accepted their gay identity (Paul & Frieden 2008). The participants related how this was due to the judgmental messages that were part of their previous religious denominations (Paul & Frieden, 2008). The participants in my research study made changes to their religious beliefs after their experiences with religious homonegativity. Most notably, changing their faith community and in their own words becoming more spiritual than religious.

In addition to the distinctions made between religion and spirituality, eight themes were generated from analyzing the participants' responses. These themes were: change in

faith community, experiencing familial acceptance or discord/rejection due to sexual orientation, feelings of abandonment by God/religion, negative experience in a religious setting due to sexual orientation, emotional reactions, maladaptive coping, adaptive coping, and religious and/or spiritual reconciliation. The theme of faith community describes how the participants' faith communities impacted their lives and the reasons changes were made with their faith communities. The participants' faith communities had a strong impact on their lives; it didn't matter whether it was a faith community that they grew up in or one that they wanted to become a part of as an adult. The negativity that the participants experienced was a catalyst for change that pushed them away from church, sometimes for years. Several of them had a difficult time, initially, coping with this experience.

The theme of experiencing familial acceptance or discord/rejection due to sexual orientation describes the participants' interpretation of how their families reacted and expressed themselves once the participants' sexual orientation were revealed. Lease and Shulman (2003) research study on religion for family members of LGB individuals indicated that some family members of LGB individuals choose to leave their religious setting when it did not approve of their relatives sexual orientation, some families remained in that setting, and some families found a different accepting religious setting. The participants in this study whose families were members of a church made references that their family members stayed with their religious setting and continued to hold beliefs that the participants were sinning by being in a same sex relationship.

The theme of feelings of abandonment by God/religion describes in the participants' own words how they felt during and after their negative experience in a religious setting. Hill and Pargament (2003) related that by attachment theory a strong connection to God can be made yet if that connection is broken then feelings of abandonment can be the result.

The theme of negative experience in a religious setting due to sexual orientation describes in essence what the participant experienced, by whom, and in what setting they were in. Moore (2008) describes how the Black Church preserves the consensus to "love" the Black SGL individual yet their lifestyle should not be tolerated. This has led to the Black SGL individual experiencing negativity within the church.

The theme of emotional reactions describes the emotional aspects of how some of the participants reacted to the negative experience in a religious setting. Heermann, Wiggins, and Rutter (2007) related exposure to negativity in religious settings can led to negative consequences for the LGB individual. Among these negative consequences are depression, low self-esteem, shame, and self-hatred.

The theme of coping, whether adaptive or maladaptive, describes how each participant coped with the negativity that they experienced in a religious setting. Each participant had his or her own method of coping with the negativity and their sexual orientation. There were some cases where the Black LGBT individual had negative coping mechanisms when they were not able to reconcile their sexual orientation with their religious upbringing. Love et al. (2005) related that there are three distinct categories of reconciliation: undeveloped, unreconciled, and reconciled. The theme of

religious and/or spiritual reconciliation describes in the participants' own words how they made the choice to reconcile their religious and/or spiritual identity with their sexual orientation.

When the coping mechanism is unreconciled it can led to negative behaviors. Some of the participants in this study initially had unreconciled coping that lead them to being promiscuous, depressed, or become addicted to alcohol and/or drugs. A few who had undeveloped coping appeared to have let go of both their religiousness and their spirituality. As they began to reconcile their sexuality with their spirituality, they all came back to a church on their own terms, though most of them had a preference of being identified as more spiritual than religious.

All nine of the participants made a change in their church/faith community due to their negative experience, yet one chose to keep his/her denomination the same and another chose only to state that he/she was Christian. Hill and Pargament (2003) discussed how a person's physical and mental health could be impacted by his or her religious and spiritual beliefs. They also stated that there are some social scientists that have beliefs that there are some health benefits attached to support from members, leaders and clergy of the church (Hill & Pargament 2003). The participants in this study were able to find a church where they were welcomed, embraced, and accepted by the members, leaders, and clergy of the church who were aware of their sexual orientation and identity.

There are interpretations of the Bible that are an integral part of some Black

churches. Some of these interpretations are ingrained within the church, having been

passed down for generations. When these interpretations are used to negatively impact an

individual because of his or her sexual orientation/identity then the potential for harm is

heightened (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). The participants' experiences impacted their lives

in a manner that led to unhealthy coping mechanisms, a fracture in their personal

relationships, and a fracture in their relationship with God. That led the participants in

this study to leave their churches of origin and to find a church that was open and

accepting of their sexual orientation/identity; some of them chose a church that was

predominately LGBT and some chose a church where the majority of the congregants

were heterosexual.

Implications for Social Change

Implications for positive social change of this study include a better

understanding of how negativity in a religious setting impacts the mental and spiritual

well being of the Black LGBT individual. It will also provide information for therapists

and psychologists who are seeking data that would be beneficial for their Black LGBT

client's treatment strategies. Additional potential implications for positive social change

include providing information to the Black religious LGBT individual who may want

data on how others have reconciled their sexual orientation with their religious beliefs.

Training for family members, clergy, therapists, educators, psychologists, and

psychiatrists must include problematic issues that are specific to the Black

religious/spiritual LGBT individual. The results of this research show how the Black

LGBT individual experiences negativity with the very entity that has long been a central

force in the Black community. The research also provides insight into the various ways that the Black LGBT individual attempts to cope and reconcile their religious beliefs and upbringing. When the reconciliation does not occur, there are potential negative results, (i.e. drug addiction, emotional abuse, lost of family cohesiveness, and depression). Gathering information on this population's spiritual well-being, or lack of, can assist in the therapeutic relationship and aid in the healing process of negative religious experiences (Schuck & Liddle, 2001) for those LGBT individuals who are seeking healing.

<div align="center">**Limitations**</div>

As this study was phenomenological in nature, its goal was to describe this group of Black LGBT individuals. One limitation was the participants having being selected from only one geographic location; therefore, the findings might not be generalizable to Black LGBT individuals in other regions of the country or outside of the U.S. Individuals who responded were primarily Christians, and so, results may be different if their religious origins were more diverse. Therefore, this research may not be generalizable to other religious groups. Also there was only one transgender individual included in this research. A study with only transgender individuals may yield different results.

<div align="center">**Recommendations for Action**</div>

Presenting this information in various forums would assist to circulate this research data. Sharing this information with LGBT groups and religious organizations can assist in removing the divide that is present in some religious organizations when it

pertains to the well-being of Black LGBT individuals. Black LGBT individuals who are religious and want to remain connected to their family and their traditional organized Christian religions need and want to feel safe, loved, and not judged.

Recommendations for the communities, clinicians, and Christian religious organizations would be to educate themselves on overcoming homonegativity, to assist the Christian religious Black LGBT individual with finding their Christian religious identity, and become a welcoming place for all individuals.

Recommendations for Further Study

Through a phenomenological lens, this study sought to answer questions with the expectation of additional questions being created. These recommendations are relevant for LGBT individuals who identify as Christian. The following are questions that still exist:

- How can LGBT organizations be more supportive?
- What resources are available for the LGBT individual who wants to be religious and/or spiritual?
- Should religious leaders change the culture of religious homonegativity?
- How can clinicians and researchers assist with changing the culture of religious homonegativity?
- How can biases and religious homonegativity be decreased?
- How can this study be replicated with other religious denominations?

My recommendations would be for more research studies that were inclusive of Black LGBT individuals and their experience with Christian religion and spirituality. It would also be important to include both positive and negative experiences that the Black LGBT individual had in a traditional organized religious setting. The positive experiences would be beneficial to discern what, why, and how the individual assimilated the experience. Additionally, when there are affirming religious experiences by religious leaders, other religious leaders can use those experiences as training aids. Another recommendation would be for Christian religious organizations to incorporate positive models of acceptance of the Black LGBT individual as a method of assisting them in maintaining a strong religious identity.

Researcher's Experience

I have taken precautions throughout this research process to ensure that my biases were not incorporated into or affect this process. I was candid with the participants concerning my sexual orientation as a heterosexual female. I inquired if this was a concern to the participants and they all stated it was not. My religious beliefs were not discussed at the beginning of the interviews; however, by the time the interviews were completed the participants were aware that I am a Christian. I was not raised in a Christian home in my childhood. My grandmother would take me and my siblings to church with her on occasions, especially Christian holidays.

I made notes after the interviews on my thoughts and how the interview impacted on me. My questions during the interview were open-ended in order for the participants to be able to describe their experience. The participants were allowed to express their

thoughts without any interruption, except for needed clarification. I recorded all the interviews with the same digital recorder. I listened intently to the participants being aware of their comfort, safety, and need for tissue and water.

Transcribing the interviews was time consuming and tedious. It took me a lot longer to transcribe the interviews then I had initially allowed myself. I inadvertently deleted the first set of several pages of transcribed interviews. After that, I purchased software to assist me in the process of transcription, which was more efficient. After I completed all the transcribing, I emailed each participant a copy of his or her transcribed interview and asked to be informed of any changes that needed to be made. Only one participant requested a change; however, they did not respond with any changes. At that point, member checking was finalized.

I have not had the experience of negativity in a religious setting due to my sexual orientation; however, I have had a negative experience in a religious setting because of my race. There was a priest at the church that I was attending who would turn away whenever he saw me approaching. By no means does this equate to the experiences of the participants in this study; however, it was enough to make me feel unwelcomed in a place of worship. I had to set aside my bias, keeping it out of the paper. I do have a relative who had the experience of religious negativity in a church in the Midwest. He relayed that experience to me which inspired me to do this research. This research has given me an opportunity to better understand the depths of the experience of the Black LGBT individual who had experienced homonegativity. I will forever have a place of gratitude, admiration, and respect in my heart for the participants who extended themselves to me

in order to conduct this research study. The results support the experience of my brother, without whom I would have never thought to research this phenomena.

Conclusion

This research study contributes to the gap in the literature with respect to Black LGBT individuals who have experienced negativity in a religious setting. This study provides valuable information for clergy, clinicians, families, and Black LGBT individuals to better understand this phenomenon. It documents the study participants' reports of negative experiences that they attributed to their sexual orientation or gender identity in a religious setting. They each shared their experiences with the hope that doing so will benefit other LGBT individuals and prevent others from experiencing similar negativity. They shared their experiences so that other Black LGBT individuals would know and understand that it is possible to be LGBT and still have a strong religious belief that is hopeful, valued, safe, and positive. They all discussed how their experience made them feel and how they were able to reconcile, cope, and move forward with a strong sense of self. They shared the devastation that they felt; the hurt, and the anger with God and others who said they were sinners who were damned to hell. They also shared how they were able to find hope, courage, and strength to move beyond the negativity in order to have a healthy religious and spiritual connection. These findings remind us how important the Black Church has been, and continues to be, as a catalyst for the treatment of Black LGBT individuals.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. How do you define religion?

2. How do you define spirituality?

3. What has been your experience of spirituality and/or religion as a Black LGBT individual?

4. Have you ever felt or saw your sexual orientation causing people in your church setting to treat you or talk to you in a way that made you feel unwanted in that setting? If so, how did this make you feel and what was your reaction?

5. How did this experience affect your relationship with your faith community?

6. How did you cope with the experience?

7. Did you make any changes in your church/faith community because of this experience? What were those changes?

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Patricia Hill

You are invited to take part in a research study of Black LGBT individuals and how they

deal with negativity in a religious setting. You were selected to be in the study because you are

18 years of age or older and have stated that you have had an experience of dealing with

negativity in a religious setting. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow

you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. I am a student at Walden

University in the General Psychology PhD program and I am the researcher for this study.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Black LGBT individuals when they
face negativity in a religious setting and how they cope.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
       Complete a demographic survey that may take up to 30 minutes to complete.
       Participate in an audio-recorded confidential interview that may last from 60 to 90
       minutes.
       There may be a follow up interview if you are not able to complete the first interview.
       At a later date you will be asked to review your transcript in order to ensure that I have
       accurately recorded your experience. It should take approximately 30 minutes to
       complete this review.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be
in the study. No one at the LGBT Center of Raleigh will treat you differently if you decide not to
be part of the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during or
after the study. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
Due to the sensitivity of the nature of this study there is a potential risk that the questions
asked and/or the discussion may be uncomfortable or emotionally upsetting to you as a
participant. By understanding this risk, you may refuse to answer any questions that make
you uncomfortable or are emotionally upsetting. You may also end your participation at
any time without facing any consequences.

In the event that you feel undue emotional stress, you may contact "The Trevor Project" at
866-488-7386 or "Wren House/Haven House Crisis Line" at 919-832-7866. Payments for

counseling must be provided by you or a third party payer (health insurance, Medicare, etc.).
The potential benefits of this study are: providing information to Black LGBT individuals who have had negative experiences in a religious setting due to their sexual orientation, providing much needed research to clinicians who provide therapy to Black LGBT individuals who dealing with religious issues, and for friends and families who are seeking information on how to be present to the Black LGBT individual when confronted with negativity in a religious setting.

Payment:
You will not receive any form of compensation for participating in this study.

Privacy:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Transcribed data will be kept secure by the researcher on a USB in a secure location of a safe deposit box in a bank. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email at patricia.hill@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 3121210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 07-22-13-0110080
 and it expires on **IRB will enter expiration date**.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent   _____

Participant's Signature   _____

Researcher's Signature   _____

Appendix C: Screener Form

Participant: _____ Date: _____

1) ____ yes   ____ no   I am a Black LGBT individual who experienced
                                  being treated differently in a religious setting
                                  because of my sexual orientation.

2) ____ yes   ____ no   I am at least 18 years of age.

3) ____ yes   ____ no   I read, speak, and understand the English
                                  language.

Scheduled date and time for interview: _____, 2013

Completed by: _____ on _____, 2013

Via: _____ Phone   _____e-mail _____ in person

Appendix D: Flyer

You are being invited to participate in a research study. I'm looking for Black LGBT individuals who have had a negative experience in a religious setting due to their sexual orientation.

There are a number of research studies that have been conducted with LGBT individuals and their experiences with negativity in a religious setting. Yet, there is insufficient research with Black LGBT individuals and their experiences. You will not receive any monetary incentive for your participation; however, this study will assist in increasing information regarding this phenomenon. In addition, this study can provide information and may improve the understanding for the therapists, psychologists, and clergy of all denominations, friends, and family members who interact with the Black LGBT individual.

All information will be kept confidential and only discussed with my committee chairperson at Walden University. This research study will be made public; however, no participant's name or any identifying information will be made public, thus, keeping your participation confidential.

In order for you to be a part of this study there are certain criteria that you must meet:

1. You had a negative experience in a religious setting due to your sexual orientation;
2. You are 18 years of age or older;
3. You are a Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender individual; and
4. You read, speak, and understand English.

If you accept this invitation, I would like to arrange a date and time to meet with you. This meeting will take 60 to 90 minutes, and may require a follow up meeting. You may request to receive the study results (minus any and all confidential information) once the study is accepted and approved by Walden University. If you meet all the criteria and accept this invitation you can respond to either the phone number or e-mail printed at the bottom of this invitation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,
Patricia Hill
Walden University PHD General Psychology Candidate
Patricia.hill@waldenu.edu
919-555-1234

Appendix E: Demographic Questions

Participant: _____   Date:_____2013

Mailing Address: _____

_____

Email Address: _____

Phone Number: Cell: _____Home: _____ Work: _____

- o What is your age?   _____

- o What is your gender?

  Female_____   Male_____   Transgender_____

- o What is your sexual orientation?

  Lesbian _____ Gay _____ Bisexual _____

- o What is your current religious affiliation? If it has changed what was your

  previous religious affiliation?

  _____

- o What is your education level?

  Some High School yes____ no___ High School Diploma yes ____ no____

  Some College ___ Undergraduate Degree___ Post Graduate _____

- o What is your current relationship status?

  Single _____

  Partnered/Married _____

Audio Recording Reference #: _____

Appendix F: Interview Sample

Patricia: We have a series of seven questions that I'm going to ask you and we can expound on them, go over them as you see fit. The first question is how do you define religion?

Participant: How do I define religion-how do I define religion, that's a good question. To me religion is a, I guess, a named denomination of practices that have a commonality to them Catholicism, Mormonism, Judaism, where they have similar practices within that scope. Christian with some variations but that's a hard thing to define, I just think it's got a set pattern of beliefs and responses and I don't know how to say it. Just for example in Catholicism in some aspects the confession part of Catholicism, you know, going to confession is a part of Catholicism. Judaism we've got Hanukkah the tradition of Hanukkah so there is a spiritual belief but it also has set patterns and rules, but I don't want to say rules but.

Patricia: Actually, I think that might be a good way, I think you defined it very well.

Participant: Okay.

Patricia: How do you define spirituality?

Participant: To me spirituality is a belief in the connectedness between people but also in a higher power that guides our lives. That there is a force in the universe that really, I want to say controls everything, but there is something higher than us that helps us to, help us when we need it but also wants us to move forward on our own in some cases. I would say I'm much more spiritual than religious in a lot of ways.

Patricia: Can you explain what you mean by that?

Participant: I believe more in the, there's a higher being that kind of guides us and helps us when we need it. There is a purpose to things that that we can't see that pattern whereas the religion like going to church every week or going to confession the kind of patterns and rules and those things aren't part of my daily life whereas spirituality is. So that's how I see it, it's taken me a long time to get to that.

Patricia: I can imagine.

Participant: A long time.

Patricia: What has been your experience of spirituality and/or religion as a Black LGBT individual?
Participant: Wow, I would say that that has been a constantly, I would say for the first 20 years of my life it was a very set thing my mother and father went to a Church of Christ.

It was very rigid, very adamant there were things that just weren't done or talked about or being gay was one of them. And for the first 20 years of my life I really tried hard to stick to that aspect of religion. You know I still believe in Jesus Christ I still believe in that. But when I came out at 21 there was a real shift in that for me and I would say probably for about five to six years after coming out there was no religion or spirituality in my life at all. I just totally rejected it I really felt cause and I'll say more about this later. My parents really weren't happy with me coming out and they said a lot of things and tried a lot of things that were faith-based that really drove me away from church and drove me away from spirituality at all I think. It led to a lot of things that I'm still dealing with today but I don't know it's been an interesting experience.

Patricia: When you said faith-based I just want to clarify that, when you said faith based were you speaking in the religious aspect?

Participant: Yes, I would say yes.

Patricia: Now I shouldn't say religious, religion.

Participant: Yes, so for example my father took me to a pastor at another church to talk about God and what the Bible says about religion, about homosexuality and then he took me to a Christian counselor you know so everything that he did had some tinge of a certain Christianity to it. And tried hard to get me to come back to God which is what he would say and you know live right, not live in that lifestyle are the words he used a lot of times that was 20, 22 years ago and we still talk but he hasn't spoken about my homosexuality in 20 years. So you know I still believe in God and I still believe in Jesus and I think that's hard for him to reconcile. He doesn't understand how I can believe in God and Jesus and yet be gay. So…

Patricia: That's interesting. Have you ever felt or saw your sexual orientation causing people in your church setting to treat you or talk to you in the way that made you feel unwanted in that setting?

Participant: Yes

Patricia: Ok, so how did that make you feel and what was your reaction?

Participant: I remember about two years after I came out to my parents, my parents tried very hard not to try to tell other people. That was one of their biggest things that they didn't want other people to know.

Patricia: That was an interesting reaction that they had.
Participant: Yes, they wanted, they didn't like me, you know someone called the house and it was a guy they automatically assumed that it was someone that I was dating and it was probably just a friend or someone from work. Eventually my parents, my mother

said she couldn't keep it to herself, she had to talk to someone and she talked to a neighbor of ours who I had known for years and who I still talk to. But she would see me in church and she used to be very inquisitive about my life and how are you doing and what's going on, and she just kind of said hello and kept on walking. Or people would blatantly come up to me and go, well you know you need to, you're hurting your parents, you need to be right with God and so I haven't been back to that church in 15, 17 years so.

Patricia: So it sounds as if your reaction was not to go back to that church?

Participant: That's right, that's right. I did go for about two years after I came out and because I was trying to please my parents on that level. I didn't really believe what the pastor was saying as far as homosexuality was because I had done some research on my own. But for two years I did go and then I just realized that my parents felt they were correct and I felt I had to go on a different way then they did so, so it would it was very tough but it was what I needed to do.

Patricia: How did this experience affect your relationship with your faith community?

Participant: Well as I said I really hadn't been in the faith community I really let go of church, spirituality I didn't believe in anything for about for a long time. I just felt like, I felt like God had abandoned me, I felt like He didn't love me and I couldn't help who I was and I spent many years praying not to be gay. And I just thought well if I'm praying not to be gay but I am gay then that means that God isn't answering my prayers so he doesn't really exist and doesn't care. And I just said, well you know what, I'm going to forget about it and I didn't go to church, I didn't go to any type of thing you know I just stayed away.

Patricia: It's interesting to me that you had very definitive definitions of religion and spirituality that were totally different and when it came to how you felt after that experience it seems as if you lump them both together. At that time was your view of religion and spirituality the same and has it changed since then.

Participant: That's a great question I think you're right I think there was a little piece of me that felt spirituality was different but I wasn't really able to explain it then. You know I would often go out for walks by myself and I would read books about spirituality, Buddhism and other things and I would feel okay there's spirit I feel there's something else out there but I don't know how to separate it from what my parents have taught me and what I have done all my life. So when I had those things happen when I came out I just left them behind both. I just said I can't reconcile these things together and I just left both of them behind. It wasn't until many years later when I started to work, kind of work on that together there were some other things that brought that to my attention as well but it has been an interesting ups and down with it.

Patricia: Your journey has been interesting.

Participant: Very, very interesting you know and it's still going on, its still going on. So, but it was tough and like I said my parents have yet to really talk about it with me and I'm 42 now and I told them when I was 21 so you know it's very interesting to not, to have a big block of your life that people don't want to discuss.

Patricia: Your life I mean that's who you are.

Participant: Right, that's how, that's what I feel I really do. I still feel that I'm, I told them this when I came out, a lot of me is still the same person that I was when I was, you know you thought I was straight. It's just who I'm dating that's different and my perception on religion is different. And what I've come to realize is my parents had built this kind of vision of what my life was going to be like and when that vision isn't realized they don't know how to reset it. For me that's how I see it.

Patricia: That's an interesting way to see it and there's probably a lot of truth to that and I think it's good that you have recognized that and still are able to be who you are and to accept your parents.

Participant: Part of the story is that I've been sober for about six years now and part of this reconnecting to spirituality has been being in the 12-step program. And really that has helped me to restore my spirituality in a lot of ways. I actually come here to meetings of AA sometimes and one of the big tenets of the program is you have to except people for where they are right now. That's been a big step for me I realize to it took me 21 years to understand and kind of accept who I was now I have to let my parents come to their own realization at their own time. They may not ever do it I've had to learn to accept that too. I feel very fortunate, I've had very supportive friends, very supportive friends who've helped me, I have some family members who were always very supportive, they knew who I was and said we don't care we love you So I'm fortunate in some ways cause I know friends of mine don't have that. I know some friends whose parents and family just said we don't really want to talk to you ever again. So I consider myself lucky.

Patricia: It sounds as if you are. You've pretty much answered the next question but I just want to say it anyway. How did you cope with the experience? And I just want to say one of the things that I sort of picked up on what you said was that you did have an addiction but with acceptance of who you are and who your parents are you've been able to come to an understanding. Can you…

Participant: Yes, well I'll kind of take you through it's a complicated thing. I think when I abandoned the spirituality, when I abandoned the religion that there was because I enjoyed going to church I was one of those kids I loved going to church, I loved biblical movies I loved all of that stuff. But I went looking for something to fill that space and

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fortunately for me it wasn't, it wasn't unsafe sex, it was trying to connect with people. You know I tried to find people you know in some of those cases when I was growing up there were bars that you went to we didn't have the online stuff that we do now so I would go to bars and meet people. So part of that being in that environment was drinking. And thinking that that was kind of fulfilling the spiritual piece that I was looking for in a lot of ways. But over time it didn't work anymore, it did not solve the problem that I thought it was going to do. I think that was a big coping mechanism for me for about 10 years, I was really drinking, going out and I just realized about nine years ago that I just couldn't do it anymore. It wasn't doing what I thought it was going to do and I recognized that I had a severe addiction and I came into the program of AA. Again, that really, I think that saved my life, it really saved my life. I would honestly say I didn't really cope I just filled it with something else that was not healthy you know what I mean.

Patricia: You existed.

Participant: Yes that's it, I was miserable I felt lonely all the time I was unhappy, I felt like my life was not really going forward where I wanted it to be and I just, I was just there. I moved around a lot thinking that it was going to help me, I moved to DC for about five years, then I moved to California for a couple of years, then I moved back here, I really was looking for something to, I didn't know what it was but I was looking so.

Patricia: Wonderful, we've discussed this you are doing a fantastic job of answering these questions based on your experience and this is the last question. Did you make any changes in your faith community because of this experience and if so what were those changes?

Participant: I would say yes when I moved to DC that was the first time I had ever gone to a gay friendly church I didn't even know they existed. It was a MCC church and I can't remember where it was in DC but part of being in AA was going to these meetings in different places and one of them was in this church in DC. I thought, I remember walking in thinking that this is a gay friendly church I don't understand that because I still had this belief of what the Bible had been taught to me from all my life. So I think the biggest thing was just searching out places that I felt supported me, I read a lot, I continue to read a lot more, I begin having really deep discussions with the people about their faith and what they believed. I just started seeking out more information and seeking out people that could help me with that information. I was blessed to have people who did that and I was getting sober at the time so I think I was clearheaded enough to accept that information. Now I will say there are sometimes I still struggle, there are times I still struggle with does God really love me, does He really care about me, is who I am okay, but most of the time I'm pretty happy. I started looking for places to go, I started looking for people to hang out with, I started reading information, I started, you know, really and again developing more of my spirituality then my religion. So I wasn't going to

particular churches, I wasn't going to particular things I was just gathering all of this information and creating my own concept of my spiritual belief.

Patricia: It sounds like it was during that time was when you really started making a difference between your view on religion and your view on spirituality.

Participant: That's correct.

Patricia: And by accepting who you are and accepting whose you are.

Participant: Right, right

Patricia: That there became a separation of religion and spirituality for you?

Participant: That's very true I came to realize that the definition I gave you when I first started, that became my definition of religion and spirituality was you know, spirituality is more of a personal connection to God higher power whichever one you want to call it. Whereas I felt that religion was more of this kind of communal connection to God where people came together as a group and had rituals and commonalities of action that's what I will use commonalities of action. So they would have Communion prayer singing there's a ritual to it and I began to realize that for me that ritual could reinforce the spirituality for me but it wasn't the basis of it. So and that's become kind of my philosophy that my spirituality is a personal connection with God and then religion which I will say recently I had been seeking out places of worship to think about going back to. I've been to the St. Jude's church in Wilmington a few times, I haven't been here yet I've been here five years in Raleigh but I have not been here yet which I would like to come sometimes. But I'm actually looking for looking into reconnecting on that religion level on that kind of communal level with people. So but it's still an amazing journey it really is and I again I'm very fortunate, I'm very fortunate that even though my parents have a hard time accepting who I am they love me and I love them they'll do anything for me and I will do for them. I but as you said earlier I've accepted who I am and if they can't do it that's okay it's really is okay because I know that my God that I believe in loves me unconditionally. But it's taken 40 years to really get to that level and I feel a lot of my African-American female and male LGBT friends may not ever get to that. From what I've experienced and talked with them some of them were far more traumatized than I was by their family by their church and they just refuse to think about any positive experience or connection with God in any way, which that's their journey and I hope that they can reconsider but I've heard horror stories.

Patricia: I can imagine that that's the difficulty of it when you're in the setting where everybody else is feeling loved by God and because of an interpretation that a person has they put on you, not you personally, but they put on you an LGBT person their ideology and their interpretation and not to make them feel accepted and wanted has to be a very, very difficult.

Participant: I think between I think honestly that is why the HIV and AIDS rate in the Black community especially gay men is so high. Because I think that many of them just feel that there is no one out there that cares for them and in some cases they will use sexuality as a way of connecting with people and whether it's safe or unsafe they don't really care as long as they're filling connected with someone. And I think, I think that's for me that's just my opinion that's part of the research that I hope to do some day is on sexual health and the connectedness what does sexuality what this sex means to them personally. Are they more apt to have unsafe sex if they feel the person will stay with them if they have unsafe sex. I don't know I just feel that our community the Black community until we really start talking about sex and in a really real way that we're going to continue to have these struggles. And in the Hispanic community as well, there's a big religious aspect to the Spanish community that I can see their HIV, especially gay man it's also really skyrocketing. So again I'm lucky and couldn't imagine I guess I've seen some horror stories that I just pray that that stuff ends one of these days.

Patricia: That would be good wouldn't it?

Participant: It would.

Patricia: It would be. There are no more questions that I have to ask other then is there anything else that you would like to add or clarify in this interview?

Participant: I think for me as I said I think in the Black community the church has been the center of so many things for so many years that what you said earlier about one person's interpretation affecting the whole church. That people are so, people are so afraid of challenging or having their own interpretation of things because they want to feel part of the group. That until that fear goes away there is not going to be a lot of changes in some cases, I don't believe. I think the Black church really there are some positive changes starting to happen in the Black church but I think it's going to take some real strong leadership to say listen we've got to have a really serious conversation about this in a real way. We've got to love our brothers and sisters where they are right now it's none of our business what God thinks about them I don't know if that sounds right what I'm saying but.
Patricia: It sounds as if what you are saying, is that with the Black church it's not that it's none of our business what God thinks about them it's the interpretation and I and I use that word a lot because to me that's what it is a person's interpretation of certain passages in the Bible.

Participant: And ignoring so many other passages that, for example great point when I challenged my parents on some of the things in the Bible, you know, because again when you watch a church sermon on TV or when you go to a church sermon there is this, what's the word, rigidity to it that this is the word of God that it's infallible but when you read the Bible there are some things that really there need to be some answers on and

that's just my opinion. But I think the Black church members are so challenged are so afraid to challenge and learn on their own because they don't want to be part of not be part of that community that they don't want to do that and also to it, it's a sense of not just welcoming GLBT folks but really believing in your heart that they are perfect in the sight of God. That they have as much chance to go to heaven as anybody else because I've also found in some cases where there are people who say oh well you should come to our church we welcome you but when you get there there's this, there's this really there's this strong sense of we're glad you're here we're going to fix you.

Patricia: And that's why they want you to come so they can fix you.

Participant: Exactly, exactly I've had that happened twice. Where they said we welcome you we're a different kind of church and we want you to be here but again you made a great point homosexuality is one of those passages where they just will repeat that on a loop over and over again. They won't talk about divorce, they won't talk about, you know, wearing two types of cloth or so many other passages in the Bible that really when you think about them it should give you pause it should really make you think. So I hope we have some courageous leaders some day who can say wait a minute folks let's really read this, let's really read this and let's really put it into context so we'll see.

Patricia: Thank you so much again I really appreciate your honesty I really appreciate you sharing your story with me.

Participant: I'm glad to do it I am so happy that you're doing this I think it really needs to have more research on this because I think for our community especially, this religion is the linchpin of so many things and until someone delves into it, and shows the effects of what it's doing there won't be much change.

Patricia: You will be able to have access to this research once I'm completed however you will not know who said what because of the confidentiality. This is confidential nothing that I will have will relate back to you specifically but you will like I said have access to this we to me also meet again once I start transcribing this information to make sure that I have completely and honestly and unbiased put your thoughts down thank you so much.
Participant: Thank you.

Appendix G: Interview Thought Journal

August 11, 2013

My first interview. Didn't go as well as I thought it would. I was really nervous and feel that I didn't ask enough follow-up questions. Participant didn't stay with the questions. I need to step up my interviewing technique or I won't have enough information for this study.

September 6, 2013

Second interview, still seems a little shaky on my part. I'm not really sure what I was expecting maybe these questions or my technique is not quiet right. I want to hear more of how they felt during this experience. It seems that so far I'm only getting surface answers. Am I expecting too much, am I expecting the participants to just pour out their hearts to me? Is this way over my head?

September 10, 2013

Third interview. This participant didn't want to meet at the 2 locations I had set up. So we did the interview outside of their apartment complex. It's a beautiful day, I felt more relaxed which seemed to make this participant more relaxed or is it because I'm feeling more confident. I got more detailed answers during this interview. It seemed as if I got too much information. Ok what is it I'm looking for, am I being too hard on myself?

September 15, 2013

Fourth interview. I'm feeling a little bit better about how this interview went. Surprise to me I encouraged the participant to go a bit further with how they felt with their experience. Not sure if that was the right thing now. I'm feeling emotionally drained, I need to talk to someone. I'm sad that this participant can't talk to their parents about their sexual orientation. Ok, I'm really being biased; I need to shake this off.

October 3, 2013

Fifth interview. This participant came in rushing. That didn't set too well with me even though I made every attempt to be accommodating. This participant had a very rich story that also included feelings of negativity that didn't stem from their sexual orientation. I think I did well with this interview even though it felt rushed cause they had somewhere to go. Well at least I know I don't have anymore than five interviews left.

October 30, 2013

Sixth interview. These interviews are not coming as fast as I thought they would. This participant also did not want to meet at the 2 locations that I had suggested. We met at a restaurant that had tables set up outside. There was an issue with the audio recorder I had to ask the first question over again. So far this has been the most emotional interview, it took everything within me not to cry during the interview. Wow, I'm crying now as I think about that interview. Again, I'm going to need to talk to someone, not about what was told to me during the interview but how I'm feeling. This reaction is all about me at this point. It really angers me when people are mistreated by religious leaders, no matter the reason.

November 13, 2013

Seventh interview. This seems to be getting easier. I think I'm doing a better job of asking follow up questions. This interview was interesting in that I found out about a religion that I was not familiar with their dogma. I just keep thinking there is an ending in sight.

November 13, 2013

Eighth interview. This is the second interview today. Actually back-to-back interviews. I'm mentally exhausted. I'm going to need to be really careful, these interviews have gotten intense. I can't imagine how it must be to experience some of the situations that these participants have had. Wow.

November 29, 2013

Ninth interview. I drove two hours to get to this interview and two hours to get back home. This has been the longest interview so far in actual interviewing and travel time. In a sense I was glad that it took me two hours to get back home. It gave me time to reflect on this interview. This has been the most difficult interview. It's amazing to me how we can mistreat each other based on our biases and prejudices. I also have to remember not to interject my bias in favor of this participant. Difficult! This was a long way from that first interview.

December 9, 2013

Tenth and final interview. Again I drove two hours to get to this interview and two hours to get back. I really wanted to cancel this one I left the hospital to come here. My grandson was born two months premature and is in neo-natal intensive care. I did my best to focus on this interview it helped to take my mind off of the baby. This participant's experience was so compelling. This is another religious denomination that I was not familiar with the dogma. I've learned something else today. I'm mentally and physically drained.

Appendix H: Sample Coding Summary by Source Report

I'll mention recovery a third time because it's allowed me to find spirituality it's allowed me to find a path to a great God of n understanding

Nodes\\Religion

Node

	Y	0.0101	1	
				PAH

I define religion as a whole, as a group of principals, practices, doctrine, created for large groups of people to follow and for individuals to find balance and peace within.

| | | | | PAH |

Nodes\\Religion\Group of principles

	N	0.0101	1	
				PAH

I define religion as a whole, as a group of principals, practices, doctrine, created for large groups of people to follow and for individuals to find balance and peace within.

Nodes\\Religious Denomination-Current

	Y	0.0030	2	

Nodes\\Addictions\Gay and addicted

| | | | PAH |

nondenominational

Yes, being gay had a lot to do with my addiction

Classification	A g g	Coverage	Number Of Coding References	Coded By Initials
		0.0084	1	
			2	4/24/2014 10:25 AM

very big church nondenominational.

I'll mention recovery a th
understanding

Nodes\\Religious Denomination-Current\Nondenominational

	N	0.0084	1	
				PAH

Cov era ge	Number Of Coding References	Reference Number	

Nodes\\Religious Denominations-Previous\Catholic (2)

| 0.0 005 | 1 | | |
| 0.0 020 | 1 | 1 | | |

Catholic

Nodes\\Religious Negativity

| 0.0 472 | 4 | | |
| 0.0 008 | 2 | 1 | | |

And certainly as I became gay and understood that that's who I was my early messages and the co
messages of the Catholic Church is that's not welcome.

| | | 2 | | |

So but that goes alone as I became more comfortable with, as a gay man and knowing that for hund
years the Catholic Church is anti-gay its imposing and imploded around those issues.

| | | 3 | | |

for those folks who are Black and gay and who are told that they are bad or not good or unwelcome
religion that's harsh and it's real and it's overwhelmingly prevalent here.

| 0.0 004 | 1 | 4 | | |

personally I find folks, gay folks, and gay Black folks the influence of the Black the southern Baptist
and some other religions in relationship to the people that I've known and loved in other parts of th
country really just created such self hate in individuals that it's sad to me.

Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Anti gay

| 0.0 108 | 1 | | |
| | | 1 | | |

So but that goes alone as I became more comfortable with, as a gay man and knowing that for hund
years the Catholic Church is anti-gay its imposing and imploded around those issues.

Nodes\\Self-acceptance\God loves me

0.0
086

1

1

A lot of that comes from just knowing. It took me quite a journey to know that I'm okay and not onl
but I'm ok exactly the way God loves me.

Nodes\\Sexual Orientation

0.0
003

1

1

Gay.

Cov era ge	Number Of Coding References	Reference Number	

Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Messages of the Catholic Church

0.0
091

1

1

And certainly as I became gay and understood that that's who I was my early messages and the cor
messages of the Catholic Church is that's not welcome.

Cov era ge	Number Of Coding References	Reference Number	

Nodes\\Sexual Orientation\Gay (2)

0.0
003

1

1

Gay.

0.0
086

1

1

Nodes\\Spirituality

0.0
146

1

1

Spirituality for me is an individual journey in harmony with the greater universe and humanity. So s
for me puts me in balance with people, plants, animals, God and allowing me to think of my higher
as life is unfolding in front of me.

Nodes\\Spirituality\Balance

0.0   1
146

1 |

Spirituality for me is an individual journey in harmony with the greater universe and humanity. So s
for me puts me in balance with people, plants, animals, God and allowing me to think of my higher
as life is unfolding in front of me.

Appendix I: Node (Themes) Structure

Node Structure
Spiritual Well-being of Black LGBT Individuals who have Experienced Negativity in a Religious Setting
5/28/2014 9:08 PM

Hierarchical Name	Nickname	Aggregate	User Assigned Color
Node			
Nodes			
Nodes\\Addictions		Yes	Red
Nodes\\Addictions\12 Step Program		No	None
Nodes\\Addictions\12 Steps		No	None
Nodes\\Addictions\Drugs		No	None
Nodes\\Addictions\Gay and addicted		No	None
Nodes\\Addictions\Going to bars		No	None
Nodes\\Addictions\I started drinking		Yes	Red
Nodes\\Addictions\Severe addiction		No	None
Nodes\\Anger		Yes	Yellow
Nodes\\Anger\Angry at God		No	None
Nodes\\Anger\Very mad cause she set me up		No	None
Nodes\\Coping		Yes	Purple
Nodes\\Coping\Drinking to cope		No	None
Nodes\\Coping\False coping		No	None
Nodes\\Coping\Feelings toward God		No	None
Nodes\\Coping\Gladly I coped it with joy		No	None
Nodes\\Coping\Religious roots helped me cope		No	None
Nodes\\Coping\Shut down		No	None
Nodes\\Depression		Yes	Blue
Nodes\\Depression\Major depression		No	None
Nodes\\Depression\Shut down		No	None
Nodes\\Depression\Sunk in my depression		No	None
Nodes\\Faith community		Yes	Orange
Nodes\\Faith community\Built my faith		No	None
Nodes\\Faith community\Immediate change was withdrawing from the church		No	None
Nodes\\Faith community\Well I guess some people just couldn't understand		No	None
Nodes\\Familial Acceptance or Discord		Yes	Yellow
Nodes\\Familial Acceptance or Discord\Daugther's acceptance		No	None
Nodes\\Familial Acceptance or Discord\Doomed to hell because of gender		No	None
Nodes\\Familial Acceptance or Discord\Family accepted me		No	None
Nodes\\Familial Acceptance or Discord\My mother she had kicked me out of her life		No	None

Hierarchical Name	Nickname	Aggregate	User Assigned Color
Nodes\\Feelings of Abandonment by God		Yes	Blue
Nodes\\Feelings of Abandonment by God\God didn't care		No	None
Nodes\\Feelings of Abandonment Family or Friends		Yes	Pink
Nodes\\Feelings of Abandonment Family or Friends\Abomination to hell		No	None
Nodes\\Feelings of Abandonment Family or Friends\Didn't know anybody		No	None
Nodes\\Feelings of Abandonment Family or Friends\Mother kicked me out of her life		No	None
Nodes\\Feelings of Abandonment Family or Friends\Not allowed to associate with other females at Kingdom Hall		No	None
Nodes\\Recovery		Yes	Blue
Nodes\\Recovery\Find spirituality		No	None
Nodes\\Religion		Yes	Green
Nodes\\Religion\A basis of philosophy		No	None
Nodes\\Religion\A personal relationship with God		No	None
Nodes\\Religion\Commonalities of action		No	None
Nodes\\Religion\Definition of Religion		No	None
Nodes\\Religion\Group of principles		No	None
Nodes\\Religion\MCC		No	None
Nodes\\Religion\Personal belief		No	None
Nodes\\Religion\Practices that are common		No	None
Nodes\\Religion\Religion is a faith		No	None
Nodes\\Religion\Sense of community		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Acceptance		Yes	Red
Nodes\\Religious Acceptance\A sin for you not to be who you are		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Acceptance\Answered my question along the journey		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Acceptance\Church acceptance		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Acceptance\Church with no stipulations		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Acceptance\Don't know if it is a sin that you're transgender		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Acceptance\Evolution of things going on		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Acceptance\Gay friendly church		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Acceptance\Interviewed Pastors		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Acceptance\Positive church experience		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Acceptance\Positive experience		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Acceptance\Rewarding		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Acceptance\The love and care that the people at the church give me		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Acceptance\They don't put people down at MCC		No	None
Nodes\\Religious assertiveness		Yes	Pink
Nodes\\Religious assertiveness\Request meetings with churches and schools		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Denomination-Current		Yes	Pink
Nodes\\Religious Denomination-Current\Baptist		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Denomination-Current\Baptist		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Denomination-Current\MCC		Yes	Pink
Nodes\\Religious Denomination-Current\Nondenominational		No	None

Hierarchical Name	Nickname	Aggregate	User Assigned Color
Nodes\\Religious Denomination-Current\Nondenominational		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Denominations-Previous		Yes	Purple
Nodes\\Religious Denominations-Previous\AME Zion Church		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Denominations-Previous\Baptist		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Denominations-Previous\Baptist		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Denominations-Previous\Baptist		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Denominations-Previous\Catholic		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Denominations-Previous\Catholic		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Denominations-Previous\Church of Christ		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Denominations-Previous\Greater Joy Ministry		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Denominations-Previous\Jehovah Witness		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Denominations-Previous\Pentacostal Baptist		Yes	Purple
Nodes\\Religious Negativity		Yes	Yellow
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Against homosexuality		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\All sorts of walks of life		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Anti gay		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Being in the Body of Christ		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Beliefs as far as transgender		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Bible scripiture		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Church membership		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Church membership		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Church that put individual out		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Disassociated from God		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Discrimination...in the Black religious community		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Disfellowsshipped me		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Disrespecting me anoouncing me as his brother		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Fix the gay		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\I have noticed some pastors who look down on homosexuals		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Influence of religion		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Messages of the Catholic Church		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\My reaction was to basically sit still		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Negativity experience in church		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Negativity in church due to sexuality		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Right with God		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Sever all ties		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Some don't accept you		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Special Sunday		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Telling me I couldn't be a member of that church		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\Unwelcome		No	None
Nodes\\Religious Negativity\What bothered me was that I wasn't accepted		No	None
Nodes\\Self-acceptance		Yes	Orange

Hierarchical Name	Nickname	Aggregate	User Assigned Color
Nodes\\Self-acceptance\Accepted Christ back into life		No	None
Nodes\\Self-acceptance\Accepts self		No	None
Nodes\\Self-acceptance\Comfortable about whos she is		No	None
Nodes\\Self-acceptance\God loves me		No	None
Nodes\\Self-acceptance\I'm 49 now I'm starting to actually, now I'm starting to accept who I am		Yes	Orange
Nodes\\Sex		Yes	Orange
Nodes\\Sex\Transgender male to female		No	None
Nodes\\Sexual Orientation		Yes	Green
Nodes\\Sexual Orientation\Bisexual		Yes	Green
Nodes\\Sexual Orientation\Gay		No	None
Nodes\\Sexual Orientation\Gay		No	None
Nodes\\Sexual Orientation\Gay Male		Yes	Green
Nodes\\Sexual Orientation\Lesbian		Yes	Green
Nodes\\Sexual Orientation\Lesbian		No	None
Nodes\\Sexual Orientation\Lesbian		No	None
Nodes\\Sexual Orientation\Lesbian		No	None
Nodes\\Sexual Orientation\Lesbian		No	None
Nodes\\Spirituality		Yes	Purple
Nodes\\Spirituality\Balance		No	None
Nodes\\Spirituality\Daily life		No	None
Nodes\\Spirituality\Definition of spirituality		No	None
Nodes\\Spirituality\Euphoriic feeling		No	None
Nodes\\Spirituality\Higher power		No	None
Nodes\\Spirituality\Higher Power		No	None
Nodes\\Spirituality\My relationship wtih God		No	None
Nodes\\Spirituality\Own concept		No	None
Nodes\\Spirituality\Personal relationship with God		No	None
Nodes\\Spirituality\Something that is within		No	None
Nodes\\Spirituality\Spirituality is within		No	None
Nodes\\Spirituality\To me its a closer connection with the divine		No	None