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College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Gregory Wayne Jackson, Jr.

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Walden University
2017

Abstract

Objectification of Gay African American Males in the Bondage Discipline Sadism Masochism Community

by

Gregory W. Jackson, Jr.

MS, Walden University, 2011

MS, Walsh College, 2009

BA, University of Michigan, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

November 2017

Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to improve the understanding of Sexual Objectification (SO) of gay African American males in the bondage, discipline, sadism, masochism (BDSM) community. Although many studies have been conducted on SO of women and other minority populations, there is a lack of research on the lived experience of gay African American males participating in the BDSM community. The theoretical framework for this study was Fredrickson and Roberts's objectification theory, with a conceptual framework focused on SO that gay African American males experienced while participating in the BDSM community. The research questions were designed to elicit the participants' experiences about their participation in the BDSM community. Ten gay African American males, selected through purposive sampling, described their reasons for participating in the BDSM community, what the participants gained from participating in the BDSM community, how they experienced SO, how they handled these experiences, and how these experiences changed them. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed by hand. The data were analyzed in 3 stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding techniques. Five themes emerged from the interviews: community, gained knowledge and freedom, verbal objectification, avoidance, and mistrust. This study contributes to the existing body of literature and promotes social change by fostering dialog about objectification. Through this dialog, behavioral patterns and cultural norms can be altered over time by increasing awareness about objectification and its effects on people. This study provided gay African American males a voice to discuss a phenomenon that impacts their lives.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the gay men of color who participate in the BDSM community and shared their experiences of being viewed as a means to an end rather than a whole person. Spending time getting to know these brave and courageous men allowed me to see their resolve to be their authentic self. I began to understand what they experience during their sexual exploration. However, I must point out that these men are not just resolved to sit back and take what is given to them. Instead, they opened their mouths and voiced their truths. They are resolved to gain knowledge and personal growth in a community that has not always seen their wealth and contributions.

This is also dedicated to my loving and supportive mom, Dr. Anita M. Haynes. She loved me before I even entered this world. Her selflessness that she showed taking care of me and my brother can never be fully expressed. I hope that I have made you proud. To my one and only son, Justice. If I could…I'd give you the world. You are such an amazing person. Dad is so proud of the man you have become. To my Godmother, Dr. Darlene M. Harris…Thank you for your love and support. I always know where I can get sound advice. To my brother Darris Butler, you have always been an inspiration. I hope that I have been as great of a brother to you as you have been to me. Last but certainly not least, to my spouse, my partner in life Walter. Thank you for pushing me to complete this journey. I know this has taken a lot of time from 'us' but you knew what lies on the other side. Words cannot express my love and appreciation for you.

I would like to dedicate this study to four individuals who are now resting with the Ancestors. My step-mother Cecelia "Poochie" Butler, my Aunt Carol Canole, my

cousin Anthony “Tony” Matthews and my Grandmother Lula M. McMorris-Thomas. Your presence is sorely missed but your impact still remains.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Sexuality, according to Califia (2000), is a multifaceted, ever-evolving, complicated phenomenon. There are many different sexual subcultures, such as heterosexuality; bisexuality; homosexuality; polyamory; and bondage, discipline, sadism, masochism (BDSM), that make up what sexuality is today. In a sexually multicultural society, BDSM functions as a subculture in both the heterosexual community as well as the homosexual community. BDSM is the acronym for three types of sexual variations. The BD refers to bondage and discipline, DS represents domination and submission, and finally SM signifies two categories that complement each other sadism and masochism.

Bondage and discipline includes the use of restraints that can be physical or psychological (Hébert & Weaver, 2015). Domination and submission refers to the exchange of control where the submissive gives up control to the dominant. Sadism and masochism works together where the sadist gets pleasure or arousal from inflicting or administering pain or humiliation onto others and the masochist gets pleasure or arousal from receiving pain or humiliation (Hébert & Weaver, 2015). These six categories combined create the, often misunderstood, form of behavior that has been defined as deviant sexual behavior and/or some physical abuse imposed upon an unwilling individual (Hébert & Weaver, 2015). BDSM encompasses six overarching subsections: bondage and discipline, domination and submission, and sadism and masochism (Stiles & Clark, 2011). Additionally, people who participant in BDSM describe it as an overarching term for consensual alternative forms of pleasure that does not have to

include sexual activities or intercourse (Stiles & Clark, 2011). BDSM, for the purpose of this dissertation, was defined as the consensual engagement in kink play, which can involve any combination of bondage, discipline, domination, submission, sadism, and/or masochism.

At the center of this community is the concept of power exchange. Power exchange is used in BDSM relationships, in which the participants actively engage in communications to identify what each participant desires from the relationship. In this exchange, participants assume complementary, yet unequal, roles through the use of negotiations. The partner exerting dominance in the relationship is termed the dominant, and the partner assuming the passive role is termed as the submissive (Townsend, 1972). Also provided in this discussion is the type of fetish play that is to be expected throughout the relationship, which can include one type of fetish such as objectification or can include multiple different fetishes.

SO (SO) is a term used to describe the fragmentation of a person into a section of sexual functions and/or sexual parts (Bartky, 1990; Davidson, Gervais, Canivez, & Cole, 2013). Others have referred to SO as a personbeing a sex object. Nussbaum (1995) explained that sexually objectified people exist for the sole purpose of others' pleasure. When an individual's purpose is reduced to pleasing another, he or she is then considered disposable, which leads to a group of people who are disempowered and marginalized. SO can bring about negative outcomes such as denigration of the objectified population (Zurbriggen, 2013).

Although numerous studies have been conducted on SO in various populations, to date, no study has been conducted to identify the perspectives of gay African American males in the BDSM community. There is a need for this study to address BDSM as it relates to African American males. If an understanding of this phenomenon can be established, this may provide evidence to foster further studies to call attention to the social problem identified within this population. This study has the potential to bring awareness about this phenomenon to assist mental health providers who have clients involved in the BDSM community, providing them with more information to formulate treatment plans that can address the client's presenting problem or comorbidity.

Background

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) developed the objectification theory to explore how women were treated as a commodity rather than a human being. However, researchers have identified that SO does not solely affect women. SO can occur in any minority population. The topic of objectification has been addressed within the female population (Calogero, Pina, Park, & Rahemtulla, 2010; Davidson & Gervais, 2015; Moradi, 2010; Moradi & Huang, 2008; Teng, Chen, Poon, & Zhang, 2015; Watson, Marszalek, Dispenza, & Davids, 2015; Velez, Campos, & Moradi, 2015); however, this problem impacts gay African American males as well. Scholars have demonstrated that the negative impact of SO on women includes self-objectification, increased anxiety, body shame, eating disorders, depression and sexual dysfunction (Szymanski, Moffitt & Carr, 2011). Some scholars have also claimed that objectification can lead to positive outcomes (Nussbaum, 1995) and is a part of sexual life (Sunstein, 1992). Davidson, et al.,

(2013) posited that the male population should be included in the discussion of objectification. Teunis (2007) proffered the findings of men objectifying other men. Calogero and Tylka (2014) suggested that sexual minority men also experience SO and at higher frequencies than nonsexual minority men. Davids, Watson, Nilsson and Marszalek (2015) supported the use of objectification theory when studying gay males.

SO has roots in the history of the United States, and it affects people today (Foster, 2011). Calogero and Tylka (2014) revealed that gay men of color (African American, Latinos, Asian and Pacific Islanders) experience SO more often than not. If this population experiences SO with frequency, then this subgroup warrants the same consideration as women concerning the need for studies addressing this phenomenon. Davidson et al, (2013) provided a foundation on which more research can be conducted on a more focused population, such as sexual minorities and sexual minority men of color.

Teunis (2007) proposed that in addition to SO being present in the gay community, race adds a different dynamic to the experience. Racially charged SO in the gay male community produces an environment where gay men of color exist to provide a service to the White majority (Teunis, 2007). Gay men of color tend to play roles in sexual encounters that are not of their own personal choosing. Though a majority of researchers have highlighted the negative aspects of SO, other researchers have concluded that SO can enhance sexual pleasure without dehumanizing the sexual partner (Sunstein, 1992). In this study, I highlighted the inconclusive nature of the current research on the impact of SO.

Historically, the term BDSM has evoked negative connotations, which was one reason that Brame, Brame and Jacobs (1993) provided a more positive description of BDSM behavior. Although historically BDSM has been characterized being motivated by some form of underlying psychopathology, some scholars believe that BDSM is associated with positive psychological states linked with healthy leisure experiences (Newmahr, 2010; Taylor & Ussher, 2001; Williams, 2006, 2009; Wismeijer & van Assen, 2013). This change in understanding of BDSM is emerging as BDSM participants continue to work to redefine BDSM behavior as positive and normal expression of sexuality.

As the BDSM community gains popularity through the reduction of negative connotations surrounding the practices, more minorities are beginning to participate in the BDSM community. Minorities (i.e., African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and Pacific Islanders), are beginning to find images of themselves in BDSM print and video. As minorities are becoming visible in the BDSM community, others who have BDSM-like desires are being drawn to the community in search of like-minded individuals to gain experience in their once taboo desires.

Statement of the Problem

Sexual minorities face many different challenges. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people face challenges related to interpersonal relationships, experiences of discrimination from society at various levels, and decreased self-esteem (Bostwick, Boyd, Hughes, West, & McCabe, 2014; Figueroa & Zoccola, 2015; Sutter & Perrin, 2016). In addition to these challenges, gay African American males face minority

stressors such as a lack of inclusion from the mainstream LGB community and from the Black community, which leads to additional poor mental health outcomes (Sutter & Perrin, 2016). Some African American gay males have expressed feelings of having a lack of visibility, fears of rejection from people once close to them, and stigma from being Black and gay. This may lead them to have feelings of being unwanted and/or unwelcomed in both communities (Watson et al., 2015).

An individual does not always receive BDSM fetish acts consensually. There are instances when being objectified is not consensual. This type of objectification in the gay BDSM community has created an environment where African Americans males report being SO. In the context of the BDSM community where fetishes are consensually played out, African American males may face nonconsensual SO. This practice becomes problematic because of the potential negative outcomes that can emerge from nonconsensual objectification. Many intersecting identities (ie., African American, being gay, and being a member of the BDSM subculture), is a trifecta for negative mental health outcomes from either one of these minority statuses. A gap exists in the body of literature regarding whether SO of African American males exists and how gay African American males perceive the practice of SO within the BDSM community.

Although studies have been conducted to study SO, to date, scholars have not attempted to identify the perspectives of gay African American males in the BDSM community. There is a need to address the issue as it relates to African American males. The aim of this study was to identify themes that were related to gay African American males in the BDSM community. If an understanding of this phenomenon can be

established, this may provide evidence to foster further studies to call attention to the social problem identified within this population. This study contributes to the current body of knowledge needed to address this problem.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to improve the understanding of SO of gay African American males in the BDSM community. To address this gap I used a phenomenological approach. Personal interviews with gay African American males in the BDSM community were used to develop a thematic understanding of the participants' experiences. The results of this study may provide insight into how gay African American males manage their participation in the BDSM community. Furthermore, the findings from this study could aid mental health professionals and researchers in identifying negative mental health outcomes among African Americans experiencing SO.

Research Questions

In this study, I sought to develop both a breath of understanding and a depth of knowledge of the experiences of gay African American males, in the BDSM culture, who have experienced nonconsensual SO. This objective was accomplished by presenting a set of preliminary research questions. In phenomenological studies, Creswell (2007) noted that the early interviews will help to refine and guide research questions.

The following preliminary research questions incorporated an overarching general research question, followed by questions that are both emancipatory and exploratory in nature. Creswell explained that emancipatory questions help guide and inform social

change. Marshall and Rossman (2006) explained that researchers use exploratory questions to investigate phenomena not well understood.

The overarching research question for the study was the following: How do gay African American males participating in BDSM perceive objectification? The preliminary exploratory questions included the following:

1. Is there something about the African American experience that provokes SO?
2. If so, what are the provoking factors?

   How does the SO of gay African American males change how they participate in the BDSM sub-culture?

The initial emancipatory question was the following:

1. How does social dialog about SO of gay African American males influence their risks of further SO?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical base for this study was Fredrickson and Roberts's (1997) objectification theory. Objectification theory was originally developed as a means to understand how objectification affected females, by providing a framework for understanding, researching and intervening to improve women's lives from a sociocultural context. Because this theory included the sexualization of the female body thereby equating a woman's worth with her bodily appearance and sexual functions, Fredrickson and Roberts' theoretical work has been used not only for studies with

women, but also on other minority populations. This approach provided details on the effects of substance abuse, self-objectification, and body shaming.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study included a focus on SO that gay African American males experienced while participating in the BDSM community. The key concepts that provided a framework for this study were gay African American males, objectification and BDSM. I explored whether SO impacted gay African American males' participation in the BDSM community. A discussion of the current research on SO and BDSM formed the main body of this review.

Nature of the Study

I used the transcendental phenomenological approach as described by Moustakas (1994), which was chosen because it aligned with describing the lived experience of gay African American males in the BDSM community. This method enabled me to explore questions of meaning to gain insight into the phenomenon of SO pertaining to this population. A phenomenological approach contributed to a deeper understanding of these lived experiences by exposing assumptions that were present concerning SO (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). It also allowed me to examine social practices and processes that were present within a subset of the sexual minority population, and it provided a thematic description of the essence of SO as lived through the participants' perspective.

Using this model, I invited the participants to tell their stories and provided in-depth descriptions of their experiences of SO. Interviews were semi structured in order to allow the response from one question to direct the next question. I invited 10 participants

to describe their SO experiences and expound upon pertinent thoughts, feelings, ideas and themes related to SO. The broad nature of these interview questions allowed the participants the opportunity to reflect on their personal experiences and to provide vivid descriptions of these experiences.

Definition of Key Terms

Gay: A descriptor to identify males whose primary physical and emotional attractions were to another male. This term was also used in this study to refer to a community of people with same-sex attractions.

Bondage, discipline, dominance, submission, sadism, and masochism (BDSM): An overarching term describing both sexual and non-sexual activities that fell under the terms of BDSM. It also served to refer to a community of people who participate in these behaviors.

Leather: Gay males who participate in BDSM practices. Additionally, the participants often preferred the term leather over BDSM because the term BDSM was viewed as a heterosexual term.

Sexual objectification (SO): The behavior of treating a person as a commodity without regard to his or her personhood. It also referred to treating a person as a means to sexual pleasure without regard to his or her preferred sexual role.

Dominant/top: A dominant was the participant who gave direction or commands in BDSM activities. A top was someone who was the giver in the BDSM/leather scene, such as the person who flogged a sub, or the penetrative partner in a sexual scene (Townsend, 1972).

Submissive/bottom: A submissive was the person who took direction or commands during BDSM activities. A bottom was someone who was the receiver in a scene, such as an individual who was being flogged or the receptive partner in a sexual scene (Townsend, 1972).

Assumptions

For this study, I made several assumptions. The first assumption was that the participants identified as African American. Secondly, it was assumed that the participant self-identified as a member of the gay community. The next assumption was that the participants participated in the BDSM/leather community. Another key assumption in this study was that the participants responded honestly and actively participated in the interview. The last assumption, though similar to the previous one, was that the participant fully engaged.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study encompassed gay African American males residing in the United States who identified with the BDSM community. The scope of this research did not include other gay men of color, such as Latinos, Asians and Pacific Islanders. I did not take into consideration whether the participant was a dominant or a submissive in the culture. This study may not have reflected all areas of the United States.

The study could have included other gay men of color or bisexual males of color such as Latinos, Asians, and Pacific Islanders. However, due to the large number of potential participants in the study population, the population involved included only gay African American males. The data were collected via semi-structured interviews rather

than tests such as the Gendered Racial Microaggressions Scale (Lewis & Neville, 2015), which measures four multidimensional factors including assumptions of beauty and SO. I could have chosen the Male Assessment of Self-Objectification (MASO), which assesses men's experience of self-objectification **(**Daniel, Bridges, & Martens, 2014); however, this would have only provided quantitative data about self-objectification. This study was more about understanding the lived experiences of the participants and not to quantify their assessment of their body and its abilities.

Limitations

This study was limited in several areas. The participants of this study did not include gay African American males residing outside of the United States. The study was limited to 10 participants; therefore, the findings of the study were not intended to be applied to other populations. The study was exploratory in nature, and it cannot furnish any level of statistical significance like a quantitative study would. I aimed to open dialog about the phenomenon. The goal of this study was to facilitate interest beyond the scope of study.

Significance

The purpose of this study was to provide an exploratory view of the SO experiences of gay African American males in the BDSM community. By presenting descriptions of these experiences from the participants' standpoint, this research provided insight of this topic from the perspective of members of this population. Lasting change can be gained by identifying the lived experiences of African American males in the

BDSM community and presenting these experiences in a scholarly manner to change the way members of society behaves.

I challenged the norms and values that society adheres to by illuminating this phenomenon by focusing on nonconsensual SO in a culture driven by various kink and fetishes. The results of this study provided insight into how gay African American males managed in their participation in the BDSM community and gave direction for possible future studies. The findings from this study can assist mental health professionals to identify possible poor mental health outcomes stemming from their client's participation in this community.

Summary

Gay African American males experience minority stressors, such as lack of inclusion in the general LGB community. Some of these experiences have led to poor mental health outcomes. Sometimes African American males experienced nonconsensual objectification within the BDSM community. In other minority communities, this type of objectification has led to self-objectification, increased anxiety, body shame, depression, and other poor mental health outcomes (Szymanski et al., 2001).

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the existing literature surrounding Fredrickson and Roberts's (1997) objectification theory and the BDSM subculture. In Chapter 3 I present the methodology of the study, including the selection of the participants and the manner in which data were collected. Chapter 4 includes the findings gathered from the interviews, including emergent themes. Finally, Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of the results gained from the study, perceived limitations of the study, and

recommendations for future research studies. I also discuss the implications of this study to bring about social change.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In the literature review, I examined the etiology of the BDSM community and objectification theory as it pertained to gay African American males' objectification and the negative outcomes that resulted from SO. In this chapter, I describe the search criteria used to identify current research in the areas of SO and the gay BDSM community. The epistemology of objectification was reviewed to include different types of objectification, objectification of men in the media, advertisement, and pornography. In addition, fundamental views of objectification and negative mental and psychological consequences are reviewed. Next, the epistemology of BDSM in the gay community was examined as well as negotiations and the difference between consensual and nonconsensual play.

Literature Search

The database of articles used for this review was compiled from Thoreau Multi-Database Search, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES and Academic Search Complete. The articles gathered were published during 1972 to 2016, focusing on the past 10 years of the current literature. Keywords and phrases such as *objectification, self-objectification, SO, BDSM, BDSM in the gay community, objectification of sexual minorities, multiple oppressions, intersecting minority identities, objectification of men of color, body shame,* and *male gaze* were used to find appropriate articles. The articles and abstracts were reviewed for keywords and phrases to produce a list of further studies to investigate. The

chosen articles provided both the necessary background and methodological structure needed for this study.

Epistemology of BDSM

Sexuality, according to Califia (2000), is a multifaceted, ever-evolving, complicated phenomenon. Brame et al., (1993) summarized the following description of BDSM from their participants: "a thoughtful and controlled expression of adult sexuality that holds the promise of intense intimacy and sharing" (p. 5).

Approximately 10% of the U.S. population participates in BDSM behaviors, according to Moser and Kleinpatz' (2006). Although 10% of the population engages in BDSM behaviors, the Institute for sex Research and Kinsey (1953) identified 22% of men and 12% of women have experienced an erotic response to a story centered on BDSM. BDSM behavior is not rare, but is more of a commonality though participants may not know activities fall under the BDSM umbrella.

Scott (1997) explained that bondage and discipline describes the erotic use of restraints that can be physical or psychological. Scott (1997) further explained that domination and submission refers to the consensual exchange of control where the submissive gives up control to the dominant. Lastly, Scott (1997) posited that sadism and masochism works together where the sadist gets pleasure or arousal from inflicting or administering pain or humiliation onto others and the masochist gets pleasure or arousal from receiving pain or humiliation. However, these six categories are misunderstood as deviant sexual behavior and/or physical abuse imposed upon an unwilling individual (Hébert & Weaver, 2015).

Participants of BDSM described it as an overarching term for consensual alternative forms of pleasure that does not have to include sexual activities or intercourse. Moser and Kleinplatz (2006) presented that sexual context is essential in BDSM but further acknowledged that some BDSM participants may not define their activities as sexual. BDSM, for the purpose of this dissertation, was defined as the consensual engagement in kink play, which can involve any combination of bondage, discipline, domination, submission, sadism and/or masochism, with or without sexual intercourse. Just as the acronym BDSM has multiple meanings with reference to behaviors, Williams (2006) also identified that it alluded to a lifestyle or a community of people who participated in the activities. This community provides the participants with an environment conducive to freedom to explore their fantasies with persons of like mind.

Howard and Martha Lewis (1972) spoke of the meaninglessness of terms like normal when describing sexuality. Lewis and Lewis (1972) suggested that using this terminology commonly referenced the opposite as abnormal. This leads an individual to be able to make the value assumption that normal is good and abnormal is bad. In contrast, Lewis and Lewis presented that sexual acts embarked upon by consenting adults that do no harm to anyone is acceptable. Wiseman (1996) presented BDSM as "the knowing use of psychological dominance and submission, and/or physical bondage, and/or pain, and/or related practices in a safe, legal, consensual manner in order for the participants to experience erotic arousal and/or personal growth" (p. 40).

BDSM in the Gay Community

The BDSM community began to grow from the sexual progressiveness of Weimar Germany, pre-World War II, which was an extension of the fetish culture in Europe in the early 1900s (Townsend, 1972). It was not until after World War II that the BDSM community began to grow and take shape into what we know now as the leather community, or the gay BDSM community. The first group that emerged in this community was the "old guard" leather system (Baldwin, 2003). Military men who had gone overseas to fight the war developed a fraternity-like camaraderie. The connection with military rules and regulations shaped the Old Guard system, which was known for its adoption of a strict code of conduct and a process that a person went through to evolve into this culture. Kamel (1983/1995) described a series of steps that an individual would complete to become a BDSM participant. These steps incorporated the man to become disenchanted with the gay sex/dating scene, experiencing depression in the form of loneliness and isolation, developing curiosity into the gay BDSM scene, becoming attracted to the BDSM scene, and considering to participate in the scene. The last two steps that Kamel (1983/1995) presented in this evolution was the person exploring different behaviors and then identifying their likes and dislikes within the BDSM spectrum.

Scholars have provided a different understanding of a BDSM identity formation. The gay BDSM community holds a marginalized status within the greater gay community (Ridinger, 2002; Tucker, 1991). Mosher, Levitt, and Manley (2006) stated that leather masculinity is the antithesis of the perception of the feminine gay male

culture by expressing eroticized hypermasculinity. Therefore, BDSM identity is presented as a socially constructed event that occurs as a second coming out experience, where the individual comes out once as a gay man and then later as a gay man in the BDSM community. Tucker (1991) and Thompson (1995) presented sexual identity formation as a continued process. This thought process supported other complex identity formation models.

Yost and Hunter (2012) approached BDSM identity formation from a different lens: intrinsic and externally. The intrinsic aspect of a person's BDSM identity is rooted in the notion that the interests have existed in the individual since childhood or they are a part of who the person is (Baldwin, 1991; Califia, 2000; Midori, 2005; Rubin, 1987). The external approach, not well supported by other studies, is rooted in the understanding that a person participates in BDSM because a partner is interested. This latter has support by Kamel and Weinberg (1995). More studies on the external influences are needed to strengthen this belief.

Basic BDSM Concepts

In order to gain a better understanding of the BDSM community, an individual must become familiar with the terminology used by those who participate actively in the culture. The first concept that needs to be defined is the various roles that a person can take during BDSM activities. Just as there are differences in definitions of BDSM, there are some differences in the roles present in the culture. The first concepts to understand are that of dominant and submissive. A dominant is the participant who gives direction or

commands in BDSM activities, and a submissive is the person who takes direction or commands during BDSM activities.

For the purposes of roles in this culture and this dissertation, a top is someone who is dominant or a sadist (a person who enjoys inflicting pain and/or humiliation; (Townsend, 1972). A bottom is someone who is submissive or a masochist (one who enjoys receiving pain and/or humiliation; Townsend, 1972). Not all bottoms are masochists and not all tops are sadists. There are many different combinations that exist in this community. An individual may start out as a masochist and evolve into a sadist, and vice versa. This decision is based on people's personal, individual experiences and is a reflection of the participants' personality or how they view themselves.

There are conflicting views on BDSM identification between researchers and participants. Kamel (1983/1995) and Taylor and Ussher (2001) identified that those who identify as BDSM participants defining both their sexuality and preferred manner of interaction with a partner. However, Langdridge (2006) and Yost (2010) offered that BDSM was better characterized by activities without any implications for a person's identity.

Consent and Negotiation

One BDSM community motto is "safe, sane, and consensual." The concept and implementation of consent is the differentiating factor between BDSM and abuse (Ortmann & Sprott, 2013). Consent is the process through which BDSM participants gain acceptance for what activities are being planned by another or together. Multiple researchers have discussed BDSM negotiations with the safe, sane, and consensual

construct being the focus (Henkin & Holiday, 1996; Miller & Devon, 1995; Taorimino, 2012; Wiseman, 1996). The commandments of healthy BDSM activity are being truthful while playing safely, sanely, consensually, and non-exploitatively (Henkin & Holiday, 1996).

The idea of consent remains a key component of both academic and popular discussion about BDSM (Williams, Thomas, Prior, & Christensen, 2014). The term consent means that permission was given for something to happen; however, the term holds certain ambiguity (Barker, 2013; Newmahr, 2011; Tsaros, 2013; Williams et al, 2014). In society, sexual violence prevention advocates provide catchphrases such as "no means no," "silence means no," or "what part of 'no' don't you understand." In the BDSM culture, direct communication is not simplistic. In BDSM activity, participants have intentionally obscured consent to increase the eroticism and allure of the scene. Many BDSM practices are laden with consensual nonconsent, such as the inclusion of gags, masks or hoods, and bondage, which created an atmosphere that resembles a more violent scene (Tsaros, 2013). Taylor and Ussher (2001) noted the distinction between abuse and consensual BDSM activities involving pain as the consensuality of the participants.

According to Tsaros (2013), in the BDSM subculture, consent is an integral part of participants' interactions and erotic encounters are preceded by negotiations to establish safe words, boundaries, limits and preferred practices. BDSM activities are negotiated and mutually satisfying (Hickey, 2006). BDSM practitioners reported that the submissive is the participant who typically controls the interaction by setting his or her

limits (Weinberg, 1978/1995). The most frequently used safe words for a BDSM scene are "red, yellow, and green" where green means continue, yellow means slow down and red means stop (Williams, 2006). In addition to the use of safe words, participants often check in with each other to ensure that the experience is enjoyable and that there are no changes to be made. BDSM participants understand that successful BDSM scenes include limit stretching (e.g., an intentional pushing of the agreed upon boundaries), which stops just before breaching the initial or renegotiated agreement (Taylor & Ussher, 2001). It is the consensuality of a scene that sets BDSM apart from violence, because the individuals are able to collectively negotiate and choose which activities to participate in. Outsiders are often without the knowledge of what is negotiated and consented to prior to the start of the scene (Pitagora, 2013). Though this knowledge exists, sexual consent still remains both a controversial and contentious topic.

Types of BDSM Play

BDSM is complicated and difficult to define. It is difficult for many people to understand. It can be behaviors that people engage in on occasion, or it can be a lifestyle and community of people who share participation in these behaviors. There are several types of BDSM play. Some can be viewed as common and others are viewed as extreme. For the purpose of this study, I categorized various BDSM play in to four categories: impact play, sensory play, humiliation play, and bondage.

Impact play. Impact play occurs when one participant (the dominant) strikes the other participant (the submissive) repeatedly for the gratification of either or both party. Impact play consists of activities such as flogging (flogger or cat-o-nine tails), spanking,

flagellation, caning, paddles, punching, whipping (with belts or single-tails) and cock and ball torture (CBT). There are some precautions that must be taken when embarking upon impact play. These activities must be done on parts of the body that are protected by fat or muscle, such as the buttocks and upper back (Bean, 1997). Thighs, chest and the back of the calves can be targets as well. The dominant must avoid areas such as the kidney, neck, head, spine and joints as to not cause permanent or life-threatening damage to the submissive. Some trauma that can occur if impact play is done improperly can be lacerations, nerve damage, broken or fractured bones, or ruptured vital organs (Taormino, 2012). Proper technique can still cause bruising, deep tissue swelling, dehydration, temporary loss of consciousness, or skin abrasions.

Sensory play. Sensory play are activities used to give the submissive partner physical sensations as opposed to mental forms of play. This category of BDSM play uses activities such as wax play; fire play; electro play; ice; medical pinwheels; manual stimulation such as edging, scarves, oils, body parts (i.e., kissing or lightly running fingers on typically untouched areas of the body) or other tactile materials (Taormino, 2012). This type of play can be done to bring the submissive to sensory overload, (i.e., the use of hot candle wax alternating with the use of ice). This activity can cause the submissive to be unable to tell the difference between the heat of the wax and the cold of the ice. Care should be taken to minimize the risk of permanent nerve damage (Bean, 2000).

Humiliation play. Humiliation play consists of activities done by the dominant to psychologically affect the submissive. Humiliation play can often push emotional buttons

in both the dominant and the submissive. Different types of humiliation play are watersports (urination), scat (defecation), spitting, food play, forced clothes wearing (dresses, diapers, stockings, and things of this nature), verbal humiliation/name calling, degradation, or furniture play (the submissive acts as inanimate objects such as chairs, foot stools or even ashtrays; Brame et al., 1993). Care should be taken to the mental health well-being of the submissive involved in this play as this play can trigger emotional situations in the submissive's past.

Bondage. Bondage is BDSM play that incorporates the use of restraints of some nature to restrict the movements of the submissive. Some items that can be used in bondage play are handcuffs, rope, plastic wrap, suspension ropes, chains, restraint/bondage table, St. Andrews Cross, or any other mechanism designed to restrict movement. Ropes, cuffs, and chains apply pressure to produce different enjoyable bodily sensations (Ernulf & Innala, 1995). It is important for the participants to have good communications. The dominant must check in with the submissive and make sure that they are not cutting off blood circulation to any body part (Wiseman, 2000). The dominant must pay attention to the body language of the submissive as to avoid missing reactions such as hyperventilation or even a panic/anxiety attack.

One area of BDSM play is objectification, which can fall under many different areas of the BDSM umbrella. There are conversations to be had initially for the participants to discuss what is desired from a scene, what is acceptable, and other boundaries. A person does not always receive these various fetish acts consensually. There are times when being objectified is not consensual. This type of objectification in

the gay BDSM community has created an environment where African Americans males report being nonconsensually sexually objectified. In the context of the BDSM community where fetishes are consensually played out, African American males often face nonconsensual SO.

This topic has been addressed extensively within the female population (Calogero, et al., 2010; Davidson, & Gervais, 2015; Moradi, 2010; Moradi &Yu-Ping, 2008; Teng, et al., 2015; Watson et al., 2015; Velez et al., 2015); however, this problem impacts gay African American males as well.

Epistemology of Objectification Theory

Although objectification theory has recently been applied to males, it was originally presented to explain how recurrent psychological concerns that women experienced were rooted in gendered oppression that was imposed by men and the patriarchal social structures (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) developed *objectification theory* to also explore how women were treated as a commodity rather than a human being. Objectification occurs when an individual is treated as a thing, denied his or her humanity, and treated as though he or she is an object void of any feelings (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Nussbaum, 1995). Women are frequently reduced to their body parts and sexual functioning (i.e., SO) because their value has been rooted in their physical appearance. Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) developed their theory on the understanding of the female body being constantly objectified by men and are in a perpetual state of evaluation by men. The behavior of evaluating the appearance of women was characterized as the *male gaze*.

Under the objectification theory, Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) identified three circumstances in which objectification can occur. First, objectification can occur when social encounters allow women to be both in the physical presence of men and evaluated. An example of this would be a woman hearing cat calls from men she passes as she walks down the street. Second, objectification can occur when men evaluate women's appearance through visual media. The woman may not be directly objectified however she receives a message that the value of the female body is for the pleasure of men. Lastly, it can occur through the use of visual media, which provides men the ability to visually inspect a woman's body or specific body parts. This is seen often with swimsuit issues of men's magazines. For the purposes of this dissertation the term objectification was used to describe external events where one is sexually objectified.

Objectification Considerations for Women

According to Kaschak (1992) and Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), the subtlest way that sexualized evaluation is performed is through the male gaze or objectifying gaze. Researchers have described the concept of the male gaze as visually inspecting or staring at a woman's sexual body parts or her whole body (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Kaschak, 1992; Moradi & Huang, 2008; and Mulvey, 1975). Henley (1977) referred to the male gaze as "ogling", "checking out", or "leering at" women. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) stated that the male gaze has the potential for SO, which was an important concept to note. Not every female who experiences the male gaze experiences SO. Men typically direct non-reciprocated gazes towards women in greater frequency than women do towards men (Cary, 1978; Fromme & Beam, 1974; and Henley, 1977), and when

directed towards women of color the male gaze is frequently coupled with sexually evaluative commentary (Allen, 1984; Gardner, 1980).

In some women, the after effects of routine SO can result in an internalized phenomenon called self-objectification. This is different from SO, which is external objectification incidents related to his or her body (or parts) and/or sexual functioning. Self-objectification is used to describe the internalization of the external experiences to which the individual believes that one's worth is based on his or her physical appearance. Self-objectification has been related to different negative psychological behaviors such as anxiety, body checking behaviors, attempts to conceal body parts of concern, decreased peak motivational state, and increased body shame. Due to this internalization process, according to Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), women are at higher risk to experience psychological distress such as depression, eating disorders and sexual dysfunction.

Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn and Twenge (1998) conducted a study to test if self-objectification was associated to body shame. This particular study was composed of college-aged women who were of European American ancestry. The participants were randomly assigned to wear either a swimsuit or sweater in front of a mirror. The results of the study showed the participants who wore the swimsuit reported a greater amount of body shame compared to participants who wore the sweater (Fredrickson et al., 1998). A similar experiment by Quinn, Kallen, and Cathey (2006) was completed to reproduce the findings of Fredrickson et al., (1998), to measure the levels of body shame that followed after the experiment manipulation. The participants were asked to visually inspect themselves in the mirror wearing the sweater or swimsuit provided and then change back

into their clothing before taking the measure of body shame survey. The results showed that even after the objectifying experience, the effects of objectifying experiences remained after the experience. Both of these studies demonstrated the causal relationship between self-objectification and body shame.

Hebl, King, and Lin (2004) replicated the study by Fredrickson and Roberts (1998); however they did so with a diverse ethnic sample which included African American, Asian, Hispanic and Caucasian female students. They wanted to identify if various ethnic groups were affected equally. The results of the study demonstrated that women across racial groups were vulnerable to the internalization of the objectifying conditions. These three studies have been instrumental in supporting Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) initial results by providing a comprehensive framework for explaining the role of sexually objectifying experiences. The validity of the objectification theory model has been established using correlational and experimental studies (Calogero, 2004; Calogero et al., 2010; Daniel & Bridges, n.d; Moradi, 2010; Moradi & Huang, 2008; Szymanski et al., 2011). The available research displayed how this theory is relevant to women. Therefore, the logical progression was the question whether the theory can also be relevant to other groups of people. For this study, I focused on other researchers who have expanded different components of the objectification theory to men.

Application of Objectification Theory to Men

Research on the impact both objectification and self-objectification on men showed that gender fails to have a moderating effect on self-objectification (Chroma et al., 2010). The objectification theory has been increasingly applied to men with

indications that male body image concerns are valid (Michaels, Parent & Moradi, 2013; Parent & Moradi, 2011; Schwarts, Grammas, Sutherland, Siffert, & Bush-King, 2010). Garner (1997) conducted a study, which suggested that 43% of the men in the sample (n = 548) reported they had dissatisfaction with their overall appearance. Still other researchers presented studies concerning the social pressure that males experience in order to have a muscular appearance (Cafri & Thompson, 2004; Leit, Harrison, & Gray, 2001). Lanzieri & Cook (2013) suggested that the social pressures for a muscular physique might be caused by the media's immense representation of musculature in the male body.

Davidson, Gervais, Canivez, and Cole (2013) postulated that the male population should be included in the discussion of objectification. Teunis (2007) proffered the findings of men objectifying other men. Furthermore, Calogero and Tylka (2014) suggested that sexual minority men also experience SO, and at higher frequencies than non-sexual minority men. Davids, Watson, Nilsson and Marszalek (2015) supported the use of objectification theory when studying gay males. Further research has suggested more evidence of self-objectification and objectification in both heterosexual and homosexual males (Daniel, Bridges, & Martens, 2013; Kozak, Frankenhouser, & Roberts, 2009).

Calogero and Tylka's (2014) research revealed that gay men of color (African American, Latinos, Asian and Pacific Islanders) experienced SO more often than not. These findings substantiated the necessity of equal consideration for males as women have concerning the need for studies addressing this phenomenon. Davidson, Gervais,

Canivez, & Cole's (2013) study provided a solid foundation on which more detailed research could be conducted on a more focused population, such as sexual minorities and sexual minority men of color.

Objectification Theory to Sexual Minority Men

Various researchers have examined sexual minority status as a moderating variable for males experiencing self-objectification (Engeln-Maddox, Miller, & Doyle, 2011; Kozak, Frankenhouser, & Roberts, 2009; Tiggemann, Martins & Kirkbride, 2007). Davids and Green's (2011) research demonstrated that gay and bisexual men experience higher body dissatisfaction when compared to heterosexual men. Tiggemann and colleagues (2007) reported that gay men experienced more self-objectification, body shame, drive for thinness, body surveillance and body dissatisfaction (lower and upper body) than their heterosexual counterparts. Tiggemann, Martins and Kirkbride (2007) also noted that self-objectification produced heightened dietary restraint. The studies by Tiggemann and colleagues (2007) have showed in the affirmative that self-objectification may affect all men; however it had stronger consequences and effects for gay men than for heterosexual men. Kozak, Frankenhouser, & Roberts (2009) stated that gay men who self-objectified were more likely to objectify other men.

Wiseman and Moradi (2010) proposed a modified model of objectification theory for sexual minority males. One modification included consideration for childhood gender nonconformity. This was of particular importance to represent potentially negative experiences that the participant had encountered due to not meeting childhood gender norms. Another modification, Wiseman and Moradi (2010), made was the inclusion of

internalized homophobia due to previous research suggestions that it contributes to body dissatisfaction among gay men (Kimmel & Mahalik, 2005). From this study, the authors created the SO Experiences scale (Wiseman & Moradi, 2010) to accurately measure SO experiences relevant to sexual minority men, which were silent in other objectification theory measures.

Szymanski et al., (2010) discussed the co-occurrence of SO, self-objectification, body shame, depression, eating disorders and substance abuse. They proposed that SO led to negative mental health outcomes. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) asserted that internalized SO was related to a multiplicity of psychological consequences such as body shame, anxiety, depression, sexual dysfunction and even eating disorders. Other researchers have also noted an empirical linkage between SO and adverse mental health outcomes such as habitual body monitoring, internalization of the thin ideal body and reduced introspective awareness (Hill & Fischer, 2008; Kozee et al., 2007; Kozee & Tylka, 2006; Moradi, Dirks, & Matteson, 2005). Thomas et al. (2004) proposed that internalization of racial SO might lead some women of color to view their sexuality as one of their few assets.

Teunis (2007) proposed that in addition to SO being present in the gay community, race adds a different dynamic to the experience. Racially charged SO in the gay male community produced an environment where gay men of color exist to provide a service to the white majority (Teunis, 2007). One of the effects of the added racism was that gay men of color tended to play roles in sexual encounters that were not their personal chosen sexual expression. For example, an Asian male may assume the

submissive or receptive role in a sexual encounter because he is viewed in that manner (based on his ethnicity) as opposed to being asked about his preferred role. This phenomenon has been seen historically dating back to slavery in the United States. Cowan (1995) spoke of acts of aggression and sex on African slaves and subsequently African American males by White males. Gardner (1980) posited that White males viewed African American males were seen as phallic. Critical Race theory, according to Rollock (2012), provided a structure that both encouraged and recognized people of color to identify, speak and hypothesize about their experiences that have been shaped by racism. Racial sexual imagery and models of masculinity have a long history in the United States. Racism and sexism are interconnected (hooks, 1989); therefore, SO of African American males cannot be separated from the underlying racial theme.

Further research is needed to gain a clearer understanding how multiple minority identities are affected by SO, with specific focus on examining whether members of minority groups are affected differently (Edwards, Vogel, & Hammer, 2011). Conerly (2001) studied how gay African American males find a safe space where their racial identity and sexual orientation can exist together when there are other greater constructs competing, such as culture, race and difficulties integrating into the greater gay community. People can develop feelings of marginalization when they are a minority participant in a majority environment. When in this type of situation, a minority not only faced being a sexual minority, but they also faced the presence of racism (Harris, 2003), which fostered feelings of isolation and loneliness (Evans & D'Augelli, 1996).

In addition to racism, gay African American males often experienced conflict between their same-sex sexual activities and internalized homonegative masculinity norms (Williams, Wyatt, Resell, Peterson, & Asuan-O'Brien, 2004). The multifaceted phenomenon of being multiple minorities may increase gay African American male's experience of psychological duress, which is further amplified if they participate in the BDSM community. Gay African American males have cultural identities that are often devalued by predominantly White males (Mobley, 2000). The authors identified that there may be different models and theories that were better used with a majority population versus a minority population.

Objectification of Men in Advertising and Media

Just as women had been the targets of objectifying advertisement, over time advertising that targeted men had become increasingly objectifying (Leit et al., 2001; Rohlinger, 2002). Greater emphasis have been placed on the effects of objectification through the media on women due to the belief that men have little or no risks of experiencing problems related to their body image (Daniel & Bridges, 2010). However, this notion had become rejected and there was a push to define and capture the male experience of body image problems (Grammas & Schwartz, 2009; Morry & Staska, 2001; Warren, 2008). Qualitative studies have begun to identify the construct of male body image's relationship with the drive for muscularity (Adams, Turner, & Bucks, 2005; Bottamini & Ste-Marie, 2006; De Souza & Ciclitira, 2005; Labre, 2005; Ridgeway and Tylka, 2005). Daniel and Bridges (2010) suggested that objectification was one possible explanation for the increase in men's drive for muscularity.

Magazine centerfold pictures portrayed males that are more muscular than previously (Leit, 2001). Lean and muscular males were frequently presented as attractive in popular media (Frederick, Fessler, & Haselton, 2005; Leit, Gray, & Pope, 2002); however, the average male substantially differed from the 'ideal' body type (Fallon, Harris & Johnson, 2014; Frederick, Bohrnstedt, Hatfield, & Berscheid, 2014; Ridgeway & Tylka, 2005). The media has represented certain body types as ideal over time (Boroughs, Cafri & Thompson, 2005; Frederick & Essayli, 2016). Rohlinger (2002) identified the increased attention that the male body has received in the media and that contemporary advertising depicted males in more objectifying ways. Inasmuch as men were bombarded by ideal body types and sexually objectified images in the media, they were also prone to take on the perpetuated ideal body as the only type of body to be valued which disregarded their personhood. Silberstein, Mishkind, Striegel-Moore, Timko, & Rodin (1989) suggested that the gay male community strongly emphasized body appearance, which exposed gay males to objectification at a more amplified degree than heterosexual males.

The objectifying gaze can be found in visual media. The photographs in visual media showed a man visually staring at a female who was not paying attention. This type of action, according to (Mulvey, 1975), highlighted bodies and body parts by aligning viewers to engage in sexualized gazes. This was not just limited to the pornography industry but it can be seen in film, advertisements, music videos, magazines and sports. Often times women of color found that their objectifying images were layered with racial stereotypes such as Asian women being portrayed as subservient or more erotic and

African Americans portrayed as animals or hypersexual (Cowan, 1995; hooks, 1981; Leidholdt, 1981). Cowan (1995) spoke of pornography as male's freedom of expression and feminist's assertion that it is about power. Males were free to express how they felt at the expense of reducing or removing power from females.

In summary, current research has shown that males are increasingly and often objectified in the media. This understanding has become the precipice for new studies to understand the effects of this type of objectification on males. Though certain body types have become the object of visual media, they don't align with the reality of the majority. It is imperative for these types of studies to be conducted to facilitate the onset of increased positive social change.

Outcomes/Consequences of SO

The objectification theory identified that SO of the female body produced negative consequences for women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). These detrimental effects included body shame, eating disorders, diminished mental performance and capacity, self-surveillance, and other negative mental health outcomes (Fredrickson et al., 1998; Gervais, Vescio, & Allen, 2011; McKinley & Hyde, 1996; Noll & Fredrickson, 1998; Parsons & Betz, 2001; Tiggemann & Slater, 2001). Calogero (2004) completed a study which showed a woman only need to picture her body was on display to encounter low body esteem. The anticipation of becoming the object of an observer's gaze can potentially trigger negative consequences (Calogero, 2004). The male gaze caused social physique anxiety (Calogero, 2004) and self-silencing (Saguy, Quinn, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2010).

Shame in the context of objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) was the negative emotion, which occurred when people valued themselves in connection to an internalized idea and failed to meet the internalized standard (Lewis, 1992). Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) generalized that individuals who are experiencing shame characterize the shortcomings globally to their whole self rather than to some specific action(s) or inaction. Lewis (1992) presented that shame creates intense desires to hide to avoid both judgmental gazes of others and feelings of worthlessness. Silberstein, Striegel-Moore, and Rodin (1987) provided an empirical study that showed that women experience more shame than men. Bybee, Sullivan, Zielonka and Moes (2009) reported that chronic shame and guilt were associated with higher levels of depression among gay men compared to heterosexual men.

Anxiety, with respect to objectification theory, was the emotion that one felt when they anticipated danger or threats to self (Ohman, 1993). Being a gay African American male in a culture that objectifies minorities created ample opportunities for the individual to experience anxiety. Minority males in the BDSM culture needed to be attentive to the potential for being sexually objectified. Research showed that this vigilance could be a chronic source of anxiety, affecting both their personal and sexual life (Gordon & Riger; Rozee, 1988).

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) presented a litany of negative outcomes from SO such as body shame, anxiety, depression, eating disorders and negative experiences surrounding intimacy. Individuals on the receptive end of objectification may be ill equipped to deal with the effects. As discussed, globally characterizing ones

shortcomings to their entire person could produce shame. Anxiety could occur due to the environment that objectification created. Other studies discussed demonstrated higher occasions of depression in gay males than in heterosexual males. It was important in the scheme of bringing about positive social change to understand the potential outcomes of this phenomenon and work to provide awareness of them to assist those experiencing any of the negative mental health outcomes.

Summary

Objectification theory and its expanded application to ethnic and sexual minorities other than females were empirically supported as a framework for understanding the experiential consequences of being a gay African American in a culture where both consensual and nonconsensual objectification is common. The intent of this dissertation was to study the lived experiences of objectification of gay African American males in the BDSM community. Participants in the gay BDSM community were not strangers to objectification as a principle in BDSM activities. However, it was the nonconsensual experiences that this study aimed to address. Teunis' (2007) research found that men objectified other men and Calogero and Tylka (2014) suggested that sexual minority males experienced SO at higher frequencies than non-sexual minority men.

Given the high probability of nonconsensual objectification of gay African American men during BDSM play, I sought to identify if some participants experienced poor mental health outcomes such as anxiety, or body shame. Building upon the concepts of Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) objectification theory and Davids, Watson, Nilsson and Marszalek (2015) support of the use of objectification theory when studying gay

males, this study explored the experiences of the participants to identify how gay African American males navigate their participation in the BDSM culture. The study also sought to identify any consequences, positive or negative, that the participants experienced from perceived SO. This current study helped to fill the gap where the current literature was silent concerning this population.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

In this chapter, I present an explanation of the study, the criteria for selecting the participants, my role in the study, and the data collection methods used in this study. The chapter includes an introduction to qualitative research, the various methods of qualitative research, an explanation about why I chose a qualitative study, followed by a brief description of the study's theoretical foundation. I, then, present the role of the researcher, the research questions, and information concerning the participants and their ethical protections. Finally, I outline the procedural aspects of the study like recruiting participants and data collection. This chapter is summarized by a discussion of the implications of the study and possible social change implications of the study.

Research Design and Rationale

Qualitative Approach

Husserl focused on how people experience and describe situations (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). Phenomenologists shed light on the studied phenomenon according to the stories that the participants share (Creswell, 2007). The phenomenological approach chosen for this study was transcendental phenomenology, as presented by Moustakas (1994). In this approach, I focused on describing how the person experienced the phenomenon instead of how I interpreted the experience. Transcendental phenomenology allowed me the ability to direct the research questions to illuminate the experiences of gay African American males related to receiving nonconsensual SO to obtain the real meaning of the experiences.

Following Moustakas' (1994) method, I used a set of open-ended questions that were developed prior to starting data collection. These questions were used to guide the interview, and they provided a structure for follow-up interviews, if needed. The questions were used to seek the essence of the experiences, and they focused on the foundations of the qualitative study (Moustakas, 1994). The questions presented in this study were chosen to gather information about whether the participants' perceived objectification and whether SO changed how the participants' participated in the BDSM community.

This qualitative study was designed to investigate the nature of shared experiences that a group of people had, instead of attempting to address questions about which variable influences a change in a particular independent variable (La Sala, 2005; Maxwell, 2005). Qualitative research methods were appropriate for this study because it enabled minority groups, such as gay African American males the opportunity to share their story in their own voices. Additionally, the results of this study can be used to promote social change by altering behavioral patterns and cultural norms over time by bringing awareness of objectification and its effects on people. This study may lead to further studies on the social problem of nonconsensual objectification within this population.

Several researchers methods have agreed that qualitative phenomenological research is appropriate when the researcher is focusing on how people in a certain environment, such as being nonconsensually objectified, experienced the shared phenomena (Maxwell, 2005; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Creswell (2007)

described phenomenology as the study of a group of people's experience with a shared phenomenon. Because the objective of this study was to understand the experiences that a group of gay African American males in the BDSM community have of being nonconsensually SO, phenomenological methods were suited to acquire these data and information. A phenomenological approach contributed to an understanding of these lived experiences by exposing assumptions that were present concerning SO (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). I used phenomenology to identify the problem and focus on the SO phenomenon experienced by the participants.

In qualitative research, there are various other designs that could have been used to extract information relevant to a particular population. However, these designs were not as pertinent as a phenomenological alignment. Grounded theory is used to develop a new theory when current theories cannot explain a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The study was best aligned with Fredrickson and Roberts's (1997) objectification theory; therefore, grounded theory was not appropriate. Both case study and narrative research designs include an emphasis on one participant or a few participants (Creswell, 2007) and was too limited in its scope. This limitation could cause the researcher to gain a fallacious comprehension of the problem being studied. Narrative approaches involve gathering stories of the participants and analyzing them to identify the key elements of the story to place them in a logical sequence of events. This is called restorying the participants' stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2007). In ethnographic research, the researcher immerses his or herself in the target population's world. This is done to allow the researcher to gain a first-hand understanding of the culture and the challenges that the

population faces. A phenomenological approach contributed to an understanding of these lived experiences by exposing assumptions that were present concerning SO (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

The Researcher's Role

Qualitative research is subjective. It is paramount that I acknowledge this and handle the issue appropriately. I had to be clear about my assumptions and biases. I gained this awareness through reflection (Morrow, 2003). I had no professional relationships with the participants.

My role of a researcher in this study was both as an observer and a participant. I took an objective outside view to better determine issues such as nonverbal cues given by the participants. I assumed the participant role in the use of the interview protocol to collect stories that expressed the experiences and realities that the participant's had concerning objectification. At times, I was required to ask probing questions to gain detailed information from the participants. I participated in the study as opposed to being a passive observer.

Patton (2002) posited that once the data have been collected, they are categorized into common themes, which explain the fundamental meanings of objectification. This approach aided in understanding the perspective of participants towards nonconsensual SO.

My role was to follow Moustakas's (1994) structured approach to phenomenological methods. I selected a social problem of which I am passionate about and desired to see a social change. The idea for the study came from feedback that I

received when asking a group of African American males, who participate in the gay BDSM culture, what topic they would like to see studied that would make a difference in their day-to-day participation in the culture. The amount of concurrence received from others in the community showed that this phenomenon was common (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). According to Maxwell (2005), nearly every study has a worldview based on the researcher's worldview. I desired to advocate for the gay African American population who have expressed discontent in how they had been approached and viewed in the BDSM community.

Bias in research can be present at any stage of the research. With proper research designs bias can be avoided. Interviewer bias was avoided through the incorporation of the interview protocol. There were biases that had to be identified and appropriately managed, such as moderator bias. Due to my position in the study as the instrument of the study and the one who collected the data, I had an impact on the quality of the data. I had to be aware of my body language and facial expressions when conducting interviews with the participants. I had to also maintain neutrality in body language, tone, and dress. Also care was taken to not give personal opinions during the interview process with the participants.

The topic of objectification could be a confusing one for many people. Due to this, I took caution to avoid leading questions. This type of actions could have skewed the participants' answers. An example of a leading question pertaining to this topic was "Some people think that SO is bad for minorities. What do you think about it?" This question needed to be constructed in a more neutral manner such as: "What is your

opinion of SO?" I paid attention to the interview question construction in order to avoid this type of bias.

A final bias discussed in this section is the social desirability bias (Furnham, 1986; Nederhof, 1985). Individuals often like to be socially acceptable. This could have affected this research if a participant provided answers to interview questions that were socially acceptable and also false. The topic of SO occurs in the United States; however, it is not socially acceptable to cause negative outcomes to people. The same phenomenon could be seen when interviewing participants about a socially unacceptable topic. They could have said what was socially acceptable despite the assurance of anonymity provided from the story.

In this study, I sought to make the participants feel like coresearchers by soliciting comments about the study. This inclusivity may have helped the participants to feel less like subjects, according to Maxwell (2005). Participant validation (member checking) allowed the participants to influence the data by providing input on the results and making any corrections to what I transcribed.

Research Questions

In order to develop both a breath of understanding and a depth of knowledge of the SO experiences of gay African American males in the BDSM culture I proposed certain research questions. In phenomenological studies, Creswell (2007) noted that early interviews will help to refine and guide research questions. The research questions that follow incorporated an overarching general research question followed by questions that were emancipatory and exploratory in nature. Creswell explained that emancipatory

questions help guide and inform social change. Marshall and Rossman (2006) explained that exploratory questions are used to investigate phenomena not well understood.

The overarching research question for the study was the following: How do gay African American males participating in BDSM perceive objectification? The opening exploratory questions included the following:

> How does the SO of gay African American males change how they participate in the BDSM sub-culture?

The initial emancipatory question was the following:

> How does social dialog about SO of gay African American males influence their risks of further SO?

Procedures

Recruiting and Selecting Participants

I announced the study, its entry criteria and requested participants on websites such as www.Facebook.com and www.recon.com and the Growlr application frequented by gay participants of the BDSM community. People interested in participating in the study contacted me by my Walden University e-mail address. I used purposive criterion sampling to identify participants who met the criterion of self-identifying as (a) a gay male, (b) an African American and (c) actively engaged in the BDSM lifestyle. I did not have to use a snowball method of recruitment because I obtained 10 participants. In a phenomenological study, 10 participants are common (Creswell, 2007). I reached data saturation at the tenth interview. Saturation is described as the point, in a qualitative

study, where more data cease to yield more information or shed further light on the topic being studied.

Consent Forms

Each prospective participant was given an e-mailed copy of the consent form and the description of the study. The prospective participants were asked to reply to the informed consent (Appendix A) e-mail with "I agree." Upon receipt of the reply to the informed consent e-mail, I contacted the prospective participant and set up a time for a one-on-one call. Once a date was set, I sent out an e-mail confirmation to the prospective participant.

Ethical Protection of the Participants

The participants for this study were volunteers and the protection of the participants from harm took precedence throughout the study. The participants understood, through the use of informed consent form (Appendix A), their freedom to not to participate or drop out of the study at any time and have their information removed from the data. Each participant agreed to the consent form via e-mail, which I will maintain with the other research documents. I began by fully disclosing the purpose of the study to those potentially interested in participating in the study. Participant confidentiality and privacy was paramount in this study, and I used pseudonyms for each participant. Exact descriptions of unique life stories that a reader could use to identify a participant were avoided.

Participants were presented with the opportunity to review how they were represented in the study, they were allowed to approve of the information contained in

the study. In the event, that a participant disagreed with what was written, I modified the information contained in the interview based on the participant's corrections. Any files, audiotapes, and transcripts are stored in a locked cabinet in my place of residence and will be kept for 5 years. Only I have access to the unaltered and unmasked transcripts.

For one participants, the interview elicited emotional responses. Some discomfort was evident. In order to minimize the potential for participant distress, I acted as a passive agent throughout the interview, while maintaining an unconditional positive regard for the participant at all times.

Data Collection

The primary form of data collection was one-on-one interviews. My role in the data collection was important for this dissertation. Lave and Kvale (1995) argued that only another human being is sufficiently complex enough to comprehend and learn the human existence and experience. It was necessary for the study's respondents and I to interact, which allowed this study to provide a benefit to social research.

The interviews, though semistructured, were allowed to grow organically into various aspects of objectification. The interviews lasted less than 1 hour each. The interviews used to collect data for the study took place via the telephone with one exception where the participant preferred an in-person interview. The interviews were audio-recorded, in order to maintain the integrity of the interviews and so that I could transcribe the contents of the interview at a later date privately. Using an interview protocol, I asked the questions in the semi-structured interview. The same interview format was used across all settings. Possible interview questions were as follows:

1. Have you been sexually objectified?
2. How do you perceive SO?
3. What sexual stereotypes have you witnessed in the BDSM community?
4. Where do you find SO portrayed?
5. When it comes to choosing a person to play with, is finding someone because of their race the same thing as finding them because of other characteristics such as fetish interests?
6. Do you exclusively play with other African American males?
7. Could you say more about your experiences as an African American male in the BDSM community?

I employed the use of "how" questions to enable proper engagement and probing dialogue with the participant.

The interviews were transcribed, coded, and written in rough draft form. The document was sent via e-mail to the participant to member check the document. Corrections were made to the document as directed by the participant. Once the information was corrected, it was resent to the participant for approval. The transcripts were then edited to remove any guttural pauses or stammering speech to make the document more readable.

Data Analysis

The data analysis consisted of hand-coding the transcribed data. I analyzed the data using open coding, axial coding and selective coding techniques after the transcript reviews were completed. Subsequently, I deconstructed the raw data into component parts. These component parts formed the basic units of analysis for the qualitative data

analysis. Once the open coding is completed, I disaggregated the data through axial coding. Finally, I reconstructed the prominent codes and themes into five themes.

Axial coding was conducted to confirm that the concepts and categories accurately represented the participants' responses and explored the relationship between the concepts and categories. I asked questions such as the following: What conditions influenced the objectification? If this is happening with this group of responses, is it going on with another set of codes? What social concepts affected the participants? What are the associated effects or consequences from the objectification experiences? These questions provided me the opportunity to observe commonalities present across all participants' responses. Axial coding can be used to identify causal conditions that lead to a central phenomenon, which causes actions and consequences. Through this process, I identified actions men of color took to influence or change the situation and with whom they interacted with to bring about this change. Selective coding reconstructed the prominent codes and themes in a manner that illustrated the relationships and insights gained from the axial stage. From the themes that emerged I was able to explain, more broadly, how the themes aligned with the existing theoretical perspectives.

When conducting qualitative research, there is a possibility that discrepant cases may be identified. Discrepant cases are those that are disconfirming from the main data. For this study, discrepant cases were handled through discrepant case analyses. This meant that I compared the discrepant cases to the confirming instances to understand the different intricacies of each specific discrepant case. This process allowed me the ability to re-evaluate the key assertions and also allowed me to consider these participant

experiences as well. A more robust discussion of the data collection and analysis is found in Chapter 4.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was measured by the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the data and the collection process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The in-depth verbal description of the lived experiences of the participants gathered through recording the interviews and accurately transcribing the participant's responses was utilized for transferability of findings between me and the respondent (Creswell, 2005). Transferability, according to Morrow (2005), alluded to the ability of the reader to generalize the findings of a particular study to their context. Establishing transferability provided readers the ability to utilize the data in their own implementation. Morrow (2005) provided the understanding that qualitative data cannot be generalized; however findings from these types of studies do possess usefulness.

Dependability was established throughout the study. I established a consistent data collection protocol that was implemented during every phase of the data collection process. I provided so much detail in the form of a clear paper trail of what occurred at all phases of the study that it can be replicated. Triangulation is a method used by qualitative researchers to check and establish validity in their studies by analyzing a research question from multiple perspectives to arrive at consistency across data sources or approaches. The more variety in the data sources one is able to obtain, the greater will be the richness, breadth, and depth of the data gathered (Morrow, 2005).

I captured multiple perspectives in an effort to establish dependability. Denzin (1978) recommended that triangulation incorporated understanding a social phenomenon the way it comes across in different contexts. For this study, I chose participants from different parts of the United States to gain insight on the phenomenon from these different contexts.

Qualitative research comes with the understanding that each researcher brings a unique perspective to the study. Confirmability specifically refers to the ability of the results of a study to be corroborated by other (Morrow, 2005). To establish confirmability, the participants were provided transcriptions of their interviews to allow them confirm the accuracy of the transcription. Reflexivity was incorporated into the study to control researcher bias. Additionally, a data audit was conducted to examine the procedures for collecting and analyzing data to identify any further biases as previously discussed.

All of the aforementioned checks and processes were implemented in order to establish credibility. The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe and understand SO from the participant's experience. Therefore, the only way to correctly judge the credibility of the results was through the participants. Cross checking the data provided and providing descriptions of the phenomenon from the participant's perspective, richly describing these experiences through their words established this study's credibility.

Summary

The purpose of chapter 3 was to present the research design and methodology and explain the way in which the methodology was selected and to provide a rationale to

support this selection. The theoretical base of the study was described. This chapter also provided a detailed discussion about the role of the researcher and the biases that could be present during the study. An in depth discussion was provided detailing the collection and analysis of the data and how it will be interpreted. Lastly, the issues of trustworthiness were discussed with specific attention to factors of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Chapter 4 of this dissertation will provide a description of the results of the study. This will be accomplished by reintroducing the research questions and describing the demographics of the participants as well as the study's setting. The data collection process and data analysis will be expressly stated. A robust description of the coding process and theme formation will be provided to facilitate the discussion about the results of the study as they relate to the research questions.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to document the lived experiences of gay African American males in the BDSM community and their experiences with objectification. This chapter begins with a description of how the data were obtained, and it continues with a description of the results. The chapter contains a discussion of key demographic information presented by the participants. I explain and detail the analysis that transpired to identify the themes that emerged from the collected data. The chapter ends with a description of the quality of the data.

In this study, I used an objectification theory lens and analyzed the themes in a narrative form in which the common themes were presented based on the participants' experiences. The participants gave expression to and communicated understanding of their lived experience of being gay, African American, and a member of the BDSM community who have experienced nonconsensual objectification. The experiences in the participants' own words disseminated their thoughts, feelings, and understanding of the phenomena of objectification and the challenges that this presented them.

Demographics

Each participant identified his racial identity as African American. Each participant identified as an active participant in the BDSM community. Each participant identified as gay. The information included a description of the participants' location within the United States, when they came to the BDSM community and how they identify in the community.

Ten males were interviewed. Five participants identified as dominant, three participants identified as submissive, and two identified as switch (meaning that they can be either dominant or submissive). Three participants stated that they were single. Four participants stated that they in a same-gendered marriage. Two out of the three who reported they were partnered (nonmarried) were in a same-gendered polyamorous relationship.

Participant 1

Participant 1 was a married male residing in a Southern U.S. state at the time of the interview. He reported his introduction into the BDSM community at 17-years-old by an older partner. He was taken to a local leather bar and was allowed in without an ID because of whom he came with. He reported that he identifies as a leather daddy or dominant and is seen in the BDSM community as such.

Participant 2

Participant 2 was a partnered male in a polyamorous relationship residing in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States, at the time of the interview. He reported his introduction into the BDSM community in two phases. The first phase occurred when he was 19-years-old where he engaged in rope play by tying up a slightly older date. The second phase he described as “more intentional” occurred when he was in his mid-20s where he went to a leather bar. He reported that he identified as a “dominant with daddy qualities,” but will switch if the chemistry is right. The BDSM community views him as a dominant as well.

Participant 3

Participant 3 was a partnered male residing in a Southern U.S. state at the time of the interview. He reported his introduction to the BDSM community through the owner of a "little leather shop", who was well regarded in the leather community. From this introduction, a gradual process ensued where he began frequenting the local leather bar. He reported that he was well received into the leather community by virtue of whom he knew. He reported that he was a submissive and fostered that image to avoid the need to play the dominant role.

Participant 4

Participant 4 was a single male at the time of the interviews, residing in a Southeastern U.S. state. He reported his introduction to the BDSM community "by accident" when he was a freshman in college with a sexual partner. He reported that initially he was resistant to anything other than sex; however, as he became more comfortable with the relationship he became open to more exploration. He identified as a switch, or one who can be both dominant or submissive depending on the negotiation and his mood. He reported that in the BDSM community he is viewed as dominant due to his demeanor.

Participant 5

Participant 5 was a partnered male residing in the Midwest region of the United States at the time of the interviews. He reported identifying with the BDSM community at a young age; however, he was introduced to the BDSM community through his heterosexual friends having a conversation about kink and fetish play. He reported that as

a child, he was afraid of his same-gender attractions because of his religious upbringing and did not verbalize them outwardly. He viewed himself as a dominant or master and reported that the BDSM community viewed him in the same manner.

Participant 6

Participant 6 was a married male residing in the Northeast region of the United States at the time of the interview. He reported that his first experience in the BDSM community occurred from meeting a man at a bar. He reported that the other man was more experienced in kink and fetish play than he. He viewed himself as a dominant and reports that his general experience was that the BDSM community viewed him in the same manner.

Participant 7

Participant 7 was a single male residing in the Midwest region of the United States, at the time of the interview. He reported his first experience in the BDSM play was a result of a "fuck buddy" relationship he had. He reported that he ultimately went to the International Mister Leather (IML) contest event where he met members of a leather organization for men of color. Through this experience, he reported he became more comfortable at the event. He reported that he viewed himself as a switch.

Participant 8

Participant 8 was a married polyamorous male with a boyfriend residing in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States at the time of the interview. He reported an experience when he was younger where he was tied up in a chair and left alone by his brother's friends. Though he did not understand why, he realized that he liked the

experience. He reported that as an adult, he began to go to a local leather bar where he met his husband. He described himself as an Alpha boy (a submissive boy within a leather relationship who has the most amount of time and experience with the dominant) and reported that people change with time in their leather expression.

Participant 9

Participant 9 was a single man residing in the Midwest region of the United States at the time of the interview. He reported that he was exposed to the BDSM culture through BDSM-related pornography after attending college. He reported that his reception was mixed. Some members of the BDSM community received him well and others were not so receptive. He reported that he identified more as a boy but also considered himself as a leatherman in general.

Participant 10

Participant 10 was a married man who resided in the Southeast region of the United States at the time of the interview. He reported coming into the BDSM community through his husband. He reported attending Folsom, an annual BDSM and Leather Street fair in San Francisco, California. He reported that there is "no leather community" in his current geographical area. He reported that he is a dominant, but can be submissive ("just not too submissive").

Table 1 summarizes the demographics of the participants, their relationship status as they described it, their socioeconomic and occupational status, and annual household salary.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics at Time of Interview

	Age	Relationship Status	Employed	Full or Part Time	Blue/White Collar	Household Salary
Participant 1	55	Married	Y	PT	Blue	> $100k
Participant 2	39	Polyamorous	Y	FT	White	$50,001-100K
Participant 3	60	Partnered	Y	FT	White	$50,001-100K
Participant 4	37	Single	Y	FT	Blue	$0-50K
Participant 5	37	Married	Y	FT	White	$50,001-100K
Participant 6	55	Married	Y	FT	White	$50,001-100K
Participant 7	34	Single	Y	PT	White	$0-50K
Participant 8	37	Polyamorous	Y	FT	White	$50,001-100K
Participant 9	30	Single	Y	FT	White	$50,001-100K
Participant 10	40	Married	N	N/A	Retired	$50,001-100K

Notes. Y is Yes, N is no, FT is full time, PT is part time, N/A is non-applicable, Salary is indicated in thousands. No information in this table was obscured.

Data Collection

Recruitment and Interview Process

Flyers (see Appendix B) were uploaded to various groups on Facebook, Growlr, and Recon websites/applications. Participants who responded to the invitation were screened by asking them their sexual identity, age, and if they actively participated in the BDSM community. I wished to verify that they met the criteria for the study and agreed to participate. Participants were provided informed consent forms via e-mail. Upon receiving an affirmed agreement to the informed consent form, a date and time was

established for their interview. Ten males were interviewed and coded as Participants 1 through 10.

All but one of the interviews was conducted via the phone; the one participant desired to be interviewed in person. I called nine participants at or around the agreed upon time. There was a follow-up e-mail sent for one participant in the study because the participant's demographics were not obtained in the initial interview. During the phone interviews, I sat in a secluded location to ensure the participant's privacy. The participants were asked to ensure that they were in an area where they would have privacy. Each participant spoke and freely shared their stories. One interview had technical difficulties with the recording device and had to be paused and addressed so that the information the participant wanted to share was captured.

After engaging in a bit of unfocused conversation to establish a rapport with the participant, I read them the introduction from the interview protocol (see Appendix C). All participants understood the introduction and did not have any questions. I began the interview by placing the speakerphone feature on and starting the tape recorder. The participants answered the interview questions according to the interview protocol. In some instances, the participants were asked questions to clarify what they stated. For example, Participant 1 described his experiences being groped nonconsensually. I made the following clarifying question to gain a better understanding of the meaning of the statement: How do you do that? Clarification stopped when the participant replied affirmatively, confirming that I understood what they said. Where appropriate, prompts were used to elicit a deeper shared description of the experiences.

The length of the interviews varied from about 20 minutes to about 50 minutes. The variation was most likely related to me refining the interview questions. Through the refinement of the interview questions, the time necessary to obtain a complete picture of the participants' experiences was reduced. The reduction in interview length did not appear to have an impact on the candor that the participants spoke with. The average interview time was 34 minutes.

I transcribed the interviews into a Microsoft Word document. Stories that contained personally identifying information, which could lead to identification by people who may know the participants, were redacted or obscured. Furthermore, the names of individuals mentioned in the interviews by the participants were eliminated.

The stories included in the study were presented verbatim, except that hesitations in speech like "umm," and common vernacular such as "I was like" were removed for the objective of readability. No expletives have been modified or removed. In some cases, changes in verb tense were made and some appropriate noun subjects were inserted in correct places if the quote was started in midsentence and the subject was previously mentioned. The full transcripts were checked by the participants and approved by them prior to being included in this write up to protect the data accuracy. The intent was not to obfuscate, but to enhance the readability of this work. A copy of the transcript was provided to the participant with instructions to make any necessary changes to the transcribed interview. Only one of the participants requested changes to be made to his interview transcript. Ultimately, the change was minor and added clarity to the transcript. He initially stated, "I had the inkling that they really believed this." When the

transcription was returned, he added clarity to what "this" was by providing a parenthetical (White supremacy) descriptive comment. He removed one inconsequential phrase in another area of the transcript, which did not change the information initially provided.

Data Analysis and Results

Coding and Theme Generation

The process of generating themes and the coding of the participant interviews were completed in several iterative stages. The first stage or open coding was meant to deconstruct the data into component parts to enable me to see what was included. Each interview was deconstructed individually. Raw text was reviewed through reading and rereading the text to identify text that contained ideas relevant to the participants for further analysis. I maintained records to maintain the integrity and accuracy of the relevant text. This process broke down the data into categories that described the content.

The second stage of the data analysis was axial coding or the interpretive stage. Qualitative research involves interpretation, and different readers may disagree with a particular interpretation. This stage allowed me to make sense of and understand the relevant text or coded data by identifying relationships among the open codes. I compared the data codes and categories within and across transcripts and across variables determined to be important to the study. Interpreting the data included searching for differences and similarities among themes, reviewing these findings with those of Frederickson and Roberts (1997), and exploring negative results in more detail.

The third stage of the data analysis was selective coding, which was comprised of reconstructing the prominent codes and themes into a fashion that illustrated the insights and relationships acquired from the interpretation stage. This helped me to explain them more broadly with the existing theoretical perspectives and knowledge. For each of the broad questions, one or two central themes emerged. I contextualized the findings by framing and positioning them within objectification theory to better illustrate how closely aligned the findings were with the original theory presented by Frederickson and Roberts (1997).

I was able to understand more of the participants' experiences through each subsequent iteration of the coding process. During the interviews, I did not take notes as to not internalize the experiences of the participants and to facilitate objectivity. I read each transcript several times to compare it with the audio recording.

With each new iteration of the coding process, themes began to emerge. At each stage, some themes were integrated into others, and multiple subthemes were reduced to a single overarching theme when appropriate. Some themes were removed altogether when the relative weakness of the theme warranted. The analysis resulted in the identification of five emic themes, each of which was reflected in most of the participants' experiences. Theme development was a complicated process because each participant had a unique story but the underlying spirit within the stories was similar.

Emergent Themes

In this study, I explored the lived experience of gay African American males in the BDSM community who experienced nonconsensual objectification. The lived

experiences of the participants in the study were varied, yet similarly highlighting the negativity that they experienced through their participation in the BDSM community and how it impacted their participation in the greater BDSM community. The participants shared their beliefs of what participation in the BDSM community meant to them. The themes that were highlighted were derived from the participants' experiences. The interviews began with a question, which provided the context and understanding of the participants' connection with the BDSM community and their BDSM identity.

The themes that were developed from the analysis of the data presented by the participants were categorized to address the following five overarching questions.

What participation in the BDSM community means to the participant?

What do the participants gain from participation in the BDSM community?

How do the participants explain their experiences of nonconsensual objectification?

How do the participants handle objectification?

How has experiencing objectification changed the participant?

The answers to these questions formulated the salient themes found in the narratives of the participants. The strength of any theme should not be implied by the order in which the themes are presented. The questions are presented in temporal order starting from the importance of participation and ending with how the participant has changed as a result of it. A full discussion of the implications of each theme is reserved for chapter 5; however, the current discussion of the themes that emerged in this study includes interpretations when appropriate.

Theme 1: Community

The participants all had significant thoughts about what participation in the BDSM community meant to them. Understanding how important participation is to the participants can assist in setting the tone of how their lived experiences contribute to their BDSM worldview. Due to the impact that participation has had on the participants, their definitions are important to understand to further understand the impact that objectification has on them. I felt that presenting the significance of what the participant gained from their participation addressed part of the "why" they endure objectification.

What does participation in the BDSM community mean to the participant?

Participant 1: It, for me to be a part of the community, it is a way for me to express my inner sexual beast that I have in me. The freedom of being that person openly without being judged… It is a place for me to enjoy the surroundings of just seeing men and women in the culture just express themselves and being who they are outside of their normal everyday traditional lifestyles and traditional mindset.

Participant 3: Basically service and fundraising. I do a lot of fundraising as well as service. I am a member of a leather/Levi club and we have been doing a lot of fundraisers for the community. And also I am a 'Title holder' and that means basically the same thing.

Participant 4: I was invited out on numerous occasions to bar night and things. I was skeptical in the beginning, but once I started attending…I felt much better by coming around and started to get to know those within the community but in the beginning it was rough.

Participant 5: I mean learned a plethora of different kinks throughout the community and several play partners throughout the years. Improving upon my skills in the other areas. Discovering different things socially about myself in terms of what I like and don't like as a result of playing with other people

Participant 7: For me it was the people (members of a Men of Color Leather Organization) that I dealt with in the community. They were very kind and protective.

Participant 8: I didn't know the protocol at all. I didn't know any procedures or anything. One of the things about the leather community is that we try to bring in people that are curious or that would like to know about the traditions of being in the leather community.

Participant 9: I feel like participation is contributing to the community as well as kind of getting stuff out of it. That can include going to play parties, actually being an active participant, contributing to the community and also working in the community and being involved in organizations that are related to BDSM and volunteering at events. Those are all things that I consider as being a part of the community.

Based on the participants' responses, they came to the BDSM community because they found a community of likeminded people that would provide them the ability to express who they are without being judged. In the BDSM community some of the participants gave back to the community through fundraising for various causes that support the community, as well as providing the service of their time to further the building of the BDSM community. Many participants did not want to be only takers within the community but they wanted to give of themselves in some way. Within the community, some participants further learned how to hone their proficiency in various kink and fetish play so that they gained better satisfaction throughout their journey of exploration in BDSM. Immersing in the community allowed some participant the opportunity to learn how to properly interact within the community through learning proper protocol.

Theme 2: Gaining knowledge & freedom

The participants gained various things through their participation in the BDSM community. In order to ascertain the value of participation each participant had to think about what they gained through their participation. Understanding what they gained can

assist in understanding how their participation impacts other aspects of their life. Their specific gains further substantiated the importance of participating in the BDSM community.

What do the participants gain from participation in the BDSM community?

Participant 1: There is a level of freedom in that when you can just be yourself. The gay community is very judgmental compared to the leather community. What I have gained is a wealth of knowledge of the culture in this community. I am a mentor, a teacher of this culture. I have gained knowledge of not just the kinks and fetishes of the community but the knowledge of what it takes to be a fetisher or a kinkster.

Participant 2: I can use my fraternity (a Men of Color Leather Organization) as a sounding board as to things that may be occurring in my life or maybe help answer some of those questions or curiosities It can be overwhelming especially if you come from a conservative background where you maybe your "alternative lifestyle" as a homosexual male has never been affirmed by say your family or even society.

Participant 3: A lot of people have accepted me on the path in which I have taken on my journey and have encouraged me to go forth and not be like a cookie cutter leather man.

Participant 5: I mean learned a plethora of different kinks throughout the community and several play partners throughout the years. Improving upon my skills in the other areas. Discovering different things socially about myself in terms of what I like and don't like as a result of playing with other people

Participant 8: We all have inner demons that we fight with almost on a daily basis. We have our secrets and our skeletons in the closets. Sometimes BDSM allows us to escape that or allows us to face it head on. But in a healthy way…in a consensual way.

Participant 9: (I have) been able to openly own my sexuality and be authentic about it. Where I don't have to hold it back for the sake of making other people comfortable, having comradery in like having a sense of family which just happen to come up from the initial connections.

Participating in the BDSM community provides a level of freedom to the participants. The participants expressed that without the BDSM community, they felt that they were not able to freely be their authentic self. Within the community they found acceptance and understanding of why they had various feelings. They were able to explore their feelings and kink affinities in a safe place. It is important to note that the participants expressed that their BDSM journey facilitated some personal discovery, which was not contained solely inside of their BDSM lifestyle. Some participants expressed that they developed bonds with people that made it easier to open up and talk about issues of concern not only in their BDSM lifestyle but other aspects of their life. This new found freedom and knowledge provided a springboard for some of the participants to continue to grow.

Theme 3: Verbal Objectification

The lived experiences of nonconsensual objectification identified by the participants typically came in the form of verbal objectification. In Frederickson and Roberts (1997) objectification theory, verbal objectification was one method of objectification that impacted the lives of women. Understanding that nonconsensual objectification was present in the BDSM community yielded the need to understand how the participants experienced objectification. Gaining this understanding provided me the opportunity to compare and contrast how the participant's experiences related to those of the participants of Fredrickson and Roberts' (1997) study.

How do the participants explain their experiences of nonconsensual objectification?

Participant 1: Other experiences I have had other people see me as nothing but a black man…a black cock…a black piece of their sexual desires without feelings, without emotions, without regard of me being a man first. This culture is open to people expressing themselves and being open to…being who they are sexually. But being objectified without asking for it…accepting it…seeking it. Walking into a room where I am nothing but a black piece of something. Like I said before, I maneuver though the culture but that is a very negative part that will never go away.

When you come into the room…it is like oh my God…black cock is in the room. Oh my god you are a beautiful black man. I am a racially mixed person. Someone once said Oh my god you are a sexy…you look like a sexy terrorist. So they use the word black and brown before they find me attractive. But a lot of it is primarily of people who see you as just that black thing. I could care less about racial relationships and mixed race relationships and love of all kinds but people that objectify you as nothing but a black or brown sexual being that is all they see you as. They can care less about you heart or your humanity or your well-being.

Participant 3: You have those that treat me as an object. You know like hung to my knees and can go on for like 25-26+ hours of the day or somebody approach me and say you have a big black cock and stuff like that. I have felt really offended by that.

The biggest turn off for me is if I meet some white guy and that's the first thing that he says that I bet you have a big black dick or something like that. I don't care how attractive he is. The minute I hear that I shut him off.

Participant 4: I always run into and what I do not like is that there is never a conversation with a white man where he has not asked how big is my cock. Or can he look at my cock. I don't like the word 'cock' period so that rubs me the wrong way anyway.

Participant 9: People who will like be interested in you sexually but when they kind of want to take it to the BDSM space and they want race to be a factor in that kind of place. They want to do the race play or they want to introduce racial slurs or references to race while in the act. Those kinds of things happen.

Participant 10:I have had people come up to me and say "Aw man…I was scared to come up to you, you just this big black guy" That has happened a lot, but people try to do it jokingly. It is what it is.

> Somebody might be bold or whatever that don't know me and be like "I just wanna rape your hole." or "I just want you to fuck me" or "I just want you to be my Master."

The theme of verbal objectification was pivotal to this research study. Frederickson and Roberts (1997) provided various ways in which women experienced objectification. One such way was verbally. However, the participants in this research spoke of verbal objectification in the sense of placing ones ethnicity in front of their personage. The participants expressed strong disdain for this behavior of being treated as an object rather than a person. The participants presented stories of being physically stereotyped because of their racial/ethnic makeup. These stereotypes and interactions were not received in a positive manner by the majority of the participants. The negative case studies are discussed below.

Theme 4: Avoidance

The participants expressed experiences of verbal nonconsensual objectification within the BDSM community. Logically the next question that I looked to address was how the participants handled the experiences as a whole. How the participants, through the lens of Frederickson and Roberts' (1997) objectification theory, handled the experiences was important. This provided a guide as to what the original population experienced and also provided structure for me to compare and contrast the data with previous research data. The majority of the participants used the avoidance technique to minimize experiences of further objectification.

How do the participants handle objectification?

Participant 1: It is basically throughout the many years have turned me off to being sexually to non men of color or white men.

Participant 2: I don't even want to be around it. I am a black leather man into BDSM kink/fetishes but (that) doesn't mean I am into (every) available kink or fetish out there.

Participant 3: I mean if they have all their life have treated people of color like that or men of color like that it is nothing I'm going to do or say to change that. I don't say anything to them. You can't change how a person is.

Participant 4: I am much more comfortable dealing with someone that looks more like me.

Participant 6: I am very clear of my avoidance of it. For me my experience with white men have not been good. It is about confrontation around the issue of race and privilege. I have never dated anyone white. I have not had sex with anyone white. I have not had any interest because I don't have any interest in having to deal with those kinds of dynamics. Even from some knowledgeable and well-meaning guys I just sort of don't want the frustration of recognizing the limitations of someone's understanding.

Participant 7: It's why I don't play with people like that (Caucasians). It makes me even more, kind of, not wanting to romantically attempt to pursue anyone who isn't of color.

Participant 9: I think it has shaped how I go about pursuing connections with people now. When I come across men who like or express that they have a specific interest in black men…I go the other way because I expect that those things will happen.

People have various methods of addressing situations. These methods typically fall into one of two categories: fight or flight. The person can flee a situation that is uncomfortable or they can address it. In this study, the participants mainly chose to avoid including Caucasian males in their BDSM play. Avoidance is the result of the participants experiencing objectification. However, this is not the sole result of these experiences. The fifth theme demonstrates how the participants' report that these experiences have changed them.

Theme 5: Mistrust

The participants expressly shared their experiences of nonconsensual objectification and how they handle these experiences. However, the research would not be complete without exploring how these lived experiences have changed the participants. If the participants experienced nonconsensual objectification and it has no impact upon them then nonconsensual objectification would be simply an experience such as taking a deep breath. However, the participants expressed that the experiences impacted their lives; therefore it is important to qualitatively explore how this has changed the participant.

How has experiencing objectification changed the participant?

Participant 1: It is basically throughout the many years have turned me off to being sexually to non men of color or white men.

Participant 2: I have never really internalized it. I actually tend to address it with that person. I'll ask a question like "What makes you think that you can just come up and touch people unannounced?" "Would you do this if we were anywhere else?" "How do you know that I am okay with this?" I tend to question people's logics and motives.

Participant 3: It has made me a lot more cynical…skeptical of stuff. If I detect that I am being considered an object or something like that…I am nice to them (Caucasian men) but I just don't let them into the inner circle at all. I don't even talk to them. I mean I am going to be civil but that's just it.

Participant 4: I am watchful. I am very watchful.

Participant 7: It makes me even more, kind of, not wanting to romantically attempt to pursue anyone who isn't of color. Do you want me because you want (name deleted) or do you want me because you want someone who is African descent. Are you looking for a "Mandingo Warrior" or are you looking for a 35 year old man who just happens to be African American.

I am always wondering what is your motive and then when you read some books and stories of some of the things that happened such as reading the

> "Willie Lynch" letters and how some men in the past…how Caucasians view African Americans…part of me doesn't trust well.

Participant 9: I think it has shaped how I go about pursuing connections with people now. When I come across men who like or express that they have a specific interest in black men, I go the other way because I expect that those things will happen. It kind of switches your worldview over time. Or your social view and it shapes how you interact with people. It makes you guarded and more cautious in pursuing connections with people when you have been more open previously.

The participants expressed that experiencing objectification had negatively affected how they interacted with Caucasian males. They expressed feelings of cynicism, skepticism and of caution when interacting with Caucasian males in the BDSM community. One participant spoke of how he pursued connections with other has been reshaped and how his worldview was changed as a result of experiencing objectification. Underlying tones of repulsion were expressed by the participants when describing how they have changed as a result of experiencing this phenomenon.

Overall, the participants of the study expressed many positive aspects of being involved in the BDSM community. They gained a better picture of who they are and they developed a more authentic self as a result of their participation in the BDSM community. Of those who expressed positive experiences, all but one expressed negative experiences of objectification. One of the participants chose to capitalize on these experiences by changing the direction of the objectification; thus becoming the objectifyer as opposed to being the objectifyee. The next section discusses the negative case examples in greater depth.

Negative Case Examples

Creswell (2007) applied the term negative case example to report uncommon results or discrepant findings. These cases must be discussed to construct a quality study. In this study, Participant 8 was unique because he denied experiencing nonconsensual objectification. He embraced and enjoyed consensual objectification. He expressed that he enjoyed participating in more risqué kink and fetish play and that it is okay to embrace what turns one on.

Participant 8: I won't say it did nothing for me because I don't mind playing in that realm again. I don't mind it at all. What it did for me was like saying "This actually turns you on and it is okay if it does and this is consensual and you made a choice to do this…they made a choice to do this and it's okay that it turns you on. You don't have to be ashamed that it turns you on. You should not be ashamed that it turns you on."

Participant 8 was factored into themes 1 and 2; however his experiences of objectification were reported as consensual and were omitted from analysis into themes 3, 4, and 5.

Participant 5 was also considered a negative case example. Though he experienced nonconsensual objectification, he expressed that he utilized that for his benefit, which differed from the other participants. He described it as 'revenge racism' where he objectifies Caucasians as much as they objectify him.

Participant 5: It changed me in how I view kink. So my kink is reverse racism. My biggest kink is using my blackness in a kink

How does that work? Well there are plenty of white guys who are out there who get into race play. You know. Into white submissiveness because they feel that they could be reversed. I feel like, in honor of our brothers and sisters in history…that if there are going to be white slaves who want

> to bow down and pay their respects and reparations by submitting themselves in that manner…I'm going to benefit off it.

This participant exhibited what research identifies as self-objectification, where he perpetuates the objectification. The remaining participants described experiencing nonconsensual negative objectification experiences. Participant 5 was factored into themes 1 and 2; however his handling experiences of objectification were not aligned with the other participants. There were no similarities with his handling of objectification with any of the other participants and so his responses omitted from analysis into themes 3, 4, and 5.

Participant 7 was considered a negative case example because his experience with the gaze, most subtle and deniable way that objectification is enacted. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) presented that the gaze is often accompanied by sexual evaluative commentary. His experience differed from those of the other participants. He was the only participant who noted the gaze and how it subsequently made him conscious about his body and contributed to shame. When asked what made him uncomfortable, he responded:

Participant 7: Well it was not just that they were Caucasian or White but (it) was that they were…the looks that I was getting. It was…to me it's a difference between looking and lusting if that makes sense. I get uncomfortable when I feel that someone is objectifying me and lusting after me.

According to Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) shame generates an intense desire to hide or escape the painful gaze of others. Participant 7 clearly expressed the negative impact of his experience with the male gaze.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, there are two main strategies that promote the quality and rigor of the research. The researcher should ensure the authenticity of the data and the trustworthiness of the analysis (Sargeant, 2012). The authenticity of the data refers to the quality of the data and the data collection procedures. There are different elements to consider that strengthen the authenticity and trustworthiness of a qualitative study. Data triangulation, using the appropriate method to answer the research questions, developing an appropriate interview protocol, and understanding the researcher's biases and beliefs with reference to objectification all address the authenticity of the data. The analysis process and addressing potential researcher influence in the analysis help to ensure the trustworthiness of the data analysis (Sargeant, 2012).

In this study, data triangulation was accomplished by using multiple data sources to produce a more comprehensive view of objectification. Participants came from the following seven locations: Wisconsin, Illinois, New York, Texas, Washington D.C., Florida and Georgia. The interview protocol used was not biased or leading. The questions did not ask questions to lead the participants to answer in a particular manner. I did not have biases relative to the phenomenon of objectification.

The trustworthiness of the data analysis was strengthened by clearly describing how the themes emerged from the data. The participant's thoughts and experiences were allowed to guide me to the emic themes.

Furthermore, trustworthiness was measured by the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the data and the collection process (Lincoln & Guba,

1985). The participants' in-depth verbal lived experiences descriptions were obtained by recording the interviews and accurately transcribing the participants' answers. Transferability, according to Morrow (2005), alludes to the ability of the reader to generalize the findings of a particular study to their context. Therefore, I provided extensive descriptive evidence that could be applicable to other populations, situations and contexts. Morrow (2005) provided the understanding that qualitative data cannot be generalized, however findings from these types of studies do possess usefulness and this usefulness was present in the understanding of the phenomenon from the participants' experiences.

Dependability was established throughout the study. I established a consistent data collection protocol that was implemented during every phase of the data collection process. I also provided and maintained precise and accurate records illustrating how each theme was developed at all phases of the study so that it can be replicated. Triangulation is a method used by qualitative researchers to check and establish validity in their studies by analyzing a research question from multiple perspectives as to arrive at consistency across data sources or approaches. The more variety in the data sources one is able to obtain, the greater will be the richness, breadth, and depth of the data gathered (Morrow, 2005). I reviewed the theme that were emerging and compared them to the results of other researchers to identify consistent themes in the current study.

I captured multiple perspectives in an effort to establish dependability. Denzin (1978) recommends that triangulation incorporate an understanding of the social phenomenon the way it comes across in different contexts. For this study, I chose

participants from different parts of the United States to gain insight on the phenomenon from these different contexts.

Qualitative research comes with the understanding that each researcher brings a unique perspective to the study. Confirmability specifically refers to the ability of the results of a study to be corroborated by others (Morrow, 2005). To establish confirmability, the participants were provided transcriptions of their interviews to allow them confirm the accuracy of what was transcribed.

Member Checking

I engaged in general conversation with each participant prior to starting the interview to build a rapport with the participant. This was used to obtain honest and open responses. During the interview, I restated and/or summarized the information received from the participant to fully understand the information provided. Member checking were completed after the interview by providing the participants with a transcript of the interview. This allowed the participant to critically analyze their interview and clarify their statements, if needed. The member checks were done with all the participants and are not without fault; however, they serve to decrease occurrences of erroneous data and the erroneous interpretation of data. I set out to provide findings that are reliable, original and authentic.

Summary

The results of the study revealed the phenomenology of gay African American males in the BDSM community who have experienced nonconsensual objectification. The nine participants in this study, with the exception of the negative case study, had

their BDSM worldview changed as a result of their lived experiences of objectification. According to their stories, the resulting themes were community, gaining knowledge and freedom, verbal objectification, avoidance, and mistrust.

Chapter 5 offers a summary and interpretation of the findings of this research and makes recommendations for further research. In addition, the social change implications of this study are discussed. This was an exploratory study intended to only begin the dialog about objectification in the BDSM community. As such, the results cannot be generalized beyond the current sample. However, due to the lived experiences of these men being likely to be shared by others in the BDSM community, the following chapter also makes recommendations for future quantitative studies involving persons in the BDSM community.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In this study, I address a research gap concerning gay African American males who have experienced nonconsensual objectification in the BDSM community. The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to understand the lived experiences of gay African American males who have experienced nonconsensual objectification, how it is has affected them and how they handle these experiences. In the results of the research, I highlighted the experiences of 10 gay African American males who participated in the BDSM community and presented, through the participants' words the existence of nonconsensual objectification. I further detailed the participants' reports of negative experiences of nonconsensual objectification; however, the participants also presented a positive image of what is gained from participating in the BDSM community. The following five themes emerged from the participants' interviews: community, gained knowledge and freedom, verbal objectification, avoidance, and mistrust. These themes will be discussed in the next section.

Interpretation of the Findings

Overall, I found key implications concerning the lived experiences of gay African American males participating in the BDSM community. The findings presented in Chapter 4 reflected the data from each individual participant's experiences and how the central research question was addressed through the development of organic new questions. The resulting data extends the knowledge and is supported by the literature presented in Chapter 2.

This study provided information of gay African American males' experiences of nonconsensual objectification in the BDSM community through the rich descriptions that the participants provided in this study. The primary research questions that guided this study were the following:

1. How do gay African American males participating in BDSM perceive objectification?
2. How does the SO of gay African American males change how they participate in the BDSM sub-culture?

I found that nonconsensual objectification was present in the BDSM community. The presence of nonconsensual objectification did change how gay African American males participated in the BDSM community. Nonconsensual objectification can have a detrimental impact on the participation and interaction of gay African American males in the BDSM community, according to the participants of this study. One of the participants stated that the BDSM community was a microcosm of the greater society. It should reflect the same problems found in the greater society.

Nine of the 10 participants in the study expressed how nonconsensual objectification had negatively impacted their lives, which resulted in them developing mistrust of and avoiding interaction with Caucasian males. The results were supported by the existing literature and the objectification theory presented by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997). Fredrickson and Roberts discussed how forms of objectification include the presence of being treated as a body or valued for its use. The results of this study aligned with this notion. However, not all gay African American males experienced and responded to nonconsensual objectification in the same manner.

The following is a discussion of each of the themes developed from the data.

Community

Seven of the participants in this study discussed that participation meant that they had a sense of community within the BDSM community. Community is an aspect of humankind. It was important for the participants to have connections in the community. Kaufman and Johnson (2004) discussed that stigmatized identities in sexual-minority groups, such as members of the BDSM community, use community interaction for identity development, negotiation, and disclosure. Burk (1991) posited that a person's self-conceptualization is impacted by others' perceptions.

There are people of color and of differing abilities with alternative sexual identifications; however, they are rarely adequately represented, if represented at all in research (Rubin et al., 2014; Sheff & Hammers, 2011). This mostly under researched community has not had their voices heard. A common definition of community includes feeling of fellowship with others as a result of sharing common attitudes and interests or having a particular characteristic in common. The participants in this study aligned with the understanding of community, and they gained a better sense of self through the community. Social support from partners and community play a positive role in a person maintaining a stigmatized identity, such as being gay or even as a BDSM participant (Pitagora, 2016).

Gained Knowledge and Freedom

Six participants expressed that they gained knowledge and freedom as a result of their participation in the BDSM community. This freedom came from various sources.

One participant spoke about being able to "openly own his sexuality and be authentic about it." Being a member of the BDSM community provided him with the comfortability to not hold his authentic self back for the sake of the comfortability of others. Hébert and Weaver (2015) discussed the identity development of BDSM practitioners through complex scripts. This highlights the knowledge gained through participation in the community and how it facilitates better identity development and the creation of a person's authentic self.

Another participant spoke about gaining the ability to escape the skeletons in his closet and/or face them head on. Although the participants' described different experiences, what they gained through their participation aligned under the theme knowledge gained and freedom. Whether it was gaining affirmation of their kinky self or gaining knowledge of the various kink and fetish play that is available in the BDSM community, each of the participants spoke of gaining either knowledge or freedom of some kind. Kleinplatz (2006) suggested that "vanilla" couples could learn from BDSM participants concerning the importance of communication. Nichols (2006) presented benefits such as personal empowerment to BDSM practice. This empowerment was mentioned by some of the participants in this study in the form of gained knowledge empowering them to be more authentic in different areas of their life.

Verbal Objectification

Nine of the participants in this study reported having experienced nonconsensual objectification in their BDSM participation, as defined by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997). Five of the participants discussed how they experienced nonconsensual verbal

objectification. Fredrickson and Roberts presented that the male gaze is often accompanied by sexually evaluative, derogatory commentary. In this study, the evaluative derogatory commentary was present; however, the participants did not mention the male gaze specifically or indirectly. Three of these participants related instances where they were verbally reduced to the size of their genitalia. To line this finding with the objectification theory, this type of experience is considered sexually evaluative derogatory commentary (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Objectification can manifest in different ways, such as nonverbal (groping and leering) and verbal (sexual remarks and catcalls; Davidson, Gervais, & Sherd, 2015). The gaze is attributed as the most subtle and deniable way sexualized evaluation is enacted (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Calogero (2004) presented that the observer's gaze could trigger negative consequences that are associated with self-objectification. I did not find that the male gaze was prominent in the experiences of the participants; however, verbal objectification was experienced by the majority of the participants.

Avoidance

The participants expressed how nonconsensual objectification negatively impacted their participation in the BDSM community. Seven of the participants expressed that they avoided interactions with Caucasian males in some way. This finding was significant because it was a way that the participants found to cope with objectification. Coping has been defined as the behaviors, emotions and cognitions that an individual uses as a way to adapt and manage a situation that is perceived as potentially threatening (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This

finding was also significant because avoidance includes the attempts a person uses to elude threats by disengaging potentially harmful or threatening situations (Bailey, Lamarche, Gammage, & Sullivan, 2016).

The participants in this study had the option to fight the objectification or develop mechanisms to avoid it. Though some of the participants made mention that they addressed the incidences of objectification, the vast majority of them decided to avoid it through reducing or eliminating their interactions with Caucasian males in the play scene. This behavior, in the context of objectification theory, is supported by other researchers and lends itself to stronger trustworthiness of the current study (Guan, & Lee, 2017; Lain, 2016; Lebel, 2017).

Mistrust

The participants expressed how nonconsensual objectification changed them internally. Absent a change in the participant's behaviors and/or mental thought process, experiences of nonconsensual objectification would be nonconsequential. Mistrust is important to discuss because these experiences have fostered the development of mistrust for Caucasian males.

Teng et al., (2015) studied the interpersonal consequence of SO. Baumeister and Leary (1995) presented that human motivation includes having positive social connections. One of the participants noted that the experiences made him watchful, which demonstrates an erosion of positive social connections with Caucasian males. This erosion helps to solidify the mistrust within this intersected population. People prefer to

connect with likable and friendly individuals and tend to avoid hostile ones (Maner, DeWall, Baumeister, & Schaller, 2007).

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) noted that interruptions in peak motivational states are psychological and experiential consequences of SO. The participants in this study reported disruptions in their activities when experiencing, or as a result of, nonconsensual objectification. Internalizing their experiences of objectification fostered a form of self-consciousness that developed into mistrust. This was noted by some of the participants in the study.

One participant noted that due to his experiences of nonconsensual SO, he has not included Caucasian males in his BDSM kink exploration because he did not trust that he would not be looked at as merely a sexual object. The experiences made him withdraw from participating with men who are not of color. Another participant expressed that he was both cynical and skeptical of the motives that Caucasian males have when they approach him. He noted that he was nice to them, but did not allow them into his inner circle. This theme is rooted in Fredrickson and Roberts's (1997) objectification theory as a response to the disruption of peak motivational states of these men.

Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding the lived experiences of gay African American males who have experienced nonconsensual objectification, how it is has affected them and how they handle these experiences. In the research questions, I asked how gay African American males perceived objectification and how objectification changed how gay African American males participated in the BDSM community. The

five themes that emerged from the data collected addressed the research questions by providing a broad perspective of the experiences of gay African American males in the BDSM community. This included the answers to what participation means to the participants and what is gained from participating. Though this study provided commentary from a relatively small sample size, the vast majority of the participants described experiences of nonconsensual objectification. This study provides a platform for future research on the BDSM population from both qualitative and quantitative stances.

Limitations of the Study

This study was phenomenological in nature, and it was designed to describe this group of gay African American males. In addition, the study was intended to be exploratory. It was meant to open the dialog about nonconsensual objectification in the BDSM community. It was not intended to establish any level of statistical significance to develop any formal theory.

The participating group did not include members of the Western region of the United States; therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to gay African American males in the entire United States or outside of the United States. Furthermore, the population only included gay African American males; therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other gay people of color populations such as Latinos, Asians, or Pacific Islanders. There is research about the female population; however, the findings of this study may not be able to be applied to females, regardless of their ethnicities, who participate in the BDSM community. Studies with other variations of minority

populations such as Asians, Latinos, Pacific Islanders, or transgender may yield different results.

Recommendations

In this study, I sought to develop a depth of knowledge of the experiences of gay African American males in the BDSM culture. It also was designed to foster open dialog both from and about gay African American males participating in the greater BDSM community. I expected this study to raise more questions than it answered. The research questions provided a framework for which the study could achieve these objectives. These recommendations are relevant for people who interact with gay African American males who participate in the BDSM community. The following questions still exist and are worthy of scholarly research or community activities:

- How can researchers and clinicians assist marginalized individuals who exhibit internalized objectification?
- How can biases be decreased?
- How can mistrust of the majority be decreased in the minority population?
- Can this study be replicated with other minority populations?

My recommendations would be for more research to be conducted that included other facets of marginalized populations in the BDSM community in order to understand their perceptions of objectification. Though other variations of minority populations may have differing experiences, it would be important to ascertain if there are similarities and what the differences are across these populations. It would be important to include both positive and negative experiences that these individuals had in the BDSM setting. For

example, a study conducted with a positive psychology focus would be beneficial to identify some of the strengths that enable individuals and communities to thrive. The findings from this study provided an understanding that there are some strengths gained from participating in the BDSM community. Understanding the positive experiences would be beneficial to understanding how the individual integrated the experiences, why the experiences were beneficial or positive, and what makes them beneficial or positive.

With respect to coping, the perceived effectiveness of coping strategies and the reasons why gay African American males choose one strategy over another should be examined. In this study, the coping mechanism chosen by the majority of the participants was avoidance. It would be beneficial for other studies to be conducted to understand why this was chosen over other methods and from a quantitative approach how much of the population chooses avoidance versus other methods. Understanding if avoidance was the simplest choice versus others would be helpful to know. Interventions designed to promote adaptive coping strategies like positive rational acceptance should be evaluated.

Another recommendation would be for BDSM organizations to incorporate more positive methods of acceptance towards African American males that facilitate and assist them in maintaining a strong BDSM identity. There are BDSM organizations that were created for people of color however, these organizations should foster dialog with the greater BDSM community and tear down existing separatist stereotypes that have been barriers to full inclusion. These organizations currently operate in a silo with minimal inter-organizational interactions. There is clearly a place for these organizations in the BDSM community but work must still be done to bridge the majority/minority gap so

that the BDSM community can continue to flourish and grow as a cohesive unit rather than a fragmented one.

Lastly, I would recommend a quantitative study on gay African American males and their experiences with nonconsensual objectification. This study could utilize one of the following assessment tools: Daily Sexist Events Questionnaire, Self-Objectification Questionnaire, or the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale. A quantitative study would provide an opportunity to gain quantifiable data to assess these experiences. This would be useful and add to the field of psychology because a quantitative approach would provide numerical data that can be transformed into usable statistics to generalize results to a population. Additionally, a quantitative method would provide more breadth of information across a larger number of cases to facilitate identifying patterns within the population. The researcher could look into the potential negative mental health outcomes resulting from objectification.

Implications

Social change is effected when information is conveyed out to the broader public on how issues affect people. As this information is gathered, applied to societal issues and disseminated new understandings and shifts in society happen. When the message is clear and action is delivered to those who have an impact upon an event, social change happens (Pierotti, 2013). This study brings about awareness of the issue of objectification. Further, it delivers the message from the participants that objectification brings about negative experiences. The publishing of this study is delivering it into the hands of those who have an impact on the event by providing a place to begin

conversation about the phenomenon. Understanding that this phenomenon exists is the first step in addressing it. It is incumbent upon everyone to look at our actions and ask ourselves if our actions negatively impact others. Even those actions that are not malicious in intent can negatively impact others.

Marginalizing any group of people based upon factors that they have no power to change is dysfunctional. History has shown that mistreatment of people based on factors that people are powerless to change, such as race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, have shifted only through organized efforts. The marginalization of people of color was only changed through the demand for civil rights. Members of the LGBT community were granted equality in marriage only through their demands for equality in the 2010s following the roadmap set forth by the gay and lesbian men and women of the 1970s and 1980s. So far, nonconsensual objectification of gay African American males have neither been looked at nor changed.

There is great significance in disseminating and sharing these results so that dialog can begin. This study provides a framework and talking points from the lived experiences of those who experience the phenomenon. The themes generated from this study can foster talking points to create proactive discussions. The discussions can allow others to understand the current existing barriers and develop mechanisms to remove the barriers, which is positive social change.

Lastly, another implication for positive social change would be for mental health clinicians to review this work and enhance their understandings of clients presenting with maladaptive coping. They could enhance their current techniques by creating new

psychosocial therapeutic methods to address members of the population who experience negative mental health outcomes as a result of their BDSM participation. My study provided an overview of the results of nonconsensual objectification and therapists could take these results forward into their practices to empower clients to better forms of adaptation than avoidance.

Summary

As evidenced from the findings of this study, the marginalization of gay African American males in the BDSM community does exist and continues to happen on a daily basis. This study certainly does not suggest that all Caucasian males objectify African American males in the BDSM community. It does suggest that the phenomenon is present and that it has an impact on this group of people. Applying the objectification theory to gay African American males emphasizes the importance of this subject and the subsequent intervention that needs to be done on behalf of this population.

This research study contributes to the gap in the literature with respect to gay African American males in the BDSM community who have experienced nonconsensual objectification. This study provides valuable insight and information for other researchers, clinicians and African Americans to better understand this phenomenon. It details the participants' reports of negative experiences of nonconsensual objectification; however, it also presents a positive image of what is gained from participating in the BDSM community. Each of the participants shared their experiences with the hope that providing these stories candidly would benefit other gay African American males in the BDSM community and prevent others from experiencing similar experiences. Sharing

their stories shows others that there is benefit to exploring one's identity in the BDSM community and being authentically true. They shared how their experiences made them feel, how they navigated through the experiences, and how they reconciled that what they gained from participating outweighed the objectification.

This study was an awesome experience for me, as the researcher, to meet these phenomenal men who had the courage to share their stories. They stripped off any masks they held and became vulnerable for the sake of research and the betterment of a community they love. The stories shared remind us of the importance of community within groups of people. The findings showed that they found strength and protection in their community. Several of the participants spoke enthusiastically about how their participation in the BDSM community provided them with the strength to be their authentic self. One participant even acknowledged that the leadership qualities he gained from participation in the community have helped him in other aspects of his life and career. The participants in the study have demonstrated that regardless of negative experiences that were present in the BDSM community, they have found a way to overcome them and live their lives on their terms. The ultimate take away from this experience is that people just want to enjoy life and be free to do so without being reduced to the function that one can provide to another.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

Objectification of African American Gay Men in the BDSM Culture

How do African American males experience objectification?

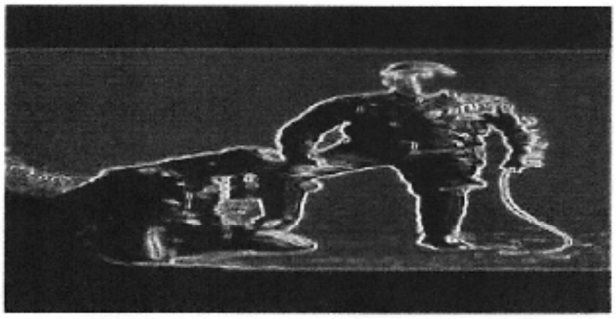
A PROMISE TO STUDY PARTICIPANTS

I PROMISE TO:

KEEP ALL INFORMATION INCLUDING YOUR IDENTITY CONFIDENTIAL

HONOR YOUR RIGHTS TO PRIVACY

TREAT YOU WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT



Your perspective is important!

Participate in a study of the ways **Gay African American** males experience OBJECTIFICATION in the BDSM CULTURE

Study Participants wanted!

- If you are a Gay African American male 21 years of age
- If you actively participate in the BDSM culture
- If you would like to participate in the research that will allow you to share your experiences

My name is Gregory Jackson. I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting in-depth interviews with Gay African American males who actively participate in the BDSM culture. If that describes you, please contact me at...

Gregory.Jackson@waldenu.edu or **(313) 784-6737**

Let your voice be heard

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Introductory Statement

You have been invited to take part in a research study exploring experiences that gay African American males have while participating in the Bondage, Discipline, Sadism, Masochism (BDSM) community. The purpose of this study is to explore the kinds of experiences you may have as an African American male participating in the BDSM community. This includes an exploration of your African American identity; your experiences with nonconsensual fetish play; and other related experiences. As someone who is actively participating in the BDSM community, you can provide valuable insight on how some of these experiences have affected you. This will help people like myself understand what kind of experiences you have had and potentially open up future studies around people in the BDSM community.

Your answers to the interview questions will be reviewed along with 10 other men whom I am interviewing. All of this information will be pulled together and analyzed by identifying themes for which your answer fits in before it is made available to anyone else. Nothing you say will be identified with you personally. The fact that you are being interviewed today will be confidential. Please ensure that you are in an area/or setting that will ensure your privacy.

Please feel free to ask me any questions about the interview or interview questions as we go through it. If there is any question you do not want to answer, simply tell me that you prefer not to. The interview will last approximately 1 hour. Because it would be impossible for me to write down all that we talk about, I will be recording the interview. You may ask me to stop the tape and/or interview at anytime. This will not affect our researcher/participant relationship.

Furthermore, the purpose of this interview is to gain an understanding of your experiences participating in the BDSM community from your point of view. The interview questions are to help us with our discussion, but please feel free to make any other comments you believe that are important. Some of the interview questions ask for personal information that is not always shared with others and may feel awkward or uncomfortable. You are free to share as much or as little information as you are comfortable with. The interview can benefit you by providing an opportunity to share your thoughts and feelings about how you have experienced certain aspects of the BDSM community. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Signed Consent - Received

Tape On: Name, Date, Time, Test

I am interested in learning about how you came to discover your BDSM identity. Tell me about your discovery of your BDSM identity. What was it that brought you to the BDSM community?

How were you received in the BDSM community?

How do you identify yourself in the BDSM community?

Prompt: Are you a Dominant, submissive, Daddy, boy etc.?

How do others view you, in the BDSM community?

Now that you have told me about how you came to the BDSM community, I would like to ask you some questions about what your participation in the BDSM community means. Can you begin by telling me what participating in the BDSM community means to you?

What makes/made things comfortable for you to participate in the BDSM community?

What, if any, things made you uncomfortable with your participation in the BDSM community?

Most people have both positive experiences and negative experiences in their respective communities. So talk to me about the positive things that you have experienced/gained from your participation in the BDSM community.

Next, let's talk about any negative things that you have experienced/gained due to your participation in the BDSM community.

**If participant alludes to objectification or SO say, "It sounds to me like you are speaking about objectification or SO.

Prompt:

SO is the act of treating a person as an instrument of **sexual** pleasure.

Objectification more broadly means treating a person as a commodity or an object without regard to their personality or dignity.

Is this what you are speaking about?

If yes…

Let's talk about that for a moment…Have you experienced any SO? If so, how? Have you experienced SO because of your African American identity? If so, how?

Was/were this/these experience(s) consensual or nonconsensual?

Have you experienced any objectification? If so, how? Have you experienced objectification because of your African American identity? If so, how?

Was/were this/these experience(s) consensual or nonconsensual?

If nonconsensual…then say:

Thinking back over your time in the BDSM community, how do you think experiencing nonconsensual objectification has affected you? Has it changed you in any way? What have you learned from this experience? What has been the hardest for you? What has gone well for you?

Before we conclude this interview, I would like to give you an opportunity to share any additional thoughts, feelings or stories you believe are important to my understanding of what it has been like for you in the BDSM community. Is there anything else you would like to tell me or think I should know?

Demographic information:

Age

Relationship status

Employment: Full or Part Time/ White or Blue collar

Annual Salary

0-$50,000

50,001 – $100.000

greater than $100,000

Appendix C: IRB Approval

From: IRB <irb@mail.waldenu.edu>
Sent: Monday, May 8, 2017 12:04 PM
To: Gregory Jackson
Cc: IRB; Tracy Marsh
Subject: IRB Materials Approved

Dear Mr. Jackson,

This e-mail is to notify you that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your application for the study entitled, " **Objectification of Gay African American Males in the Bondage Discipline Sadist Masochism community**."

Your approval # is 05-08-17-0188366. You will need to reference this number in your dissertation and in any future funding or publication submissions. Also attached to this e-mail is the IRB approved consent form. Please note, if this is already in an on-line format, you will need to update that consent document to include the IRB approval number and expiration date.

Your IRB approval expires on May 7th, 2018. One month before this expiration date, you will be sent a Continuing Review Form, which must be submitted if you wish to collect data beyond the approval expiration date.

Your IRB approval is contingent upon your adherence to the exact procedures described in the final version of the IRB application document that has been submitted as of this date. This includes maintaining your current status with the university. Your IRB approval is only valid while you are an actively enrolled student at Walden University. If you need to take a leave of absence or are otherwise unable to remain actively enrolled, your IRB approval is suspended. Absolutely NO participant recruitment or data collection may occur while a student is not actively enrolled.

If you need to make any changes to your research staff or procedures, you must obtain IRB approval by submitting the IRB Request for Change in Procedures Form. You will receive confirmation with a status update of the request within 1 week of submitting the change request form and are not permitted to implement changes prior to receiving approval. Please note that Walden University does not accept responsibility or liability for research activities conducted without the IRB's approval, and the University will not accept or grant credit for student work that fails to comply with the policies and procedures related to ethical standards in research.

When you submitted your IRB application, you made a commitment to communicate both discrete adverse events and general problems to the IRB within 1 week of their

occurrence/realization. Failure to do so may result in invalidation of data, loss of academic credit, and/or loss of legal protections otherwise available to the researcher.

Both the Adverse Event Reporting form and Request for Change in Procedures form can be obtained at the IRB section of the Walden website: http://academicguides.waldenu.edu/researchcenter/orec

Researchers are expected to keep detailed records of their research activities (i.e., participant log sheets, completed consent forms, etc.) for the same period of time they retain the original data. If, in the future, you require copies of the originally submitted IRB materials, you may request them from Institutional Review Board.

Both students and faculty are invited to provide feedback on this IRB experience at the link below:

Congratulations!

Bryn Saunders

Research Ethics Support Specialist

Office of Research Ethics and Compliance

Walden University

100 Washington Ave. S, Suite 900

Minneapolis, MN 55401