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IN THEIR OWN WORDS: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

OF RELATIONAL RESILIENCE IN THE LIVES OF

GAY, BISEXUAL, AND QUESTIONING MALE YOUTH

A Dissertation

Presented to the Department of Psychology

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

BY

RODRIGO SEBASTIÁN TORRES

SEPTEMBER 2011

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To my best friend, life partner, and husband Victor Jerome de Forest.

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VITA

I was born in Mexico City and received my formal education in México, France, and the United States. I earned a Bachelor of Arts in Russian Studies from Hamilton College in Clinton, New York; a Masters of Arts in the Social Sciences from the University of Chicago; and a Masters of Arts in Clinical (Child) Psychology from DePaul University. I completed my pre-doctoral internship in Clinical Child Psychology at the Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences of the David Geffen School Medicine, the Semel Institute for Neuroscience & Human Behavior and the Resnick Neuropsychiatric Hospital at the University of California Los Angeles.

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTON

Research in *resilience* has challenged and overturned many deterministic assumptions regarding the developmental trajectory and outcome of children and youth exposed to adversity and/or disadvantage. Emerging from a variety of disciplines (e.g., developmental psychopathology, child development, medicine, and education), and over the course of almost forty years, research in this area has built an impressive body of work that includes varied research paradigms (Masten, 2007), diverse measures (Claus-Ehlers, 2008; Connor & Davidson, 2003; Kobasa, Maddi, & Kahn, 1982), different conceptual models (Jordan, 2004b; Walsh, 2003), and a corpus of empirical findings regarding the characterological and ecological variables associated with this phenomenon (Anthony, 1974; Clauss-Ehlers, Yang, & Chen, 2006; Garmezy, 1971, 1974; Masten & Coatsworth, 1995; Wagnild & Young, 1993; Werner & Smith, 1982). With its focus on adaptive processes and developmental strengths, the study of *resilience* offers a positive and much needed alternative to research focused on developmental deficits and psychopathology.

However impressive are the scope, diversity, and richness of the extant literature on *resilience*, more impressive still is the paucity of empirical research examining this phenomenon in the lives of same-sex attracted (SSA) populations, in general, and SSA youth (e.g. gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth), in particular. With rare and recent exception (Adams, Cahill, & Ackerlind, 2005; Anderson, 1998; Fenaughty & Harré, 2003; Gwadz, Clatts, Yi, Leonard, Goldsamt, & Lankenau, 2006; Mutchler, Ayala, & Neith, 2005; Saunders & Kroll, 2000), the lives, voices, and developmental "successes" of SSA youth are missing from a line of research committed to answering the question, "What serves to protect and promote the health and well-

being of youth?" This lack of research is undoubtedly due to a host of factors, not the least of

which is the historic emphasis given to examining the problems faced by SSA youth instead of a

systemic consideration of their strengths (Boxer & Cohler, 1989; Herdt, 1989; Savin Williams;

2005; Russell, 2005). Efforts to correct this "investigative oversight" are overdue and much

needed.

Although scientific attention to "risk" remains critical for promoting optimal

development among SSA youth-to suggest otherwise would be irresponsible-the need to attend

to where and how these young people are succeeding should not be overshadowed by a research

history motivated by identifying and alleviating "risk." Left unchallenged, the idea that SSA

youth represent an inherently vulnerable group serves not only to misrepresent this population

(Savin-Williams, 2005; Torres, Harper, Sánchez, & Fernandez, & the ATN, in press), but to

undermine prevention and intervention efforts targeting this same population (Anderson, 1998;

Russell, 2005).

This dissertation addressed the paucity of *resilience* research with SSA youth and

challenged the idea that they represent an "inherently vulnerable" population. Specifically, this

work involved a secondary analysis of interviews conducted with self-identified gay, bisexual,

and questioning (GBQ) male youth[1] in order to learn from these youth about the "essence" of

relational resilience. These interviews were collected as part of a larger, mixed methodological

study that explored identity development and integration and its association to HIV-related

sexual and substance use behaviors among this same population. The identification and

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[1] The decision to focus on gay, bisexual, and questioning male youth reflects a constraint imposed by the data from the larger study and not a belief that the issues related to these populations hold any primacy over those of other SSA youth (e.g. lesbian youth), as well as gender-variant youth (e.g., transgender youth). Greater attention must be given to the entire spectrum of SSA and gender variant youth with regard to *resilience*. It is my hope that this project will encourage others to pursue this much-needed line of inquiry.

exploration of supportive and nurturing relationships (e.g., natural mentoring relationships) was an integral feature of the interviews.

Prior analysis of the relational data from the larger study (Torres et al., in press) indicated that a majority of interviewed participants identified at least one supportive and nurturing naturally occurring mentoring relationship. Moreover, when discussing what identified "mentors" did that was supportive and nurturing, study participants underscored the provision of social support (i.e., emotional, instructional, directional, and unconditional support), time and time again. These findings suggested that the existing interviews held promise for elucidating the relational mechanisms undergirding the identified supportive relationships and thus extending our knowledge beyond simple identification to burgeoning explanation regarding *relational resilience*. Understanding the "essence" of relationships that promote adaptive relational functioning or what has been termed *relational resilience* (Walsh, 1998; Jordan, 2001) was the focus of the present work.

Grounded in an interpretivist paradigm and examined though a phenomenological lens (Moustakas, 1994), this study was a qualitative cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) that explored the relational lived experiences of SSA youth, specifically self-identified GBQ male youth between the ages of 15-23. The theoretical framework adopted for this work was Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT) (Jordan, 2001, 2004b)-a theoretical perspective that posits that individuals grow through and by relationships and that yearning for growth-promoting relationships (e.g., naturally occurring mentoring relationships) is fundamental to adaptive functioning. A pioneering architect of this theory, Judith Jordan (2004) stresses that the potential for *relational resilience* lies within the relationship itself and that growth-promoting change happens in connection with others. According to RCT, connection is facilitated by flexibility,

owned and supported vulnerability, mutual empathic involvement, relational confidence, relational awareness, and mutual empowerment (Jordan, Walker, 2009). For my dissertation, I wanted to learn whether this intuitively promising theoretical model held promise for helping us to better and more completely understand growth-promoting relationships in the lives of SSA males.

In order to ensure trustworthiness, credibility and rigor (Rossman & Rallis, 2003), the following steps were built into the present qualitative effort: interpretive triangulation, prolonged engagement with the data, member checking, and journaling. These methodological steps helped to ensure that the data represented that lived experiences of study participants as accurately as possible.

Data analysis consisted of a recursive process of data review, organization, and coding (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2004). While analysis started with a priori codes drawn from RCT (e.g. *supported vulnerability* and *mutual empathic involvement*), inductive analysis was a secondly and arguably more important exercise, allowing unique themes to emerge from individual interview cases. The recurrent and recursive analytic process allowed me a deeper and, shall I say, more intimate understanding of the data.

Before proceeding, it is important that I define key terms used throughout this dissertation, including *gay*, *bisexual*, *questioning*, *same-sex attracted*, and, of course, *relational resilience*. This definitional step is important to (1) avoid definitional ambiguity, (2) communicate my understanding of these terms as clearly and as explicitly as possible, and (3) provide consistency for the dissertation. In what follows, I do not define the term *resilience*, as I provide a detailed definition of this construct at the beginning of the literature review.

Key Terminology

Gay[2]

This identity label is used primarily for and by men whose primary sexual, emotional, and romantic attraction is to the same sex (Anhalt & Morris, 1998; Bohan, 1996; Savin-Williams, 1995). The use or adoption of this term does not mean that a man has acted on his attraction(s) to the same sex. A self-identified *gay* man may: (1) currently be having sex with another man; (2) may have had sex with a man in the past, but not currently doing so; or (3) may have never had sex with another man in his life. The reasons why a self-identified *gay* man may never have had sex with another man are varied and may include: societal pressures, lack of opportunity, fear of discrimination, or, simply personal choice.

Bisexual

This identity label is used for and by individuals who have sexual, emotional, and romantic attractions to both sexes (Bohan, 1996, Rust, 2000). Depending upon the individual, this attraction may be stronger for women or for men, or may be approximately equal, and/or may vary with time. A self-identified *bisexual* individual may have had sex with people of both sexes, or with only one sex, or s/he may have never had sex at all (Rust, 2000). It is important to note that some people who have sex with both men and women do not consider themselves *bisexual*, while others may hyphenate the present identity term to include "more conventional" sexual identity labels (e.g., bisexual-heterosexual female) (Rust, 2000).

Questioning

Questioning has become a popular identity label among many youth who are attracted to the same sex (Hollander, 2000). However, defining this term is challenging. It is generally used

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[2] The use of the terms *gay* and *bisexual* are advocated by the American Psychological Association (APA) (2003, p. 67).

to recognize that sexual identity formation is a developmental process independent of socio-cultural constraint. During this process individuals may be challenged to find a label that signifies that they are not primarily attracted to members of the opposite sex and/or that they do not necessarily identify with the historic same-sex attracted communities (i.e., gay or lesbian community) (Hollander, 2000). While the term *questioning* is usually treated as an intermediate label by some, the length of time that an individual embraces this term can vary, from a couple of days to many years. The use of this term does not indicate ambivalence, a lack of awareness, discomfort, or distress related to the emergence of romantic, erotic, and/or sexual feelings for members of the same sex.

Same-Sex Attracted

This descriptive term is used to reference a broader spectrum of same-sex attracted (SSA) sexualities than is typically captured by the traditional sexual identity categories of gay or bisexual, for example. As such, when applied to youth, SSA captures individuals who adopt a gay or bisexual sexual identity, as well as those who do not elect to use a more "traditional" sexual identity label despite acknowledgment of same sex feeling, thoughts, and/or behavior (Savin-Williams, 2005). While there is nothing descriptively incorrect with the labels *gay*, *bisexual*, or *questioning*, they are, from the perspective of some scholars limiting and incomplete descriptive terms for the complex phenomena known as sexual identity (Savin-Williams, 2005). In contrast, the term SSA offers a more comprehensive, inclusive, complete, and flexible term for this complex and dynamic aspect of identity.

Relational resilience

The construct of *relational resilience* challenges traditional thinking regarding *resilience* where focus centers on identifying constitutional or ecological variables, or their interaction, and

their association with a "better than expected outcome" within a context of adversity (Jordan, 1997; Miller & Striver, 1997). *Relational resilience* identifies relationships as the functional units for understanding *resilience*. This model of *resilience* posits that individuals "grow through and toward connection; that a desire to participate in growth-fostering relationships is the core motivation in life" (Jordan, 2005, p 82). Movement toward "empathic mutuality" is at the core of this process (Jordan, 2004b) with the following identified as key conceptual features of *relational resilience*: (1) *supported vulnerability*; (2) *mutual empathic involvement*; (3) *relational confidence*; (4) *empowerment*; and (5) *relational awareness* (p. 32).

Review of Selected Literature

The present study rests within the literatures on *resilience* and *SSA youth* (e.g., gay and bisexual male youth). In my review of these literatures, I include research findings from investigative efforts on *youth mentoring* and *social support*, as these investigative lines share with research in *resilience* the goal of identifying and understanding the variables that serve to promote optimal development. However, a comprehensive review of these supportive lines of research is beyond the scope of the present study and the interested reader is directed elsewhere for more in-depth coverage of *social support* (Belle, 1989, Cohen, Underwood, & Gottlieb, 2000) and *youth mentoring* (Dubois & Karcher, 2005; Rhodes, 2002). Following the review of the literatures, I direct my attention to a detailed explanation of the present study, including an enumeration of my research questions.

Resilience

The extant literature on *resilience* is vast. A recent computerized search of the abstract database PsycINFO resulted in 2,947 peer-reviewed journal articles. Given the size of this literature, it is clear that any attempted review must be focused in nature. As such, and in light of

the age demographic targeted for this present effort, I limited my review to research focused on

children and youth.   For this purpose, I defined "youth" as individuals between the ages of

and   years, inclusively. My decision to include children-related findings rests on the fact that

most research in *resilience* has focused on children (i.e., individuals younger than 13 years of

age). More importantly, however, most of the early and seminal work in this area was done with

this younger demographic (Werner & Smith, 1982).

Since first attracting the attention of the behavioral and social science communities in the

1970's (Anthony, 1974; Garmezy, 1971, 1974; Murphy & Moriarty, 1976; Rutter, 1979; Werner,

Beirman, & French, 1971; Werner & Smith, 1982) the literature on *resilience* has grown

exponentially to include a variety of foci, methods, and perspectives (Ferguson, 1994; Heckman

& Lochner, 2000; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 1994; Masten & Coatsworth,

1998; Rolf, 1999; Taylor, 1994; Walsh, 1998), as well as criticisms (Kaplan, 1999; Tarter &

Vanyookov, 1999; Tolan, 1996). Whether perplexed by children of schizophrenic mothers who

thrived despite their "high risk" status (Garmezy 1974), intrigued by so-called resilient children

who had experienced the stressors of disease and chronic illness (Sinemma, 1991), or desirous to

identify and understand the variables associated with academic success among young people

(Finn & Rock, 1997; Gordon, 1996), this line of research has been motivated by the central

belief that individuals who attain favorable outcomes within a context of risk hold important

information about the etiology of psychopathology and adaptive outcomes (Garmezy, 1985). As

such this work represents a much needed shift from pathogenesis (i.e., origins of illness or

disease), with it preoccupation with dysfunction, to salutogenesis (i.e., origins of health), and its

emphasis on health and the qualities and strengths that contribute to favorable growth and

adaptive functioning,

Defining *resilience.*

Despite agreement regarding the importance of investigating *resilience*, the construct has evaded definitional consensus (Bartlet, 1994; Tolan, 1996). This lack of definitional agreement has had a number of effects, including confusion regarding construct measurement and comparison of research findings.

Lack of definitional consensus aside, *resilience* generally refers to an end state of positive adaptation and development within the context of adversity (Gwadz et al., 2006; Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2001; Rutter, 1979). Garmezy (1985), a pioneering figure in the study of *resilience*, defined this phenomenon as "manifest competence despite exposure to significant stressors" (p.217)   Other working definitions include: (1) success in meeting developmental tasks and expectations (Luthar, Doernberger, & Zigler, 1993; Masten & Coatsworth, 1995, 1998), (2) the maintenance of homeostasis within a context of adversity (Block & Block, 1980; Cohler, Scott, & Musick, 1995), and (3) the ability to thrive in the face of obstacles or adverse circumstances (Bartlet, 1994; Gordon, 1996). In developmental research, the term is used to describe children and youth who attain an optimal level of development despite threats to favorable adaptation and/or healthy development (Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2001; Rutter, 1979; Walsh, 1998; Werner, 1995). In practical terms, referring to individuals as "resilient" suggests that they have somehow "beaten the odds" and are on their way to "making it."

As suggested above, *resilience* has been conceived as an intrapersonal (i.e., personality) trait or variable (e.g. psychological well-being or intelligence) that protects the individual from the adverse effects of risk or adversity (Kobasa & Puccetti, 1983; Masten, 1994; Masten & Coatsworth, 1995). Increasingly, however, researchers are conceiving *resilience* as a more dynamic phenomenon involving a range of factors (internal and external) and a range of

processes that bring together diverse mechanisms operating before, during, and after the encounter with risk or adversity (Luthar et al., 2000; Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick, & Sawyer, 2003; Richman & Fraser, 2001; Rutter, 1987, 2001). For example, Walsh (1998) discusses *resilience* as the capacity to rebound from adversity strengthened and more resourceful. Walsh's (1998) view is that *resilience* involves an active and transformational process of endurance, self-righting, and growth in response to crisis and challenge. In essence, Walsh's (1998) view is that *resilience* is "more than merely surviving a harrowing experience" (p.44) and that it involves qualities that enable people to heal from painful wounds, take charge of their lives (i.e., become empowered), and go on to live full and productive lives. Walsh (1998) views *resilience* as a *process* [emphasis mine] that results when an individual reacts to risk factors that are present in the environment. From this view, *resilience* is not only a transactional process, but an interactional process consisting of individual and environmental or ecological factors (Cowan, Cowan, & Schulz, 1996; Winfield, 1994).

Bernard (1995) discusses an extended and nuanced definition of *resilience* by asserting that it is not only fostered by the individual, the environment, and protective processes but can itself foster protective attributes in the individual. Here *resilience* is not only an outcome of development but a mechanism of adaptive development. According to Bernard (1995), *resilience* enables people to develop social competency, skills in problem-solving, critical consciousness, autonomy, and a sense of purpose.

These process-focused definitions of *resilience* attest to the importance of understanding the interpersonal processes (i.e., the relational dynamics or mechanisms) that contribute to optimal developmental outcomes in children and youth. Underscoring the centrality of relationships is a relational model of development based on the work of Jean Baker Miller, M.D.,

and her colleagues at the Jean Bake Miller Training Institute and the Stone Center at Wellesley College (Jordan & Walker, 2004). This theoretical model-originally based on a rethinking of a psychology of women-is known as Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT).

Advocates of RCT suggest that most definitions of *resilience* have overemphasized separation and autonomy as markers of optimal development. They argue, instead, that *resilience* should be understood as the "capacity to move back into growth-fostering connections" (Jordan, 2005, p. 82). Accordingly, *resilience* is a relational phenomenon. This relational model of *resilience* posits that relationships that enhance adaptive growth are characterized by a two-way experience of connection and reciprocal growth. Mutual empathic involvement is at the center of growth-fostering relationships, according to RCT. Attention to relationships that are growth-fostering among same-sex attracted male youth *was* [emphasis mine] the focus of my study.

Studying *resilience*.

Resilience is typically inferred by examining the functioning of individuals who have experienced hardships in their upbringing in various adaptive domains (e.g., mental health, social behavior, academic achievement). *Resilience* research generally figures upon two primary questions: a) Why are some individuals able to adapt favorably despite personal experience with significant duress while others with similar experiences fail to do so? b) What factors facilitate the process of overcoming this adversity? This line of research has a pragmatic mission: to learn better ways of preventing psychopathology and promoting healthy development among "at risk" populations.

As an inferential process, research in *resilience* makes two judgments (Masten, 2001; Smokowski, Reynolds., & Bezruczko, 1999). The first involves identifying and defining the

perceived or assumed threat to development. This step is important as individual are not typically considered resilient if they have not, depending on the perspective or conceptual definition adopted, faced, overcome, tolerated, or rebounded from an identified threat.

In the developmental literature, threats are typically referred to as "probable risk factors," meaning factors associated with an increased likelihood of poor physical, emotional, and/or behavioral outcomes. Research in *resilience* with children has examined a number of "probable risk factors," including low socioeconomic status (SES) (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Garmezy, 1991; Rutter, 1979; Werner & Smith, 1982); low birth weight, divorce or familial disruption, parental mental illness (Masten & Coatsworth, 1995, 1998); exposure to maltreatment (Beeghly & Cicchetti, 1994); and urban poverty and violence (Luthar & Goldstein, 2004).

Researchers working with adolescents have found a number of assets and resources that may compensate for or protect against risks for substance use (i.e., alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs), racial discrimination, violent behavior, and sexual behavior (Caldwell, Kohn-Wood, Schmeelk- Cone, Chavous & Zimmerman, 2004; Scheier, Botvin, & Miller, 1999; Paul, Fitzjohn, Herbison, & Dickson; 2000). Missing from this general line of work are investigations of *resilience* relative to the unique developmental risks faced by many SSA youth, including, but not limited to, social isolation, homophobia, heterosexism, academic foreclosure, and HIV/AIDS (Harper & Schneider, 2004; Savin-Williams, 2005).

The second judgment made in the study of *resilience* involves the criteria by which adaptation or consequence is appreciated as "better than expected given exposure to risk" (Luthar & Zelazo, 2003, p. 515). This second judgment represents a particularly sensitive matter as those who define these criterial determine who is studied, within what context, and against what "standard" of normality or adaptive functioning their *resilience* will be determined. For

SSA youth, the dominant heterosexual paradigm, along with its expected developmental tasks, places this group outside the traditional purview of those interested in understanding *resilience*, however unwittingly. Too often are the developmental attainments of SSA youth measured against a heterosexual developmental framework, ensuring, by default, that SSA youth will be understood as somehow less than developmentally "successful." Undertakings that aim to identify health-promoting processes and optimal development among SSA youth (i.e., *relational resilience* in the lives of SSA youth) serve to correct the historic tendency to denigrate a SSA developmental trajectory.

Most of the research in *resilience* has been quantitative. Two major approaches have characterized the design of these positivistic *resilience* studies: *variable-focused* studies and *person-focused* studies (Masten, 2001). *Variable-focused* research uses statistical analysis (e.g., multivariate analysis) to test for main effects between measures of a given resource (e.g., supportive parenting) and the attainment of an optimal level of development (e.g. academic achievement or social engagement). By moving the concept of *resilience* beyond the individual, *variable-focused* research places the concept of *resilience* within a more ecological context. In contrast, a *person-focused* approach is generally characterized by a comparison, whereby two groups drawn from the same "at-risk population" who have adaptive and maladaptive outcomes are compared on a set of outcome criteria (e.g., the presence of psycho-social problems).

Relative to the preceding, qualitative research efforts in *resilience* are few in number. Emerging from a number of academic fields, including community psychology (Moe, Johnson, & Wade, 2007), education (Deardon, 2004; Hurd, 2004) educational anthropology (Espinoza-Herold, 2007), educational psychology (Everall, Altrows, & Paulson, 2006), and social work (Ungar, 2001, 2004, 2005; Ungar, Brown, Liebenberg, Othman, Kwong, Armstrong et al, 2007),

this line of work aims to discover and understand *resilience* "from the perspectives" of those studied (Merriam, 2002, p. 6).

Using both qualitative (Espinoza-Herold, 2007; Ungar, 2001, 2004, 2005) and mixed qualitative-quantitative methodologies (Greeff & Holtzkamp, 2007; Noppe, Noppe, Bartell, 2006; Ungar et al, 2007), this line of work has learned from children and youth about what accounts for their *resilience* vis-à-vis a number of developmental and environmental risk factors, including a terrorist attack that paralyzed a nation (i.e., the World Trade Center attack of 9/11) (Noppe et al., 2006), the death of parent during childhood (Hurd, 2004), the impact of homelessness (Nebbitt, House, Thompson, & Pollio, 2007), and the premature foreclosure on education (Espinoza-Herold, 2007).

Thematic and content analyses of cases studies (Espinoza-Herold, 2007; Ungar 2003) are salient and repeated analytic features in this small but important body of work. For example, Everall and colleagues (2006) used basic interpretive qualitative inquiry to analyze interviews with 13 previously suicidal female youth (ages 15-24). This study was designed to understand how adolescents overcome suicidality from the subjective perspective of youth. Data analysis revealed four major domains of *resilience*: (1) social processes that involved relationships and interactions with peers, parents, and extra-familial adults; (2) emotional processes involving the awareness and expression of feelings; (3) cognitive processes that entailed a shift in perspective and recognition of personal control; and (4) purposeful and goal-directed action whereby participants experimented with new behaviors, exercised independence, and created hopeful futures and positive identities for themselves. Moreover, it was found that the processes in each of these areas were closely connected such that changes in one area were typically related to changes in the others.

Unfortunately, there are few qualitative studies (Fenaughty & Harré, 2003) that have

examined *resilience* in live of SSA youth. As a qualitative and phenomenological effort, my

dissertation addressed this empirical gap while joining a burgeoning body of qualitative

investigative work (Carranza, 2007; Moe et al., 2007; Osterling & Hines, 2006) aimed at

enriching and deepening our understanding *resilience* in the lives of young people.

General *resilience* findings.

Resilience research has converged on three variable sets associated with this

phenomenon: (1) variables at the individual level, 2) variables associated with the family or most

immediate social system, and (3) variables associated with the wider social ecological setting

(Werner, 1989).

At the individual level, *resilience* research is focused on identifying assets that

distinguish children and youth who obtain "optimal levels of development" within a context of

adversity from those who do not. Assets refer to characterological variables (e.g., competence,

self-esteem, or self-efficacy) that allow an individual to manage, cope, and/or move beyond

personal challenges; as opposed to resources, which generally refer to external or ecological

factors (e.g., social support systems) that contribute to the same outcome. In the literature on

resilience, asset-focused research is also known as *person-focused* research (Masten, 2001).

The classic exemplar in this type of work is Werner's and Smith's (1982) seminal

longitudinal study of children from the island of Kauai. In what is undoubtedly one of the most

ambitious *person-focused* studies of *resilience*, these pioneering investigators followed and

reported on the lives of almost 700 children for a period of nearly 40 years (Werner, 1993;

Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992; Werner & Johnson, 2004). The children in this study were

American-born but represented a variety of national, ethnic and racial backgrounds (i.e.,

Japanese, Filipino, Hawaiian, Portuguese, and Polynesian) and had been reared in hardship on the island of Kauai. The researchers categorized a third (n = 210) of these children as "at-risk" because of exposure to four risk factors (i.e., familial alcoholism, violence, divorce, and mental illness) prior to the age of two. By the age of 18, one-third of the identified "at-risk" children had developed into competent, caring and confident young adults with the capacity "to work well, play well, and love well" and were considered resilient by the researchers. Among the noteworthy findings were that resilient participants had better parenting resources while growing up and were rated as more appealing as infants; they also had better cognitive test scores, more positive self-perceptions, and greater conscientiousness (i.e., were more reflective and introspective) relative to their less well-adaptive peers. A later follow-up study found that all but two of these "more resilient" participants were still living successful lives as adults (Werner & Johnson, 2004). The longitudinal nature of this study makes these findings particularly strong and important to our understanding of *resilience* as this phenomenon manifests over time.

Results of the Kauai effort along with subsequent *person-focused* research (Cowen, Wyman, Work, Kim, Fagen, & Magnus, 1997; Richters & Martinez, 1993) converge on a set of personal characteristics related to *resilience*. These characteristics or assets include (1) being female (before adolescence) and male (after adolescence) (Rutter, 1989; Gamble & Zigler, 1986), (2) the absence of organic deficits (Werner, 1989), (3) an easy going temperament (Cohler, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1982); (4) increased responsiveness, flexibility, and adaptability relative to peers (Werner & Smith, 1982); (5) an internal locus of control, (6) a sense of humor (Masten, 1986), (7) strong cognitive/intellectual skills (Masten, Hubbard, Gest, Tellegen, Garmezy, & Ramirez, 1999; Smith & Carlson, 1997) and (8) a healthy and more positive sense

of self and the ability to find equanimity and meaningfulness in life (Dubow et al., 1997; Masten et al., 1999; Reynolds et al., 1999).

From among the preceding, the positive relationship between intellectual functioning and *resilience* is one of the most consistent findings in this line of work with youth (Masten et al., 1999; Smith & Carlson, 1997; Smokowski et al., 1999; Werner, 1995). A longitudinal study of teenagers with exposure to family adversity during childhood (Ferguson and Lynskey, 1996) found that participants who showed healthy adaptation had higher IQ scores at age 8 than did teenagers with adjustment problems. Levine (2002) has suggested that although intelligence can enhance *resilience*, intelligence is not simply IQ but is the intelligent application of one's understanding of others and of oneself in a wide range of situations. There is strong support for this position in the research literature, which indicates that resilient teenagers are generally found to have good problem-solving skills and to use problem-focused coping strategies (Howard & Johnson, 2000; Smith & Carlson, 1997; Smokowski et al., 1999; Werner, 1995).

Particularly important to the purpose of my dissertation are findings suggesting a correlation between strong levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy and more successful coping strategies and problem-solving skills (Rutter, 1985). Rutter (1985) noted that strong self-esteem and self-efficacy make successful coping more likely, whereas a sense of helplessness increases the probability that one adversity will lead to another. Seligman's (1975) concept of *learned optimism* has a bearing on these *resilience* findings. Seligman's earlier work on *learned helplessness* demonstrated how people could be conditioned by life circumstance to become passive, less agenic, and more likely to give up on solving problems. Seligman (2003) has proposed that if helplessness can be learned, then it can be unlearned through experiences of mastery, in which people come to believe that their efforts and actions can yield success.

The concept of *hardiness* grew out of the search for individual personality traits, particularly in relation to the study of stress and coping (Murphy & Moriarty, 1976). This research effort suggested that persons who experience high degrees of stress without becoming ill have a personality structure characterized by *hardiness* (Kobasa, 1985; Kobasa et al., 1982). As useful a concept such as *hardiness* might be to our understanding of *resilience*, it is limited, misleading, and potentially stigmatizing. When conceived as something innate, *resilience* carries the implication that certain people are "born that way" and that their *resilience* is a sort of armor that protects them from external influence. This idea has led some researchers to conceive of *resilience* as invulnerability (Anthony, 1987).

There are at least two potential dangers to the idea of the "invulnerable" youth. First, there is the potential to misunderstand this term to mean that "invulnerable" individuals are somehow impervious to stress because of their inner fortitude. The implication here is that "invulnerable" youth can withstand even the most severe adversity as they were somehow made of steel instead of flesh and bone. This idea is antithetical to the human condition because human beings *are* [emphasis mine] affected by what they encounter in life with both positive and negative consequences. Second, there is an inherent danger of equating vulnerability with weakness and invulnerability with strength. In attempting to unravel the concept of *resilience* it is important not to view those who succumb to adversity as deficient, weak and blameworthy, especially when they are struggling with overwhelming conditions beyond their control. Felsman and Vaillant (1987) note, "In bearing witness to the resilient behavior of high-risk children everywhere, a truer effort would be to understand, in form and by degree, the shared human qualities at work" (p.304).

Beyond individual level findings, the influence of family members, particularly parents, upon the behavior and well-being of children and youth is a common finding in the literature on *resilience* (Rutter, 1979, 2001). This literature has linked monitoring of children by parents, parental disciplinary styles, the quality of the parent-child relationship, the psychosocial state of the parent(s), and the level of family cohesion with the mental health and behavior of children and youth growing up under adversity (Banyard, Williams, Siegle, & West, 2002; Feiring et al. 1998; Hazzard, Celano, Gould, & Lawry, 1995; Hyman & Williams 2001; Kumpfer & Alvarado, 2003; Kumpfer & Elder, 2003; Rosenthal, Feiring, & Taska,. 2003; Spaccarelli & Fuchs 1997; Valentine & Feinauer 1993; Walsh, 1998). Gribble, Cowen, Wyman, Wyman, Work, & Wannon, (1993) found that parents of stress-resilient children had more positive parental attitudes, were more involved in their children's lives, and provided more and better guidance. The result was that the stress-resilient children were more securely attached than were stress-affected children.

For adolescents challenged with stress and adversity, a secure attachment with at least one caring parent appears to play a major role in promoting *resilience* (Heller, Larrieu, d'Imperio, & Boris, 1999; Hollister-Wagner, Foshee, & Jackson, 2001; Smith & Carlson, 1997; Rutter, 1987). Legitimization of parental authority (Jackson, 2002), family connectedness (Lloyd-Richardson, Papandonatos Kazura Stanton & Niaura, 2002), parental monitoring (Rai, Stanton, Wu, Li, Galbraith, Cottrell, L., et al. (2003), and open parental communication (Magnani, Seiber, Gutierrez, & Vereau , 2001) have been reported as compensating for the risk of peer sexual behavior for adolescent sexual behavior. In a study with inner-city high school students in Chicago, Smokowski et al. (1999) found that resilient youth frequently reported being grateful for family members, particularly mothers, for the provision of positive role modeling

and consistent caring. The most highly valued supportive contribution underscored by study

participants was the provision of motivational and informational support. Giving guidance about

the perils of disadvantaged environments and/or developmental challenges (i.e., learning how to

be a sexual and erotic person and stay healthy) and keeping youth on the right track by consistent

monitoring were frequently cited by these youth as critical factors influencing their *resilience*.

Further enriching our understanding of *resilience* among youth are findings indicating

that when nurturing and support are not consistently available from parents, resilient youth are

adept at seeking support from alternate caregivers in the family (Werner, 1995). Grandparents,

aunts, uncles, and older siblings often provide positive role modeling and support that help buffer

the effects of adversity (Carbonell, Reinherz, & Giaconia, 1998; Rak & Patterson, 1996;

Smokowski et al., 1999).

In studies with children, rapport with a supportive adult, usually a parent or caregiver, has

been found to facilitate childhood recovery from loss, stress, and trauma (Brooks, 1994; Rutter,

1987; Werner, 1993), underscoring findings elsewhere in the literature that link a warm

affectionate, emotionally supportive, and available parenting style (Rutter, 1985; Werner &

Smith, 1992; Haase, 1997) with a number of adaptive behaviors, including academic

achievement, prosocial behavior and peer acceptance among children and youth (Cicchetti &

Rogosch, 1997; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Masten et al., 1999). To these findings, other

queries have added structure, organization, and stability in the home (Banyard et al. 2002;

Hyman & Williams 2001) as important factors for the attainment of optimal development

outcomes.

Research in the area of *social support* (Spencer, Jordan, Sazama, 2004) underscores the

strong link between familial bonds or protective/nurturing parent-child relationship and

children's and youths' psychosocial health and well-being (Cauce, Mason, Gonzales, Hiraga, & Liu, 1994; Cotterell, 1992), even into late adolescence (Holahan, Valentine, & Moos, 1995). Smokowski et al. (1999) report that resilient youth value a type of guidance called "motivational support" (p. 439). According to these researchers, study participants who received direct guidance and encouragement from their parents in the face of adversity often felt motivated, optimistic, and reassured that someone believed in their ability to succeed. In sum, the link between what have been called "supportive" (Cauce et al., 1994; Harter, 1998; Resnick et al., 1997), "confiding," or "caring" (Wyman, Cowen, Work, Hoyt-Meyer, Magnus, & Fagen, 1999) relationships and greater psychological health and adaptive functioning among children and youth is well established.

At the extra-familial or socio-environmental level, research findings associated with *resilience* are comparatively fewer in number. Nevertheless, findings at this level indicate that for many youth, involvement in relationships with non-related individuals and extracurricular activities outside the home helps promote *resilience* (Gore & Aseltine, 1995; Rutter, 2001; Smith & Carlson, 1997; Smokowski et al., 1999). For example, Werner (1990) found that, outside the family circle, favorite teachers were among the most frequently cited positive role models in the lives of children. These children reported that a teacher's willingness to listen and provide guidance and information motivated them to perform at their academic best. The critical role played by caring, supportive, and nurturing non-related adults is echoed in findings from studies of mentoring relationships.

Conceptually linked to the construct of *resilience*, work on mentoring relationships has found that young people repeatedly identify non-related adults as major positive role models in their lives (Blyth, Hill, & Smith, 1982; Beier, Rosenfeld, Spitalny, Zansky, & Bontempo, 2000;

Rhodes, Ebert, & Fischer, 1992; Sanchez & Reyes, 1999; Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, & Notaro, 2002). This line of work documents that mentoring relationships provide a number of positive benefits for many youth, including youth identified as "at-risk" (e.g., urban, low SES ethnic minority youth, children of alcoholic parents, and ethnic minority adolescent mothers) (Beam, Chen, Greenberger, 2002; Cavell, Meehan, Heffer, & Holladay, 2002; Chen, Greenberger, Farruggia, Dong, 2003; Hirsch, Mickus, & Boerger, 2002; Klaw et al., 2003; Sanchez & Reyes, 1999; Taylor, Casten, & Flickenger,1993). Documented benefits include better school attendance and grades, greater maturity, and better mental health (Klaw et al, 2003; Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001; Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994).

Rhodes, Contreras, and Mangelsdorf (1994) investigated the antecedents, effects, and underlying characteristics of naturally occurring mentoring relationships in a sample of 54 inner-city Latina adolescent mothers. Participants who reported a mentor (35 percent) also reported significantly lower levels of depression while experiencing similar levels of stress and overall support resources as did their counterparts who did not report a mentor. Mentored participants reported being more satisfied with their support resources and appeared better able to cope effectively with relationship challenges. In another study, Rhodes et al. (1992) not only found lower levels of depression among adolescent African American mothers who reported a mentor, but also discovered a moderated relationship between depression, relationship problems, social support, and satisfaction with support. The authors suggested that mentors, 85 percent of whom were female and about 42 percent of who were relatives may have helped these young women extract helpful support from other individuals who then buffered them against stressors associated with a difficult life situation. In this study mentoring relationships appear to have served a mediating role. By serving as supportive models of success, mentors may directly

stimulate improvement in adolescents' self-perceptions, attitudes and behaviors (Blechmen, 1992).

 SSA youth *resilience* findings.

 We know much more about the developmental risks faced by SSA youth than we do about the protective factors that may promote their optimal development (i.e., *resilience*) (Russell, 2005; Savin-Williams, 2005).   Therefore, it is important to identify the factors and related mechanisms that may support and enhance the health and well-being of this population (Morrow, 2006). A small group of researchers (Adams et al., 2005; Anderson, 1998; Fenaughty & Harré, 2003; Gwadz et al., 2006; Mutchler et al., 2005; Saunders & Kroll, 2000; Russell, 2005) has begun to address this investigative need and have identified a small but important set of protective factors for SSA youth.

 At the individual level, positive self-esteem and a sense of competency have been linked to adaptive psychosocial functioning among SSA youth. From an exploratory cross-sectional study with European American, middle-class, gay male youth, ages 14-20, Anderson (1998), reported that participants who reported a positive self-esteem and a strong sense of competency also reported perceiving themselves to be strong and competent. According to Anderson (1998), these same participants reported feeling good about themselves, having control over their lives, and not internalizing societal homophobia. These young men viewed being gay as a source of strength and reframed their sexual orientation in a positive way. A drawback of these individual level findings is that they represent assets helpful to all youth.   Perceiving oneself as competent is helpful to youth, regardless of sexual attraction and/or identity. A sense of competency and well-being linked to the process of "coming out" is, however unique to SSA youth.

The experiential process of "coming out" has also been linked to positive self-esteem among gay male youth (Boxer, Cook, & Herdt, 1999; Savin-Williams, 1989). The term "coming out" generally refers to a developmental process by which acceptance of oneself as SSA and of one's sexual identity as a positive aspect of oneself is central. Although "coming out" trajectories vary by individual, they tend to include the adoption of non-heterosexual sexual identity (e.g. gay or bisexual), the restructuring of one's self-concept, and the adjustment of one's relationship with others and society (Savin-Williams, 1995). The process of "coming out" is held by many to represent one of the most important developments in the life of SSA individuals (Savin-Williams, 1995; Troiden, 1979). Research indicates that SSA individuals report a reduction in psychological distress and a more coherent sense of self after "coming out" (Cass, 1996; Rosario, Hunter, Maguen, Gwadz, & Smith, 2001; Savin-Williams, 1990).

Research with SSA youth of color (e.g., African American and Latino SSA youth) suggests that SSA youth of color who develop self-efficacy in dealing with racism report better coping skills in relation to heterosexism (Anderson, 1998). This is an important finding given that SSA youth of color face multiple and concurrent sources of discrimination as a function of their varied minority identities (Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000; Morrow, 1997). However, SSA youth of color who grow up in an ethnically homogenous cultural setting may be less well-prepared to deal with heterosexism as they have lacked the opportunity to identify and develop necessary coping skills (Adams et al., 2005). The development of "adaptive coping skills" was echoed in a qualitative study aimed at understanding the relationship between experiences with discrimination and the choice of career among SSA ethnic minority youth (Adams et al., 2005). This work found that indifference, minimization, and academic achievement served as adaptive

coping strategies for dealing with discrimination based on sexual orientation among Latino lesbian and gay youth.

At the family level, close relationships with parents have also been linked with adaptive psycho-social functioning among SSA youth (Anderson 1998; Fenaughty & Harré, 2003; Savin-Williams 1989). Anderson's (1998) work with gay male youth indicated that participants who reported high self-esteem as gay males also reported high levels of social support from parents throughout their development. These youth credited parents with establishing the foundation for positive self-esteem and a sense of competency early in childhood through loving, caring relationships. As these young men grew up, they reported that social support from gay, lesbian, and bisexual friends in adolescence sustained the positive aspects of self-esteem established earlier and contributed to a greater sense of self-efficacy (Anderson, 1998). A recent exploratory study of natural mentoring relationships in the lives of gay, bisexual, and questioning (GBQ) male youth in Chicago (Torres et al., in press) found parents reported among "supportive and helpful" adults in the lives of a subset of study participants. These are important findings as they serve to remind us that parental rejection is not developmental challenge faced by all SSA youth.

Research in natural mentoring relationships indicates that in times of distress or challenge SSA male youth may seek out and accept the support of caring nonparent adults, such as teachers, counselors, romantic partners, and neighbors (Torres et al., in press), mirroring findings found elsewhere in the literature on *resilience* (Rak & Patterson, 1996; Walsh, 2003). SSA male youth discussed these naturally occurring mentoring relationships in terms of a close, caring, and validating relationship that offered the opportunities to both express and receive love, which they linked to elevated feeling of self-worth and high self-esteem (Torres et al., in press). The

provision of social support beyond the family system is one of the most repeated findings in research with SSA youth.

Perceived social support was explored in a qualitative study of 17 gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth and young adults from a Seattle-based sexual minority youth drop-in center (Nesmith, Burton, Cosgrove, 1999). Study participants were interviewed in person with an open-ended question format to describe, in their own words, perceived social support they received as "sexual minorities." Support was organized into four types, those fulfilling concrete, emotional, financial, or informational needs. Study participants indicted that non-family members were more supportive than family members, particularly regarding the provision of informational support specific to a SSA lifestyle (e.g., introducing the participant to the gay, lesbian, or bisexual communities). The importance of supportive and nurturing relationships is underscored in provocative study of young gay men's safe sex accounts and their experiences in sex education at school (Mutchler et al., 2005). This effort with European American and Latino young men, ages 18-24, reported that a subset of study participants linked only practicing safer sex with their being "influenced by safer sex mentors" (p. 42). According to these young men, their "safer sex" mentors helped them learn how to thrive and protect themselves as sexually active gay men instead of becoming victims of social discrimination and physical illness. The supportive role that erotic participants can play in the lives of SSA youth has been explored and discussed elsewhere in the literature (Torres et al., in press).

At a more systemic level, research indicates that school policies can make a positive difference in the lives of SSA youth. Findings from a study investigating the association between gay-sensitive HIV instruction and risk behaviors among a random sample of high school gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) youth suggest that GLB youth in schools with gay-sensitive instruction reported fewer sexual partners, less recent sex, and less substance use before

last sex than did GLB youths schools without this type of instruction (Blake, Ledsky, Lehman, Goodenow, Sawyer, & Hack, 2001). In addition to influencing the prevalence of higher risk sexual behaviors among SSA youth, supportive school environments contribute to a greater sense of safety, an increase in school attendance, an increase in sense of belonging, and a higher incidence of plans to attend college among SSA youth (Kosciew & Diaz, 2006; Mutchler et al., 2005). Within the school setting, the presence of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) plays an important role in promoting optimal levels of development among SSA youth (Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006). Social support from other SSA youth provides opportunities for support, socialization, information exchange, education, and contributes to heightened self-esteem (Anderson, 1989; Torres et al., 2007). Supportive school personnel also contribute to a greater sense of safety, increased attendance, an increased sense of belonging, and a higher incidence of planning to attend college (Kosciw and Diaz 2006).   SSA youth also have higher resiliency scores when teachers intervene in response to homophobic slurs (Russell 2005). The critical role that school environments can play in addressing growing HIV prevalence rates among young men who have sex with men, particularly young African American and Latino men (Valleroy, MacKellar, Karon, Rosen, MacFarland, Shehan, et al., 2000; Warren, Fernández, Harper, Hidalgo Jamil & Torres, 2008) is underscored by these findings.

Notwithstanding the importance of the preceding findings (general and SSA youth specific), the emphasis they give to *identifying* [emphasis mine] individual and ecological variables associated with *resilience* limits their explicative power regarding this same phenomenon. More and more, researchers are calling for research on *resilience* that illuminates how protective factors operate in the lives of younger people (Luthar at al., 2000), rather than simply identifying risk and protective factors. Researchers have specifically cited the need for

focused study of the processes or pathways through which relationships with significant others offer significant psychological protection in the face of adversity (Masten, 1994; Resnick, Harris, & Blum, 1993; Rutter, 1990). In addition to countering deficit-based approaches to studies with SSA youth, my study answered the call for research aimed at illuminating our understanding of the underlying relational processes of *resilience*. Identifying and explaining the underlying processes by which protective factors (e.g., parent-child relationships, mentoring, and social support) promote *resilience* is essential for advancing theory in this area (Cicchetti & Garmezy, 1993; Luthar et al., 2000; Rutter, 1990).

SSA Youth

Since capturing the attention of the research, medical, and mental-health communities in the 1970s, SSA youth, have been characterized, with rare exception (Savin-Williams, 2005; Torres et al., in press; Wilson, Harper, Hidalgo, Jamil, & Torres, 2010), as troubled, socially isolated, socially rejected, vulnerable, and at increased risk for a number threats to development, including academic foreclosure, depression, suicide, and HIV/AIDS (D'Augelli &Hershberger, 1993; Rosario, Rotheram-Borus, & Reid, 1996). In the first study of gay male youth, Roesler and Deishler (1972) interviewed 60, 16-22 year-old young male sex-trade workers who had had at least one same-sex sexual experience. Findings from this study revealed that 48 percent of participants characterized their "homosexual" trajectory as one of "extreme emotional turmoil." Study participants reported a lack of acceptance in the "straight" world and the repulsion they themselves felt toward other "homosexuals" as the greatest problems associated with "homosexuality." By the time the next empirical investigation into the lives of gay male youth appeared sixteen years later (Remafedi, 1987a, 1987b), a deficit-based portrait of gay male youth was well-established.

Working with a sample collected through gay-oriented media and the local health department, Remafedi (1987a, 1987b) explored the stressors that placed study participants at risk for both psychological and physical problems. Remafedi (1987a, 1987b) found that most participants had: (1) experienced emotional distress, (2) consulted a mental health professional, (3) been hospitalized for mental health problems, and (4) attempted suicide in the past. Subsequent research efforts echoed many of these findings, serving to cement the idea that gay male youth represent an inherently vulnerable and "at-risk" population (Martin & Hetrick, 1988; Rotheram-Borus, Meyer-Bahlburg, Kooperman, Rosario, Exner, Henderson, et al., 1992; Rotheram-Borus, Rosario, Van Rossem, Reid, & Gillis, 1995).

A focus on the psychosocial travails of gay male youth had both positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, this focus served to secure much needed funds to investigate and identify the psychosocial challenges and related needs of this population (Coleman, 1981; Malyon, 1981). However, at the same time, this deficit-based perspective and research frame had the unfortunate consequence of linking being gay and young to being "troubled." By the 1980s and 1990s, the "inherently vulnerable" portrait of gay male youth was cemented with the inclusion of the suicidal script.

Research has indicated that suicidal behavior may be higher for youth who are sexually attracted to members of the same sex (Gould, Greenberg, Velting, & Shaffer, 2003; Heimberg & Safren, 1999; Russell & Joyner, 2001; D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 2001; Remafedi, 1999; Garofalo, Wolf, Wissow, Woods, & Goodman, 1999). Russell and Joyner (2001) were the first to use nationally representative data to support this association. In a study involving over 6,000 female and over 5,000 male youth, these investigators concluded that youth with a same-sex orientation were more than twice as likely to attempt suicide. Research with community and

clinical samples of SSA attracted youth, for example, found that between 20 percent and 42

percent of study participants had attempted suicide at least once (D'Augelli & Hershberger,

1993). The largest study of this type with 36, 254 Minnesota high school students revealed that

the 212 gay and bisexual identified males were seven times more likely to report an attempted

suicide than the 184 matched heterosexual identified males (Remafedi, French, Story, Resnick,

& Blum, 1998).

While the assumption that SSA youth, as a whole, represent an inherently unhappy,

unhealthy, or unproductive group is debatable, what is not debatable is that this population faces

additional and unique developmental challenges as a result of society's reaction to their sexual

orientation and/or identity (Harper & Schneider, 2003). To illustrate, the challenge of

developing, integrating, and managing a SSA sexual identity is compounded for youth who

learn, from a young age, of the profound and pervasive stigma attached to their sexual identity.

In contrast to their non-SSA counterparts, these youth may have no built-in support systems or

assurances that their peers and family will accept, support, and/or nurture them as a SSA

identified individual. Thus, social and cultural stigmatization and prejudice in the form of

homophobia (i.e., an irrational and unfounded negative attitude towards SSA individuals)

(Friend, 1993) and heterosexism (i.e., a pervasive cognitive schema whereby the superiority of

an other-sex orientation and/or attraction is presumed over that of a same-sex orientation and/or

attraction) (Friend, 1993) create real and unique developmental challenges for these youth

(Anhalt & Morris, 2003; Saffren & Heimberg, 1999).

In addition to not finding someone to turn to in times of need, many SSA youth find

school a frightening place. In an investigation of "anti-homosexual" violence, D'Augelli &

Hershberger (1993) reported that almost one third of the youth at a number of centers for SSA

youth fear verbal harassment and one fourth fear physical abuse at school. Similarly, Pilkington & D'Augelli (1995) reported from their sample of SSA male and female youth (ages 15-21) that 80 percent experienced verbal insults, 44 percent were threatened with violence, 33 percent had objects thrown at them, 31 percent reported being chased or followed, and 17 percent reported being physically assaulted at school. As a consequence to this invalidating school environment, many SSA youth have reported a decline in academic performance, involvement in extracurricular activities, and/or a premature foreclosure on school completion (Elia, 1994; Evans & D'Augelli; Morrow, 1997).

Although it is now widely accepted that being attracted to the same sex *per se* does not increase psychological difficulties, the preceding indicates that a lack of social support, infrequent positive events, and chronic stress represent real developmental risks for SSA youth (Safren & Heimberg, 1999). In summary, unlike non-SSA youth, SSA youth must manage two simultaneous and sometimes competing developmental tasks: self-identifying as SSA and simply growing up (Anhalt, & Morris, 1998; Bohan, 1996; Carrion & Locke, 1997; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993, D'Augelli et al., 1998; Ryan, 2001; Savin-Williams, 1995, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c).

While considerable and impressive work has highlighted the factors that challenge optimal developmental outcomes for SSA youth (Harper & Schneider, 2003), there has been much less emphasis on protective factors (Anderson, 1998; Russell, 2005). Without minimizing the importance of past deficit-based efforts with SSA youth, or undermining the continued need to better understand the varied and real developmental challenges faced by this population-this line of work overshadows another equally likely scenario for SSA youth-that they are resilient and doing well (Savin-Williams, 2005).

The idea of resilient SSA youth represents a significant departure from traditional conceptualization of this population as wanting, vulnerable, or somehow deficient. This traditional perspective challenges work with SSA that adopts a *resilience* framework because the model of the deficient and vulnerable SSA youth is so deeply engrained in general consciousness. In similar fashion, the study of *resilience*, specifically the study of *relational resilience*, is complicated by a cultural framework that emphasizes independence, autonomy, and self-reliance as key features of developmental success and psychosocial health and well-being (Gilligan, 1982; Jordan & Walker, 2004). This perspective, while acknowledging the importance and necessity of relationships, relegates these phenomena, along with related constructs (e.g., reciprocity and mutuality) to supportive or secondary roles to the attainment of independence and self-reliance (Gilligan, 1982; Jordan 2004c). This perspective is unfortunately commonplace among many schools of psychology where focus is placed on individual personality traits, movement toward autonomy, self-realization, self-sufficiency, and success through competitive achievement (Jordan & Walker, 2004, p. 2). Even theory that underscores relationships as critical to psychological health and well-being (e.g., Object Relations Theory) communicates disconnection as a necessary mechanism for this outcome (Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975).

By promulgating relational disconnections, theories that underscore individuality and independence inadvertently disfavor marginalized and/or less-privileged members of society (e.g., sexual, racial, ethnic minorities and women) (Jordan & Walker, 2004). Where separation, autonomy, and self-sufficiency are held as primary development outcomes, marginalized and/or less-privileged members of society by reason of their socio-cultural and/or economic status may be treated as dependent, needy, and less healthy (Jordan, 2004a; 2004b). Individuals who are

sexually, romantically, and relationally attracted to members of their same-sex (e.g., gay males, lesbian females, and bisexuals) figure historically among these marginalized groups.

While it is important to examine factors within the individual that facilitate health and well-being, we can no longer only look at these factors. For research aimed at answering the question, "What works to promote and protect the development, health, and well-being of SSA youth?" it is necessary to examine the underlying processes of relationships that encourage an optimal level of development. RCT presents a powerful model of development and *resilience* for examining the relational variables the may serve to promote *relational resilience* among historically marginalized groups. The adoption of this theoretical framework serve to answer Luthar et al.'s (2000) admonition that ''future empirical studies on *resilience* must be presented within cogent theoretical frameworks'' (p. 553).

Relational-Cultural Theory

In the late 1970s, at about the same time that interest in *resilience* was emerging among researchers in developmental psychopathology, a group of feminist scholars (Jean Baker Miller, M.D., Judith Jordan, Ph.D., Irene Striver, Ph.D. and Janet Surrey Ph.D.) began to discuss how traditional psychodynamic theories and therapeutic practices based on these theories neglected or misunderstood critical aspects of women's lives, in particular the relational experiences of women (Jordan & Hartling, 2002; Miller & Stiver, 1997).

Believing these experiences as important contributing factors to the psychological health of women, this group of scholars questioned the "usefulness" of a psychology that elevated the separate self, self-sufficiency, and separation as primary developmental outcomes (Miller, 1988; Jordan, 1987; 1989; Jordan & Walker, 2004). This call to action echoed Carol Gilligan's (1982) position that traditional theories of development devalue women and separate some men from

other men. Gilligan (1982) described how individuals, relationships, and societies are forced

toward disconnections dictated by patriarchal culture. For males, disconnection comes early in

life though socially sanctioned messages regarding heteronormative behaviors, including gender

conformity. In essence, males are taught to distance themselves from their own emotions and

others to prove their masculinity. The aforementioned dialogic effort among Miller and

colleagues laid the foundation for what is now known as Relational Cultural Theory (RCT).

As a comprehensive theory of development, RCT challenges traditional models of human

development that hold separation, individuation, and self-competency as primary developmental

outcomes (Jordan, 2004b). RCT proponents contend that traditional models of development fail

to consider the effects of a number of issues of control and power (e.g., sexism, racism, and

homophobia) that render the primacy of a "separate self" developmental model "questionable"

when assessing developmental success of historically marginalized population.   When, by

reason of their gender, ethnicity, race, and/or sexual attraction and identity, individuals enjoy less

power and control in their lives, research focused on learning what serves to promote their

development may do better by considering how these populations engage in mutually empathic

and responsive relationships (Jordan, 2005). RCT provides a model for these investigations

(Jordan, 1986).

RCT posits that the goal of development is not forming a separated, independent self, but

rather the ability to participate actively in *growth-fostering relationships* (Jordan & Walker,

2004). Core tenets of RCT include: (1) individual growth through and toward *growth-fostering*

relationships, (2) movement toward mutuality instead of separation, (3) engagement in and

benefit from an increasingly complex relational network, (4) mutual empathy and mutual

empowerment via *growth-fostering relationships*, (5) mutual authenticity in *growth-fostering*

relationships, (6) individual growth from contributions made to *growth-fostering relationships*, and (7) relational competence (Jordan, 2004a). In short, *resilience*, from an RCT perspective, is not an internal trait, but a dynamic relational process. RCT proposes that we think of *relational resilience* as the "capacity to move back into *growth-fostering relationships* (Connelly, 2005; Jordan, 1993, 2005). RCT proponents (Jordan, 2005) posit the following as key features of a relation model of resilience: 1) *supported vulnerability*; 2) *mutual empathic invol*vement, 3) *relational confidence*, 4) *mutual empowerment* that involves encouraging mutual growth, and 5) *relational awareness* alongside personal awareness.

Supported Vulnerability

Supported vulnerability means acknowledging and owning vulnerability as a growth promoting phenomenon (Jordan, 2004b). According to RCT, openness to being affected by a relational partner is central to intimacy and to growth-fostering relationships; without *supported vulnerability*, people relate inauthentically (Jordan, 2004). From this perspective, communicating a need for support and/or acceptance represents an essential factor in developing a sense of connection. The idea of *supported vulnerability* denies the primacy of self-sufficiency and the tendency to see vulnerability as a weakness. According to Jordan (2004a), "vulnerability per se is not a problem; it is disowned vulnerability that becomes problematic" (p. 33).

Mutual Empathic Involvement

According to RCT, *mutual empathic involvement* means being mutually engaged, committed and attuned to the relationship and to the interpersonal dynamics that affect both relational partners (Jordan, 2004b). It represents empathic sensitivity to the unspoken needs of one another within the relationship. In mutuality, one is both affecting and being affected by someone else; one extends oneself to the other and is receptive to the impact of the other.

Mutual empathic involvement is characterized by receptivity, active initiative toward the other, and a sense of expanding participation, engagement, and openness between relational partners (Jordan, 1986). The position that proximity and empathy are important for relational health and success is supported by research finding linking these concepts to high self-esteem, self-actualization, cooperation, low interpersonal distress, and relationship satisfaction (Beeber, 1998; Schulman & Knafo, 1997).

Relational Confidence

Acknowledging and owning vulnerability as a growth-promoting phenomenon is only possible if individuals are capable of asking for support. However, in order to ask for support, individuals must possess some level of trust and confidence in the relationship, including confidence that they can influence the relationship. *Relational confidence* involves having a sense that one has something to contribute to the other and to the relationship. According to Jordan (2004a, 2004b), confidence in a relationship "depends on mutual trust in the empathic response of relational partners" and in a commitment to one another and to the relationship" (p. 35). It also grows from reliability, a shared purpose of making the relationship mutually enhancing for both people, and a determination to honor and respect each other.

Mutual Empowerment

Mutual empowerment refers to a two-way dynamic process by which both partners in a relationships move toward greater effectiveness and power within that relationship (Jordan, 1986; Surrey, 1987). This concept echoes traditional conceptualizations of empowerment found in community psychology. Rappaport (1984), a leading figure in community psychology, defined empowerment as "a process: the mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives (p.5)."

Mutual empowerment is a relational extension of Rappaport's (1984) definition, whereby individuals in relationships gain equitable, and not equal, mastery over the relationship. Thus, *mutual empowerment* is possible in all relationships including those characterized by traditional power differentials (e.g., parent-child, teacher-student, or mentor-mentee). *Mutual empowerment* involves finding ways to make interactions growth-fostering for everyone in the relationship. Mutual empowerment is a particularly powerful concept as it entails outcome and process at the same time

Relational Awareness

Relational awareness involves the development of clarity about the movement of relationships, including an awareness of individual patterns and ways of connecting and disconnecting, and transforming the flow from the direction of disconnection to connection. It includes personal awareness, awareness of the other, and awareness of the impact that one has on other people and their impact on oneself in turn (Jordan, 2004a). In other words, *relational awareness* involves an attunement to self, other, and relational

As evident from the preceding, connections in the form of *growth-fostering relationships* are central to RCT. Miller (1988) discussed "five good things" associated with these relationships: (1) increased zest, or vitality; (2) an increased ability to take action, or empowerment; (3) increased clarity, or a clear picture of one's self, the other, and the relationship; (4) an increased sense of worth; and (5) a desire for relationships beyond that particular relationship. According to Miller (1986), these "five good things" describe what results from *growth-fostering relationships* (i.e., the outcome when mutual growth occurs through mutual empowerment and mutual empathy). In the words of two leading RCT scholars: "When individuals are engaged in a mutually emphatic, mutually empowering relationship, both

people are becoming more responsive to fostering the well-being of the other and of the

relationship itself; both people are growing through connection" (Jordan & Hartling, 2002).

In addition to articulating the outcomes for connections or *growth-fostering relationships*

(i.e., "five good things"), RCT examines the consequence of disconnection. In RCT,

disconnections are experienced as the opposite of the "five good things." In other words a

disconnection is experienced as diminished zest, a state of disempowerment, a lack of relational

clarity, a depressed sense of worth, and a lack of desire for relationships in general (Jordan &

Hartling, 2002). However, disconnections can be transformed and corrected via *growth-*

fostering relationships, according to RCT. In situations of relational disconnection where the

injured person is able to represent her/his feelings authentically and the other person is able to

respond empathically, experiences of disconnections can lead to an increased sense of relational

competence (i.e., the ability to effect change and feel effective in connections) (Jordan, 1999). In

contrast, where a disconnection cannot be transformed, the situation has the potential to lead to

what is known in RCT cant as *condemned isolation*. When in a state of *condemned isolation*, an

injured person is at greater risk for emotional and psychological difficulties, according to RCT

(Comstock, Hammer, Strentzsch, Cannon, Parson, & Salazar, 2008). This theory argues that

experiences of isolation, shame, humiliation, oppressions, and marginalization are relational

violations that can lead to a state of *condemned isolation* (Hartling, Rosen, Walker, & Jordan,

2000).

According to RCT, at times efforts to preserve relationships, particularly hurtful and

disempowering relationships, individuals may conceal important aspect of themselves (Jordan &

Hartling, 2002). In other words, in order to save an invalidating relationship, the strategies of

inauthenticity and self-invalidation are adopted as relational survival strategies. RCT refers to

this concealment of self as the *central relational paradox* (Comstock et al.., 2008). These "survival strategies" may be used to avoid perceived risks of hurt, rejection, social exclusion, and/or marginalization (Miller & Striver, 1997). Depending on the nature of the disconnection, the strategies may be accompanied by feelings of shame, fear, and self-blame, as individuals may carry a deep-seeded understanding that they are at fault for the relational disconnection.

RCT situates relational growth beyond the individual and most proximal of contexts (e.g., family) to include the socio-cultural levels in which this growth occurs. RCT underscores the impact that societal practices of oppression have on an individual's sense of connection and disconnection. Models of oppression such as racism, sexism, and heterosexism extend unearned privilege to certain identity categories (e.g., European American, male, heterosexual) and, by so doing, accord these groups the power to "name" what is normal, correct, and even legal.. Privilege, in this context, refers to unearned advantage held by people as a function of their ethnicity, race, gender, and/or sexual orientation and identity.

RCT has begun to generate a body of empirical research focused on disentangling the importance of growth-promoting relationships and understanding their relationship to health and well-being (Genero, 1995; Genero, Miller, Surrey, & Baldwin, 1992; Hartling & Ly, 2000). Although most of this work has been done with adults, research has begun to examine relational processes among adolescent populations. For example, in one study higher perceived mutuality between female youth and their mothers was associated with lower levels of depression among the daughters (Powell, Denton, & Mattsson, 1995). These findings are converging with clinical data that has long provided evidence for the value of growth-fostering connections and the experience of mutuality for both male and female adolescents.

RCT has inspired a growing body of research on depression, trauma, eating disorders, substance abuse, chronic illness, mother-daughter relationships, lesbian relationships, as well as issues of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism (Hartling & Ly, 2000; Jordan, 2004). This theoretical framework has informed our understanding of what the literature has referred to a *relational competence. Relational competence* may be understood as the capacity to effect a change (emotional, cognitive, and/or behavioral) in another person or in the relationship According to Jordan (2004b), *relational competence* involves "being in touch with our own feelings-and with our own hearts-that we touch the hearts of other and both people grow (Jordan, 2004b, p. 15). Another term for *relational competence* is *relational resilience*. Unfortunately this relational model has not been extended to the lives of SSA youth and thus whether terms such as relational awareness and supported vulnerability can be included in a discussion of the relationships that promote health and well-being among this population is unknown.

Rationale

Much of the empirical work with SSA youth has centered on identifying and understanding the developmental challenges faced by this population instead of exploring a balanced consideration of their developmental successes (Russell 2005; Savin-William, 2005; Torres et al., in press).   While attention to the persistent risks faced by this population continues to be important and necessary, equitable attention to the factors that support, promote, and protect their optimal development (i.e., their *resilience*) is overdue (Morrow 2006; Russell, 2005; Savin-Williams, 2005).

The literatures on *resilience*, as well as the literatures on the conceptually related constructs of *mentoring* and *social support*, repeatedly underscores that the presence of supportive and nurturing relationships is critical to attenuating the negative impact of adversity and risk in the lives of "at risk" youth (e.g., African American adolescent mothers, low income urban Latino youth, and youth raised in poverty and exposed to familial alcoholism) (Cavell et al., 2002; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes, 1994; Rhodes et al., 1992; Sanchez & Reyes, 1999; Werner, 1993; Werner & Smith, 1982). Recent work has extended this finding to the lives of SSA youth (Torres et al., in press).

Notwithstanding the importance of the preceding work, it has been more successful at *identifying* relational variables associated with *resilience* than in *elucidating* the underlying process that account for this outcome. The need for research in this direction has been made explicit in the literature on *resilience* (Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 1994; Resnick, Harris, & Blum, 1993). Efforts in this direction must be guided by theory, however.

Most theoretical models of *resilience* posit that *resilience* reside within the individual in such traits as temperament (Rutter, 1990), hardiness (Kobasa, 1985), or self-esteem (Burnett &

Demnar, 1996) or that it represents the developmental outcome of the interaction of these

intrapersonal traits and varied ecological resource, including supportive and nurturing

relationships (Garmezy, 1987). Although useful in their own right, these models of *resilience*

are biased in the direction of overemphasizing the individual or the individual in relation, as

might be the case in a mentoring relationship. However, given repeated evidence that relational

processes contribute to *resilience*, a relational model of *resilience* is needed in order to further

our understanding of the phenomenon.

Theorists at the Jean Baker Miller Training Institute and the Stone Center at Wellesley

College have created a theoretical model of *resilience* that posits that "connection is at the core

of human growth and development" (Jordan & Walker, 2004, p. 2). This model is known as

Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT). RCT suggests that relationships that enhance resilience and

encourage growth are characterized by a two-way experience of connection, involving 1)

supported vulnerability, 2) *mutual empathic invol*vement, 3) *relational confidence*, 4) *mutual*

empowerment that involves encouraging mutual growth, and 5) relational *awareness* (Jordan,

1997; Miller & Stiver, 1997). While compelling from a theoretical perspective, it is unclear

whether this relational model of resilience can be extended to a discussion of *relational*

resilience among SSA youth, yet it is a particularly strong model for examining this phenomenon

relative to this historically marginalized population.

Proponents of RCT argue that the dominant Western culture does snot support the notion

of interdependence (Jordan & Walker, 2004). However, for certain groups of people,

particularly marginalized populations (e.g., gay and lesbian youth), interdependence may be

essential for their health and well-being. As such, RCT is a strong theoretical model for the study

of relational processes underscoring *resilience* in the lives of SSA youth.

In light of the persistent threats to development faced by many SSA youth (Harper & Schneider, 2004) identifying and understanding the factors that underscore these relational resources is critical to any effort aimed at promoting and protecting the health and well-being of SSA youth, in general, and young SSA youth of color in particular. Young men who have sex with men, particularly African American and Latino male youth, are at high risk of HIV infection (Muñoz-Laboy & Dodge, 2007; Warren et al., 2008) and represents the largest group of males between the ages of 13-24 living with HIV and AIDS in the United States (Rangel, Gavin, Reed, Fowler, & Lee 2006). Moreover, there is evidence that this situation is worsening, with infection increasing at alarming rates (Wolitski, Valdiserri, Denning, & Levine, 2001).

Working with data from a larger multi-site, mixed methods study examining identity development and integration and its association to HIV-related risk and protective behaviors, the present cross case analysis adopted an RCT lens to examine relationships in the lives of self-identified gay, bisexual, and questioning (GBQ) male youth from Chicago and Miami. This effort attempted to learn from GBQ male youth how the following relational processes may have manifested in their lives: (1) *supported vulnerability*; (2) *mutual involvement* (3) *relational confidence*; (4) *mutual empowerment*; and (5) *relational awareness*.

This effort brought a phenomenological focus to the experiences of GBQ male youth whose voices have historically been marginalized from mainstream empirical investigations about youth development. Conducting phenomenological research is described as "a dynamic interplay among six research activities" (van Manen, 1990, p. 30); these six activities are: 1) turning to a phenomenon that seriously interests us; 2) investigating experience as they are lived rather than as they are conceptualized; 3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon; 4) describing the phenomenon through writing and rewriting; 5) maintaining a

strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon; 6) balancing the research context by considering the parts and the whole (p. 30). These six activities extended naturally into the research paradigm for this dissertation.

Creswell (1998) listed eight reasons to undertake a qualitative study: 1) the nature of the question requires it, 2) the topic needs exploration, 3) there is need for a detailed view, 4) the objective is to study participants in a natural setting, 5) the researcher is interested in a literary style of writing, 6) necessary time and resources exist for extensive data collection, 7) there is a receptive audience for the study results, and 8) the researcher can take the stance of active learner rather than expert. This dissertation met these criteria and was thus well suited for a qualitative research design because of the lack of research on *resilience* vis-à-vis SSA youth.

Research Questions

I.   What role does *supported vulnerability* play in the lives of GBQ male youth participants?

   a.   How do GBQ male youth talk about *supported vulnerability*?

   b.   How do GBQ male youth enact *supported vulnerability?*

   c.   How does *supported vulnerability*, as discussed and enacted by GBQ male participants, compare to RCT's conceptualization of *supported vulnerability*

   d.   What role does *supported vulnerability* play in health promoting behaviors among GBQ male participants?

II. What role does *mutual empathic involvement* play in the lives of GBQ male youth participants?

   a.   How do GBQ male youth talk about *mutual empathic involvement*?

   b.   How do GBQ male youth enact *mutual empathic involvement*?

   c.   How does *mutual empathic involvement*, as discussed and enacted by GBQ male participants, compare to RCT's conceptualization of *mutual empathic involvement?*

   d.   What role does *mutual empathic involvement* play in health promoting behaviors among GBQ male participants?

III. What role does *relational confidence* play in the lives of GBQ male youth participants?

   a.   How do GBQ male youth talk about *relational confidence?*

   b.   How do GBQ male youth enact *relational confidence?*

   c.   How does *relational confidence*, as discussed and enacted by GBQ male participants, compare to RCT's conceptualization of *relational confidence?*

   d.   What role does *relational confidence* play in health promoting behaviors among GBQ male participants?

IV. What role does *mutual empowerment* play in the lives of GBQ male youth participants?

     a. How do GBQ male youth talk about *mutual empowerment*?

     b. How do GBQ male youth enact *mutual empowerment*?

     c. How does *mutual empowerment*, as discussed and enacted by GBQ male participants, compare to RCT's conceptualization of *mutual empowerment?*

     d. What role does *mutual empowerment* play in health promoting behaviors among GBQ male participants?

V. What role does *relational awareness* play in the lives of GBQ male youth participants?

     a. How do GBQ male youth talk about *relational awareness*?

     b. How do GBQ male youth enact *relational awareness*?

     c. How does *relational awareness*, as discussed and enacted by GBQ male participants, compare to RCT's conceptualization of *relational awareness?*

     d. What role does *relational awareness* play in health promoting behaviors among GBQ male participants?

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Overview

For this dissertation, I conducted an exploratory, cross-case, secondary qualitative

analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1994) of previously transcribed, in-depth interviews

with a subset (N = 20) of self-identified gay, bisexual, and questioning (GBQ) male youth in

order to explore and bring forth the views of these young men regarding relational mechanisms

theorized to be integral to the construct of *relational resilience* as articulated by proponents of

Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT). Merriam (1998) describes the strengths of qualitative case

study research as:

> ...a researcher selects a case study design because of the nature of the research problem
> and the questions being asked. . . . The case study offers a means of investigating
> complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in
> understanding the phenomenon. . . . (p. 41)

Data for the present effort were taken from a larger multi-site, mixed-methods study

funded by the National Institute of Health's Adolescent Trails Network (ATN) for HIV/AIDS

Interventions. This larger study was called the MOSAIC Study; it was designed to explore the

relationship between the development of identities (e.g., gay, ethnic, and masculine) and HIV

risk and protective behaviors among African American, Latino, and European American male

youth ages 14-22.   A total of 200 participants from Chicago and Miami were recruited from a

number of community based organizations that work with SSA male youth for this larger effort.

Study eligibility for the Mosaic study was conducted using a brief screening interview

(see Appendix A). Successfully screened young men were then asked to complete a consent or

assent form depending on their age (see Appendix B) followed by a set of questionnaires

assessing their ethnic identity development, sexual orientation identity development, level of

engagement in drug and sexual risk behaviors, and demographic characteristics (Appendix C).

Data from the questionnaires were then use to select participants for the second phase of the

larger study-an in-depth qualitative interview. In order to select a developmentally and

ethnically diverse subsample of participants for the qualitative interview, the Mosaic research

team created a purposive framework stratified by age (15-17, 18-20, 21-22), ethnicity (African

American, Hispanic/Latino, and White non-Hispanic/European American), level of gay

identification (higher and lower), and recruitment site (Chicago and Miami).

A total of 63 participants completed an in-depth qualitative interview.   The semi-

structured, in-depth qualitative interviews investigated gender, sexual, ethnic identity

development; within each of these domains, participants were asked about interpersonal

relationships that had been supportive and helpful, with particular emphasis given to these

relationships vis-à-vis sexual identity development.

Prior examination of the qualitative data collected in Chicago (Torres et al., in press)

suggested that the transcribed interviews held promise for further exploration of the relationships

in general, and of supportive relationships, in particular with the hope of learning about the

underlying relational mechanisms of growth-fostering relationships in the lives of GBQ male

youth.

As noted by McLeod (2001), "qualitative inquiry holds the promise of discovery, of

generation of new insights into old problems, and producing nuanced accounts that do justice to

the experience of all those participating in the research (p. 1). As such, I selected a qualitative

analytic methodology for this dissertation-specifically; I chose to conduct a phenomenological-

focused, cross-case analysis of the data collected during the second phase of the Mosaic study.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) contend that "qualitative methods can be used to obtain the intricate

details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to

extract or learn about through more conventional (i.e., qualitative) methods" (p. 11). A

phenomenological approach to analyzing the data allowed me to retain a sense of the whole truth

of the lives and relationships being examined while attempting to identify the underlying

relational mechanism that may undergird *relational resilience* in the lives of study participants.

Participants

This dissertation was focused on learning whether RCT held theoretical promise for

identifying the underlying relational mechanisms of *relational resilience* in the lives of SSA

young men. As such, youth and young adult males who self-identified as SSA and whose

transcribed Mosaic in-depth interview spoke richly about relationships in their lives were

considered for this effort. The Mosaic study recruited a total of 200 participants who met the

following study criteria: 1) 14 to 22 years of age; 2) self-identified as African American, White

non-Hispanic/European American, or Hispanic/Latino; 3) self-identified as gay, bisexual, or

questioning (GBQ); 4) self-reported HIV seronegative status; 5) understanding of written and

spoken English; and 6) residency in the Chicago and Miami metropolitan areas. Lack of

English-proficiency was an exclusionary criterion because the cost and time required for high-

quality translation was prohibitive.

The Mosaic recruitment efforts considered questioning male youth, in addition to gay

male youth, because from a gay identity developmental perspective, it was believed that these

young men were in a stage of confusion similar to that articulated in Cass' (1979) and Troidan's

(1989) gay identity development models and their developmental experiences were thus arguably

parallel to young men self-identified as gay. Similarly, bisexual males were included for

recruitment because the development hurdles, including the development of connection and

supportive relationship with the heteronormative standard had strong parallels to that of self-identified gay male youth.

SSA female participants were not considered for the Mosaic study for at least two reasons. First, the exclusion of females was imposed by the eligibility criteria of the larger study. To review, this larger effort focused on understanding behavioral and intrapersonal phenomena among a subset of SSA male youth vis-à-vis a distinct health risk (i.e., HIV infection and AIDS). Second, the inclusion of female SSA youth would have introduced a developmental confound the present effort. While SSA female youth certainly experience similar developmental challenges to those faced by their SSA male counterparts, there is strong evidence that their developmental trajectory differs in important and significant ways from that of SSA males (Diamond, 1989; Schneider, 2001).

In a similar fashion, the exclusion of other SSA ethnic identities, including bi-racial and non-Latino, African Caribbean male youth were not included in the Mosaic study to avoid other potential confounds related to culture and history. In sum, while the needs of one group should never be conceived of as more important than those of another, methodological "neatness" and practicality converged to shift focus to one group instead of another.

Procedure

A non-probability, convenience sampling technique was used to recruit participants for the larger Mosaic study, from which the data for this dissertation originated. This technique is appropriate for research aimed at working with under-represented populations (Patton, 2004). Data collection for the larger study consisted of two phases.

During the data collection phase, participants were recruited from a number of venues frequented by SSA youth. These venues were community based organizations (CBOs) that work

exclusively, or primarily, with SSA youth; select community venues frequented by SSA youth (e.g., coffee houses, clothing stores, and parks); CBO sponsored social events for SSA youth (e.g., dance parties); university-based SSA student group organizations; and cultural events geared toward the larger SSA community (e.g., Pride Parade). Recruitment was done either face-to-face or through advertisements for the larger study (e.g., flyers and pocket-cards) posted or distributed at the various recruitment sites. Whenever possible, and based on their level of involvement with the PI for the Mosaic study, the particular venue site allowed the recruitment team to present the study to youth present at the venue and/or leave recruitment flyers for later distribution.

Youth who expressed an interest in the Mosaic study were screened by a multi-ethnic research tem consisting of undergraduate, doctoral, and Ph.D. level researchers in a private room in order to ensure privacy and confidentiality. Verbal screening using a screening interview guide (Appendix A) was used to establish study eligibility. Participants were considered eligible for participation if the met the following criteria: a) White non-Latino/European, Latino/Hispanic, or African American, b) identified as either gay, bisexual, or questioning, c) were born and currently identify as being male, d) were between the ages of 14 and 23, e) must not have tested positive for HIV, f) must have the ability to read English, and g) live in the Chicago or Miami metropolitan areas. After determining eligibility and obtaining verbal agreement for participation in the larger study, signed informed consent or assent (Appendix B), depending on age, was obtained from all study participants.

Although a signature of the parent or guardian is typically required for an assent form, a waiver of parental consent was granted to the larger study by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the host university in Chicago for two reasons: 1) because the larger

effort posed no greater than minimal risk to participants and was a confidential study that

collected non-genetic identifying information and 2) because obtaining parental informed

consent has the potential of placing youth participants at risk for disclosure of their sexual

attraction and/or identity, which, in turn, has the potential of placing these youth at risk for

parental rejection and/or expulsion from their home (Rotheram-Borus, Rosario, & Koopman,

1991; Savin-Williams, 2001a). Exposure, familial rejection, and/or home expulsion, all have the

potential of decreasing the number of SSA youth who are willing to participate in research, thus

limiting the scope, accuracy, and currency of our empirical knowledge base.

The same waiver was not granted by the IRB of the host university in Miami and, as a

result, participant recruitment in Miami was limited to youth ages 18-22. During the

consent/assent process participants were informed about 1) the nature of the larger study, 2) the

factors that might be expected to influence their willingness to participate in the study, 3) the

possible risks associated with their participation, 4) their right to decline participation and/or to

withdraw from the study at any time, and 5) the researchers commitment to respecting the

dignity and rights of all participants during all phases of the research experience.

Successfully screened young men who agreed to take part in the larger study were then

asked to complete a self-administered quantitative questionnaire (Appendix C). The

questionnaire consisted of select items from the Multi-Group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)

(Phinney, 1992), the Gay Identity Questionnaire (GIQ) (Brady & Busse, 1994) and the

Identification and Involvement with the Gay Community Scale (IGS) (Vanable, McKirnan &

Stokes, 1998). Demographics, as well as a history of drug and alcohol use and sexual behavior,

were also collected in this survey.

In order to ensure privacy, initial screening and administration of the quantitative survey were administered in private room at the respective recruitment site, typically a CBO. When a private room was not available or per the request of the request of the interested young man the survey was scheduled for a later date and/or location (i.e., the host University for the Mosaic Study). Under these conditions only the screening was conducted at the venue.

Youth who received information about the study through a flyer were directed on the flyer to call a confidential phone number linked exclusively to the larger study in order to complete a preliminary screening and schedule a time and place (either at the community agency or at the designated office area of the host university in their area to complete a confirmatory screening, a consent or assent form, and a quantitative measure. Members of the recruitment teams reviewed the surveys for completeness and, if necessary, had the participant complete or clarify any overlooked or ambiguous response(s). Using these techniques, a total of 200 self-identified GBQ male youth were recruited in the Chicago (N = 97) and Miami metropolitan areas (N = 103) for the larger study. Participants provided contact information for participation in the subsequent phases of the larger study. They were compensated with $25 gift card for completing the questionnaire, which took 30 to 45 minutes to complete.

Quantitative data from the surveys, along with qualitative impressions from research team members who supervised the survey administration, were used to create a stratified purposive sampling frame for the second phase of data collection-one-on-one semi-structured qualitative interviews. A stratified purposive sample is recommended when conducting qualitative theoretical model development with understudied groups (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The stratified sample reflected three age groups (14-17, 18-20, 21-22), three racial/ethnic identity groups (African American, Latino/Hispanic, and White non-

Latino/European American), two levels of gay identification (high and low), and two sites (Chicago and Miami). This sampling frame was used to select an ethnically and developmentally diverse subsample of study participants for the qualitative interviews.

Two to six weeks after completing the quantitative survey, selected participants were contacted by phone or email by either an undergraduate or graduate research assistant for participation in the qualitative interview. Participants were given the option of scheduling their interview at either the site of initial recruitment, if this happened to be a CBO where a private office could be secured or in a private office in the designated research offices for the larger study. Participants were advised that the interview would take approximately two hours and that they would be compensated $35 cash for their time and effort. A total of 62 participants (Chicago = 38; Miami = 29) completed the qualitative interview.

The interviews explored identity development across three domains: gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, along with their integration and relation to risk and protective sexual behavior. As part of their interview, participants were queried regarding the nature of "supportive and nurturing relationships" in their lives, including the presence and function of natural mentoring relationships. The interviews in Chicago were conducted by a principle investigator and Ph.D.-level study coordinator for the Mosaic study, and three doctoral graduate students in psychology. The Chicago team consisted of ethnically diverse (e.g., European American, Pakistani American, Latino, Mexican, and Bi-racial) adults, SSA adults with significant research, academic and have personal history with GBQ male youth. All interviewers were trained on all phases of qualitative interviewing, including rapport building, administration of the semi-structured interview, and administration of a debriefing protocol by the study's principle investigator. Members of the Miami team received similar training by the principle investigator from Chicago.

The interviews took place in private offices located at either the respective recruitment site or the research offices for the larger study. All efforts were made to ensure that the interview took place in a space that was private and safe for participants. The equipment used for the interview session was a tape recorder with external microphone and a standard audio cassette tape. The recorder and microphone were set up on furniture between the participant and the interviewer. The interviews took one and a half to two hours to complete. All participants were compensated $35 for taking part in an in-depth interview. Interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist not affiliated with the larger study. All transcribed tapes were reviewed by a graduate student member of the research team in Chicago to ensure fidelity. Rich text format files of the transcribed interviews were uploaded into NVivo 7.0 (QSR NUD*IST Vivo software; Qualitative Solutions & Research) software for later coding. Two years following data collection, the recorded data were destroyed.

All participants were debriefed following the interview using a standardized debriefing protocol (Appendix E). This protocol provided interviewers with necessary information for handling emergency situations and/or making mental health referrals for those participants who had expressed or otherwise communicated abuse, suicidal/homicidal ideation, or any other form of psycho-emotional distress.

Dissertation Case Selection

In order to maximize learning and "preserve multiple realities" (Stake, 1995, p.) participants (i.e., cases) for my dissertation were selected based on the richness of relational data found in the transcribed interviews from the larger Mosaic study, specifically participants who went beyond simply identify a supportive and nurturing relationships to detailing these relationships during the qualitative interview process. My focus on narrative richness was in

keeping with phenomenological research where participants are selected based on their current or past experience with the phenomenon being examined (Cresswell, 1998).

To select these cases, I read all 62 qualitative interviews twice. A Case Summary Sheet (See Appendix D) was developed for this selection process in order to systematize this process as well as build accountability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Using this process a total of 20 transcribed interviews were selected. The selection process and final count of 20 interview cases included regular discussion with my dissertation chair regarding the richness of data being considered, as well as why "thin" were being interpreted as such. These ongoing discussions served to mitigate any potential bias on my part during this process. The following table (Table 1) illustrates the demographics of the 20 selected participants.

Table 1

Participants Selected for Analysis: Demographics at Time of Data Collection

Name[a]	PIN[b]	Age	Gender	EI[c]	SI[c]	Education Status
Jacob	0105	18	Male	Latino	Gay	High School Student
Ethan	0119	21	Male	AA	Gay	High School Graduate
Michael	0143	23	Male	AA	Gay	High School Graduate
Jayden	0209	22	Male	AA	Gay	High School Foreclosed
William	0210	20	Male	Latino	Gay	College Student
Alexander	0304	19	Male	Latino	Gay	High School Student
Noah	0305	18	Male	AA	Gay	College Student
Daniel	0307	18	Male	AA	Bisexual	College Student
Aiden	0325	19	Male	Latino	Gay	High School Graduate
Anthony	0404	16	Male	EA	Gay	High School Student
Joshua	0407	22	Male	EA	Gay	College Student
Mason	0410	20	Male	EA	Gay	College Student
Christopher	0411	19	Male	Latino	Gay	College Student
Andrew	0414	22	Male	EA	Gay	College Student
David	0415	19	Male	Latino	Gay	College Student
Matthew	0512	19	Male	Latino	Gay	College Student
Logan	0603	20	Male	EA	Gay	College Student
Elijah	0606	17	Male	EA	Gay	High School Student
James	0704	18	Male	EA	Gay	College Student
Joseph	0706	20	Male	EA	Gay	College Student

[a] Pseodonym. Selected and assigned at random.
[b] Participant Identification Number. Assigned during Mosaic Study participation.
[c] EI = Ethnic Identity (AA = African American, EA = European American, and Latino). SI = Sexual Identity.

Creswell (1998, 2005) notes that the sample in a phenomenological study should be limited to a small number in order to avoid redundancy and gain greater and deeper intimacy with the data. Past phenomenological work suggested that a sample of 10 interviews would be adequate (Friedrich & Leiper, 2006; Miller & Draghi-Lorenz, 12005; Patone, 2005; Schecter-Conrbluth, 2006.). However, the richness of the data and the significance a dissertation project justified the selection of 20 transcribed interview cases.

Because this dissertation represents a secondary analysis of previously collected data, participants from the Mosaic study were not contacted for the dissertation. However, in order to secure feedback from experts (i.e., SSA youth) a focus group of four gay and bisexual young men was convened in Los Angeles in order to secure their feedback regarding the findings that were emerging after half of the 20 qualitative interviews were analyzed by the author. As no new data was being collected from this small focus group, there was no need for additional IRB review.

Instruments

Quantitative measure (Mosaic Study).

This 112-item measure (Appendix C) consists of a compilation of five different questionnaires: 1) the Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM, Appendix C, items 17-40) (Phinney, 1992, 2) the Gay Identity Questionnaire (Appendix C, items 43-87) (Brady & Busse, 1994), 3) the Identification and Involvement with the Gay Community Scale (IGCS) (Appendix C, items 88-95) (Vanable, McKirnan, & Stokes, 1998), 4) a section assessing their level of engagement in drug or sexual risk and protective behaviors (Appendix C, items 96-111), and 5) a demographics survey (Appendix C, items 1-16). The demographic questionnaire (Appendix C, items 1-16) was developed by the principle investigator and leading graduate research assistant

for the Chicago team and consisted of queries into age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, education level, and family composition.

Qualitative measure (Mosaic Study).

The 38-question qualitative interview guide (Appendix F) explored a number of issues that young GBQ male may youth experience, such as challenges to developing varying identities (e.g., gay, ethnic, and gender), identity integration, involvement with the gay community, substance use, and sexual behavior.

This guide was developed by the Chicago-based research team (including the author) for the Mosaic study, most of whom had extensive experience working with GBQ youth, the production of this guide involved an iterative group process over the course of three months during the summer of 2005. The guide was developed from a phenomenological perspective involving two assumptions. The first is that what is important to know is what individuals experience and how they interpret the world. The second implication is that the only way to really know what another person experience is to experience it as closely and directly as possible (Patton, 2002). In order to get at the personal experiences, questions were developed to allow participants to define and describe queried phenomena in their own words and conceptualizations. Subsequent probes were included in order to guide participants through an in-depth phenomenological reflection of their experiences.

The final interview guide covered the following topics: 1) querying regarding the messages study participants learned regarding their gender, sexual, and ethnic identities, including their reaction to the same; 2) querying into the process by which study participants developed their gender, sexual, and ethnic identities, including struggles therein; 3) development and current comfort level with identified sexual and ethnic communities; 4) self-identified

relationships, including community factors, that proved supportive and helpful in the development of a non-heteronormative sexual identity; and 5) sexual behavior including protective and higher risk behavior.

After conducting half of the qualitative interviews, six confirmation interviews with adult key informants and participants who had not taken part in the second phase of study were conducted in order to ascertain quality, content, and ecological validity of the data collected. These interviews had two objectives: 1) confirm initial understanding of the data and 2) find out if there were additional areas of inquiry that were being left out. Information from these confirmation interviews was used to modify the interview protocol before the final set of in-depth interviews was completed. As a result, questions were added the guide focused on the existence of the internet SSA communities and "hustling." A second and final confirmation step consisted of four participant youth focus groups that served to confirm and validate the overall emergent themes from the qualitative interviews, including themes related to natural mentoring relationships. Efforts were made to include members from all three ethnic categories, sexual identity groups, and age groups in these focus groups.

Interview guide: relationship-focused questions.

Participants were queried regarding supportive and helpful relationships in their lives across all investigated identity domains of the qualitative interview. This questioning regarding relationships grew focused in the section of the interview that examined sexual identity development. In this section, participants were queried regarding the presence, form, and function of naturally occurring mentoring relationships. In this section, participants were asked two specific questions (Appendix C, Question 32): 1) "When you first started to identify as [GBQ], who was helpful and supportive in this process?," and 2) "Other than your parent, has

there been an important person in your life, who is older and more experienced than you and has

provided you with guidance and support as a GBQ individual?" This more detailed or focused

querying allowed for the collection of rich data. Denzin (1994) suggests that richly detailed

narratives of personal experiences should be the overall task of research. The focus of the

research is on those life experiences that alter and shape the meanings persons give to themselves

and their life projects.

Analysis

By capturing detail and depth, case studies are among the most effective methods of

evaluating behavior and behavioral outcomes. They are effective at capturing richness,

complexity and highlighting what is exceptional and noteworthy. Described as "an intensive,

holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (Merriam,

1988, p. 21), this kind of work is appropriate when conducting exploratory research on complex

social phenomena (Yin, 1994), when an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon is desired from

the perspective of more than one individual (Patton, 1990), and when prior theory guides

analysis (Yin, 1994).

In addition to pointing out the strengths of case studies, it is important to acknowledge

their limitations. Guba and Lincoln (1981) declare: "case studies can oversimplify or exaggerate

a situation; leading the reader to erroneous conclusions about the actual state of affairs…They

tend to masquerade as a whole when in fact they are but a part – a slice of life" (p. 377) and do

not provide a framework for comparing and contrasting the outcomes of cases that share a

similar profile (e.g., male youth who are same-sex attracted).

Stake (2000) delineates three types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective.

Intrinsic case studies focus on a case that is unusual and of particular interest (Creswell, 1998;

Stake, 2000). An instrumental case study is pursued in order to provide insight about a particular

issue that may be generalizable (Creswell, 2003). The primary purpose of an instrumental case

study is to help advance understanding (Stake, 2000). The collective case study encompasses

more than one case "in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition"

(Stake, 2000, p. 437). Since the purpose is to help advance understanding, a collective case

study is a grouping of instrumental case studies (Stake, 2000). As the analysis of a select

subsample of interviews, the present effort was a collective case study.

Miles and Huberman (1994) describe cross-case analysis as initially analyzing each

individual case as a whole entity and then comparing the analysis of all of the cases. This

approach reassures researchers that the events in only one case are not wholly idiosyncratic. A

phenomenological focus entails centering on participants' life experiences in order to ascertain

the meaning of phenomenon of interest (Cresswell, 1998). By understanding each individual's

experiences and how they converge with similar participants, one can determine the larger

framework to describe the structure (or "essence") of the phenomenon of interest (Schutz, 1970).

Research conducted from a phenomenological perspective is based on the belief that

knowledge of an experience can only be communicated by the person who has lived it (Patton,

2002). As such, I examined the descriptions given by study participants regarding relationships

in their lives. According to Sandelowski (1999) descriptions are memories of past events that are

told in the present moment and the participants often change their descriptions from one account

to the next. As such, the relationships described by study participants represent recollections.

This fact naturally brings to question issues of rigor. One way of ensuring or increasing the rigor

of qualitative research is to be direct and explicit regarding your methodology (Miles &

Huberman, 1994). In keeping with this admonition, the following details the analytical steps I engaged in for the present study.

A ladder of analytical abstraction (Carney, 1990) is a useful model for describing the analyses conducted for this study (Stake, 2000). This "ladder" consisted of three levels of analyses: (1) Level 1: Data Reduction, Case Selection, and Initial Coding; (2) Within-Case Analysis and Continued Coding; and (3) Cross-Case Analysis. These three levels of analysis are in keeping with the recommendations of Miles and Huberman (1994).

Data Reduction, Case selection, and Initial coding

Qualitative data pile up geometrically. Researchers who fail to consider the importance of order and data reduction from the outset may end up lost in a sea of words-a major concern of mine at the start of this project. The first level of analysis served as a form of data-reduction. I read each of the 62 in-depth interview cases twice in order to familiarize myself with the data; familiarization and immersion means "becoming very familiar with the text" and "getting a feel for the overall meaning and different types of meaning in the text" (Kelly, 1999, p.409). During this initial step, I began coding the transcripts, using codes developed in accordance with the primary research questions for the study as an operating coding scheme. As reading/coding proceeded, I attempted to remain mindful of the process in which I was engaged by the use of marginal reflexive remarks and my researcher journal. Reflexive remarks allow researchers to remain aware of their own feelings, insights, and interpretations (Patton, 2002). Immediately after reading each interview, I completed a case summary sheet (Appendix A) in order to (1) avoid getting lost in the amount of data being examined and (2) begin identifying and distinguishing "rich" interviews from "thin" interviews.

In accordance with Miles' and Huberman's (1994) recommendations, the case summary sheet consisted of the following three questions: what were the main relational themes in the interview; what information did I get or failed to get with regard to the research questions; and what other salient, interesting, illuminating, or important relational points were made in the interview. The case summaries were then discussed with my chair and cases were selected..

Qualitative researchers tend to work with small samples (Miles & Huberman, 1994), as opposed to quantitative researchers who aim for larger samples in order to establish statistical significance. As stated above, the case summary sheets were used to select a sub-sample of transcribed interviews for further analysis. Qualitative samples tend to be purposive. Choice of participants or interviews in this case, was driven by the conceptually driven research questions and not by a concern for representativeness (Glaser & Corbin, 1967). Mile and Huberman (1994) indicate that "to get at the construct, we need to see different instances of it, at different moments, in different places, with different people" (p. 29). Mindful of this admonition, I combined the techniques of theory-based sampling with that of maximum variation sampling. Theory based sampling finds examples of a theoretical construct (e.g., *relational resilience*) in order to elaborate and examine it. Maximum variation sampling serves to document diverse variations of a phenomenon across diverse cases and to identify important common patterns. Using this combined sampling technique, I selected a subset of participant interviews (N = 20) for subsequent within and later cross-case analysis.

In order to facilitate management and handling of these data all transcribed interviews were entered into computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (i.e., NVivo 8.0); NVivo 8 is a multi-functional software system for the development, support, and management of qualitative data analysis. I selected QSR NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis Software because it is

well suited for managing and organizing the data for the present effort, which comprised of multiple cases (i.e., transcribed interviews), and because I had past experience with the program. Because this research was exploratory, it was important to be able to code and make coding revisions as the analyses progress. This software facilitated the coding, sorting, and refining of categories by creating logs of the changes that were made and allowing custom searching and retrieval of data.

In order to improve my understanding of what was happening in the case interviews I was examining, I had regular case analysis meetings with my dissertation chair (roughly to coincide with my reading of sets of eight interviews each). The purpose of these meetings was to summarize what I was finding and discuss my understanding of the same (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Such feedback is essential to prevent researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and to establish interpretive credibility (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I could not find any rule or guideline for determining the number of interviews I should have read prior to meeting with my chair. Instead, I considered my work style, the time I had available for this effort, and need to develop a regular work pattern for my overall dissertation project. To help focus the meetings, I developed a note-taking form as disused by Miles and Huberman (1994). As a second measure to prevent researcher bias, I held a focus group with four self-identified SSA young men age 18-23 while I was on internship at UCLA; these young men were enrolled as undergraduate students at UCLA and actively involved at the university's LGBT student center. These "experts" providing confirmatory and competing insight and feedback regarding the emerging findings I was uncovering during analysis. Since no new data was being collected from this focus group data review, IRB approval was not required for this step.

Within-Case Analysis and Continued Coding

I analyzed each case interview separately to gain a complete picture of the relational dynamics and processes discussed by each study participants. Maintaining the integrity of each interview was important to me, as the interview represents a section of a life lived.

This within-case analysis focused on answering the primary research questions for the proposed study: (1) What role does *supported vulnerability* play in the lives of GBQ male youth participants?; (2) What role does *mutual empathic involvement* play in the lives of GBQ male youth participants?; (3) What role does *relational confidence* play in the lives of GBQ male youth participants?; (4) What role does *mutual empowerment* play in the lives of GBQ male youth participants?; and (5) What role does *relational awareness* play in the lives of GBQ male youth participants?

This more careful reading of the transcribed text involved a careful and time-consuming search of the text for recurring words or themes (i.e., content analysis). Content analysis generally refers to any sense-making effort that takes volumes of qualitative material and attempts to identify core constancies, themes, and meanings (Patton, 2002). This process involved a more inductive process, whereby findings emerge out of the data through the researcher's interactions with the data, in contrast to deductive analysis where the data are analyzed according to an existing framework. This process is also known as "open-coding" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During open coding, the researcher identifies and (tentatively) names the conceptual categories into which the phenomena observed will be grouped. The goal is to create descriptive, possibly multi-dimensional, categories which form a preliminary framework for analysis. Words, phrases or events that appear to be similar can be grouped into the same category. I discussed emergent thematic codes and patterns with my chair in order to gain

important insight into how different people might view the same data, amalgamate varying and competing interpretation, and keep myself open to competing ideas (i.e., researcher triangulation).

As I read more interviews, I amended preliminary codes, as needed, to reflect emergent consistencies in the data. Code amending, or development, characterized data analysis throughout the proposed effort. This analytical behavior is in keeping with accepted data analytical practices when working with qualitative data (Lincoln & 1986, Patton, 2002). After old codes were amended or new ones created all previously coded transcripts were re-examined and recoded where necessary to ensure that all transcripts were coded accurately. This re-coding process is known as "extension" or "bridging" (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Cross-Case analysis

After within-case analysis was completed, I conducted a cross-case analysis, or the third and final level of analysis. According to Creswell (1998), when using a multiple case study design, the usual formula is to "first provide a detailed description of each case and themes within the case, called a within-case analysis, followed by a thematic analysis across the cases, called a cross-case analysis, as well as assertions or an interpretation of the meaning of the case (p. 63).

A cross-case analysis is an analytic method that facilitates the comparison of commonalities and difference in the events, activities, and processes that are the units of analyses in case studies (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Moreover, studying multiple cases increases generalizability and develops more nuanced descriptions and more powerful explanations (Miles & Huberman, 1994). However, and this warrants emphasis, generalizability was NOT a principle goal of my study. Instead, I was hoping to expand the repertoire of possible SSA male

youth experiences instead of pointing to one singular and "correct" description for all SSA male youth.

Comparisons across the selected case interviews were made to determine where similarities and differences exist (Yin, 1994). Cross-case analysis enhances researchers' capacities to understand how relationships may exist among discrete cases, accumulate knowledge from the original case, refine and develop concepts (Ragin, 1997), and build or test theory (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In order to make emerging themes and patterns visible, I used a matrix data display data. Displays present and organize data in a way that allows it to be grasped as a whole (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The use of a display allowed me to draw preliminary conclusions the data, including detecting of differences, noting of patterns and themes, seeing trends. (Miles & Huberman, 1994)

Verification

Creswell (1998) presents eight 8 useful procedures for verification and recommended that at least two of these be incorporated into any given study: 1) Prolonged engagement and persistent observation, 2) Triangulation, 3) Peer review or debriefing, 4) Negative case analysis, 5) Clarifying researcher bias, 6) Member checks, 7) Deep, elaborative description , and 8) Publication. For this dissertation, I incorporated triangulation; member checking; clarifying researcher bias; and deep, elaborate description.

Trianagulation.

In order to lend credibility to the findings of my study, I incorporated a number of confirmation procedures. The first validity procedure I employed was triangulation (Creswell, 1998). Merriam (1988) defines triangulation as "using multiple investigators, multiple sources

of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings" (p. 204). The case

discussion/selection meeting with my chair, as well the continued discussion during within-case

analyses served as one form of triangulation. Triangulation was also inherent in the fact that I

used multiple sources of data since interviews were conducted with several participants; this is

known as methodological triangulation (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Member checking.

According to Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen, (1993, p. 31", "No data obtained

through the study should be included in it if they cannot be verified through member checks."

There were three separate member checks for the present study with the first second check

inherited from the larger Mosaic Study effort.

The first check, which took place after half of the Mosaic interviews were completed,

involved group format interviews with study participants who had not participated in a

qualitative interview and three semi-structured individual interviews with adult "experts" who

had significant professional experience working with SSA youth. Interviewees during this first

check were asked to comment on the themes that were being discovered through the interviews

and the general line of inquiry used to secure these data. Among the primary aims of this check

was to learn if researchers were failing to capture important themes. Secured feedback informed

the process and content of the remaining interviews. Obtaining feedback by the studied

population is described as "member checking" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981), and feedback through

knowledgeable experts is a form of "peer debriefing" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Both forms of

feedback serve as sources of "phenomenological validity" (Bronfenbrenner, 1976).

The second confirmation check, which took place after all the individual interviews were

completed, consisted of four focus groups with study participants who had participated in the

qualitative interviews. During these focus groups, participants verified the themes and their

subsequent arrangement into pattern codes.

The third and final check consisted of a focus group with four self-identified SSA young

men age 18-23 while I was on internship at UCLA; these young men were enrolled as

undergraduate students at UCLA and actively involved at the university's LGBT student center.

These "experts" providing voluntary, non-remunerated confirmatory and competing insight and

feedback regarding the emerging findings I was uncovering during within-case analysis. As

noted previously, since new data was being collected from this focus group data review, IRB

approval was not required for this step.

Verifying researcher bias.

Reflective of my phenomenological stance, my task as a researcher was to allow the

known or experienced world of study participants reveal itself to the reader through their own

words. This was accomplished principally by journaling. Phenomenology requires the

researcher to first select a phenomenon which holds personal value and then through the process

of bracketing or journaling, the researcher attempts to suspend his beliefs and experiences of that

phenomenon in order to "take a fresh perspective of the phenomenon under examination"

(Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Morales, 2007, p. 254).

Throughout this dissertation, I kept a reflective journal (Appendix F) in which I

attempted to keep track of my own biases, prejudices, and preconceptions regarding the

phenomenon in question and the population with whom I will work. In addition to my

reflections, the journal also documented the course of the research, and thus served to extend the

instrument (me) beyond myself. The journal progressed from very broad reflections, "What does

relational resilience mean to me," to more focused musing, "What comes to mind when I think

of relational resilience vis-à-vis SSA youth." The goal for my journal was not to eliminate my

preconceptions regarding *relational resilience* or SSA youth-this would be impossible- rather,

this exercise kept me alert of my biases, prejudices, and preconceptions so that I could take steps

to minimize their impact on my understanding of participants lived experiences. The technique

of journaling ensured that the study's findings result not from what my own preconceptions or

biases regarding the phenomena in question, but from the SSA male youth own descriptions of

their experiences (Reitz, 1999).

As a Mexican, gay, male researcher of SSA youth, I came to this project with a history,

gender, sexual orientation, race, language, and culture that influenced how I understood and

interpreted the data. As such, my stance as a researcher cannot be truly objective because I

cannot distance or divorce myself from my own perspective or history. This argument reflects

an epistemological stance, that is a set of assumptions about the world, knowledge, and human

behavior that determines how the researcher interacts with the data. The constructivist

perspective with a subjective epistemology (as in this study) "embraces the notion that meaning

is constructed by an observer (researcher) and that it is context dependent" (Maione, 1997, p.4).

Accordingly, objectivity is impossible because all I know are constructions of the world and the

distinctions that I make pertain more to a revelation of where I stand rather than to an intrinsic

constitution of the world which appears (Becvar & Becvar, 2006). According to Denzin and

Lincoln (2000, p.19), "there are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in

the worlds of – and between – the observer (researcher) and the observed (researched)" and

therefore the observer (researcher) cannot exist outside the observed system (researched)

(Maione, 1997).

Thus, the reality that I understand, interpret, and make knowable to others is not fixed but influenced by who I am and what I already know. This fact echoes the definition of a hermeneutic *circle*, or the idea that understanding and meaning making inevitably incorporates what is already known. The important idea here is that whenever we attempt to decipher a new phenomenon, we come to it with expectations and preconceptions (Way, 2005). It has been suggested that biases and prejudices are "necessary for understanding" (Way, 2005). Biases and prejudices afford relativity from which one can gain an appreciation of and possible understanding of someone else's perceptive or vantage point. Way (2005) writes that instead of forgetting "one's biases, prejudices, and preconceptions, one should engage with such biases and assumptions and determine their validity and limitations. This allows for openness to what participants are saying and not only to confirming expectations.

As a researcher, I view myself as a phenomenologically oriented interpretivist. As an interpretivist, I acknowledge and accept that I have my own understandings, my own convictions, my own conceptual orientation, and that I, too, am a member of a particular culture at a specific time in history (Milers & Huberman, 1994). Moreover, I accept that these idiosyncratic and personal formulations bear upon how I see and interpret the world. In other words, I am part of the meaning making process that makes the world understandable to me and what I say about it to others. Throughout my analyses I continually reflected on my expectations and how my interpretations come to be. This reflective stance kept me open to what I did not know and what my expectations prevented me from learning. It allowed me to listen to the voices of SSA male youth, what Kierkegaard called a passion for what is possible (Pattison, 2006)

Finally, as a phenomenologically oriented interpretivist, my choice of research paradigms is influenced by my particular philosophical world view.   For me, the goal of research is to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it. This goal is variously spoken of as an abiding concern for the lived world, for the emic point of view, for understanding meaning, for grasping the actor's definition of a situation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As such, qualitative (non-positivistic) phenomenological research models bear a strong appeal for me.

Elaborate description.

Lincoln and Guba (1984) support the power of observation and the utility of the human as an instrument and declare that the validity of data gained from such sources depends on "privileged access" and "sufficient intensity and duration" (p. 193). These characteristics are the foundation of what they describe as "prolonged engagement" and "persistent observation" (Lincoln & Guba, 1984). This project spanned over two years, during which time I also completed my clinical residency at UCLA. I engaged with the data from the beginning of this project. Careful and repeated reading of the transcribed interviews was necessary for case selection and to ensure eventual feasibility of this effort.

CHAPTER III:

RESULTS

This chapter presents findings from two separate but related analytical endeavors. The first endeavor was a within-case analysis. The themes that emerged from these efforts are presented within the context of the lived experiences from which they were distilled. Presentation of cross-case analysis then follows in which I present common themes as well as variant themes (i.e., themes not common to all participants but common to a majority of participants). A thick description is provided to illustrate all themes. To protect privacy and help ensure confidentiality, I assigned pseudonyms to all study participants; these pseudonyms are used throughout the remainder of this dissertation, including presentation of cross-case analyses findings and the discussion.

Within-Case Findings

In keeping with a phenomenological focus, each participant case analysis is presented separately with the participant's own voice (i.e., their own words) used to illustrate important themes. As is typical in qualitative research, the description of a case is thick and is imparted to the reader in a personalized manner. As there is no prescribed or "best" manner in which to present within-case finding, I elected to incorporate discussion into their presentation. I believe this a useful method of presentation as it begins to weave presented findings into the study's research questions and communicates to the reader how I was understanding and conceptualizing these findings. Excerpts from transcribed data will be presented to illustrate key themes and concepts. For the sake of clarity, participants' responses are presented in normal font, while investigator comments or queries are presented in italics.

Before proceeding, I want to acknowledge the inherent subjectivity in my presentation of findings-a step rarely taken by most researchers. From an interpretivist perspective, the findings presented represent layers of construction and interpretation bounded within a specific theoretical framework (i.e., Relational Cultural Theory). As the "instrument" for this project and subsequent analyses, my voice, perspective, and biases are embedded in what is presented. My "interpretation" manifests in my selecting of some excerpts (and not others) and in my use and placement of them in certain sections of this chapter. I made these decisions primarily by choosing data that stood out for me as particularly poignant, provocative, and/or representative of an idea. Finally, I chose articulations of personal experiences and ideas that made theoretical material more available and "real" and which brought to life the processes of relational resilience. In sum, the work that follows is value-laden and subjective.

"Jacob" (0105)

Introduction.

Jacob was a 17-year-old, self-identified Latino ("Mexican American"), gay male at the time of his interview. The second of three children born in the United States to Mexican immigrant parents, Jacob was living at home with his parents and three siblings at interview. When asked about his family, Jacob contrasted the relational distance experienced with his parents to the "particularly close relationship" he "enjoyed" with his older sister. Asked about his circle of friend, Jacob reported that his "close friends" were mostly heterosexual, Latina females his same age.

Jacob was a senior at a prestigious, public, college preparatory school in Chicago where he reported marked involvement in a number of extra-curricular group activities (e.g., band and choir). Although self-identifying as "gay," Jacob pointed out the he "still likes girls," suggesting a less traditional and possibly more fluid understanding of sexual identity and the use of the label "gay."

Themes.

Evidence of relational connection (one-one-one connection and connection with community) were notable in this interview. Jacob identified his older sister and his former therapist as people who had been supportive of him as a young gay male. In the excerpt that follows, there is evidence of Jacob reaching out for help, owning vulnerability, and being open to being affected by his therapist (i.e., evidence of *supported vulnerability*):

> …I have my therapist… the first time I was really afraid…She thought that I needed to start dealing with it [being gay]…I didn't want to do, so I was afraid…I was crying because I was gay …My hands were sweating and stuff… She was cool…she just made me feel that it wasn't the end of the world. And she made me see that there was much more to me than just being gay…She didn't want to see me going around doing bad things. So she just cared for me. She wanted me to be okay.

By reaching out to his therapist and being willing be seen as vulnerable, as needing of someone else, Jacob denies the primacy of self-sufficiency and the tendency of seeing vulnerability as weakness.

In addition to his therapist, Jacob identified a formal mentor as someone who was supportive of him as he grew into his gay male status. The following illustrates central characteristics of what RCT understands as good connection or *growth-fostering relationships* (i.e., engagement, empathy, mutual empathy, and authenticity):

> ...this guy from this mentoring program...I saw him five years. He took me to all these places and he was like a father figure that I never had. And then I remember one day I was just like, when I started accepting, well, acknowledging it [being gay]...I told him because...I was told that if you tell the people that you care for...something along those lines...he was like, I knew you were.

The relationship suggests being present and caring about the relationship (*relational engagement*); listening, feeling with and joining the other's world (empathy); being in the experience together (*mutual empathy*); and honest expression of one's needs and feelings (*authenticity*).

In addition to interpersonal connection, Jacob also spoke of connection to community-specifically the gay community-and by so doing suggesting *community connection* as an important subtheme.

> I go to this [gay] youth program…I was so scared the first day…But like I felt that really gave me confidence, I mean, even at school, even like with friends…I think that self-confidence is needed before you go out there, you go anywhere, and move on with your life, and I think that's self-confidence in my life.

In discussing his involvement with the gay youth group, Jacob discussed finding mutuality and empathy with similarly self-identified gay male youth. He discussed how group members "just get me" and how "I don't have to explain myself to them…that's cool." These

brief quotes suggest key components of *mutual empathic involvement* that for Jacob has uniquely

manifested within the context of a gay community and which leads to an increase in self-worth

and confident-key outcomes of growth-promoting relationships:

> ...I was so scared the first day I went, like last year and stuff...But like I felt that really gave me confidence, I mean, even at school, even like with friends...I think that self-confidence is needed before you go out there, you go anywhere, and move on with your life...

Connection toward community appears to balance that strategies of disconnection

adopted by Jacob (e.g., pulling away from peers at school) while living in a heteronormative

culture that shames, anthologizes and is intolerant of same-sex attracted individuals (Jordan,

1997).

Relational disconnection was a repeated, nuanced, and rich theme in Jacob's interview.

Whether talking about his relationship with his parents, "I'm not as nearly as close to my mom as

I was before not. We've grown apart. Since I told her I was gay," or his experiences at school

where he was the target of social marginalization for being gay, Jacob spoke to invalidation,

discrimination, and rejection of his gay male status vis-à-vis a culture where heteronormativity

was privileged and preferred

> ...my mom is probably the person I care for the most, but I just, like recently one day I was just angry...I started using curse words...and she was like, well, because it's [being gay] a different culture and it's hard for me to accept it... she's always saying that she will always love me and I don't understand how she could love me if she doesn't accept me...

Within this narrative of disconnection, *shame* emerged as a noteworthy subtheme. In the

following excerpt, we have evidence of the enormous impact that *shame* had on Jacob, leading

him to perhaps understand that although he feels a desire to connect, he feels unworthy of

compassionate understanding or empathic responsiveness form others, in this case peers at

school:

I don't like going to that school...I don't like the people...I don't like my insecurities...like are they talking about me...If you tell someone you're gay at school, eventually everyone finds out... it becomes oh, [Jacob]", the gay one. *What's it been like for you with hearing that?* I try to say that I don't care but I do...Makes me angry....I realize is that I probably put myself out there too much, so like these last couple of months... I have been pulling back...and that was good.

Within the context of home, *shaming* appeared to be a purposeful, hurtful activity done to Jacob by his parents:

…My dad's like ultra machismo…when I was little he used to hit me and tell me that he didn't want a faggot…he would give me cold showers…my mom just sat there and she's, because it's like you're a Mexican woman…she probably thought that by him doing that I wouldn't grow up to be gay...

Here *shame* can be understood as an active socializing force used by members of a dominant group (heterosexual parents) to silence the reality of a member of a subordinate group (a same-sex attracted child). As such, *shame* is an active sociopolitical force of disconnection tethered to unique cultural patterns of values, beliefs regarding nonconformity with heteronormative expectations. Proponents of RCT (Hartling, Rosen, Walker, & Jordan, 2000) write that *shaming* is a form of social control whereby the dominant group benefits when members of subordinate group blame themselves for their assumed inferiority.

I would always like cry, so I would say why am I gay? Why am I gay? Life is so unfair… I guess you just hate yourself so much because you're gay and I think…I did really bad things. Like I would just sleep around with people for no reason…And it was like I did it because I, I don't know, I just didn't feel like I deserved to be with someone doing a healthy manner. So I was really ashamed…

Here Jacob appears to have internalized the belief "I am the problem," reflecting what Miller (1988) has identified as the "depressive spiral" of disconnection that results in a sense of "condemned isolation." With this apparent self-blaming and self-shaming, we have evidence to support what proponents of RCT would call the opposite of the "good five things" (i.e., the outcomes of disconnection). That is, Jacob presents decreased/depressed energy; confusion

regarding himself and others; he appears unable to act in an adaptive and growth-promoting

manner; her reports a decreased sense of self-worth; and is turning away from connection.

The mechanism of disconnection discussed by Jacob is reminiscent of Walker's (2001)

description of the *power-over paradigm* with regard to women, an ideology that defines women

as "other," as less than, subordinate, and inferior. Enforcing the destructive power-over

paradigm involves the creation of hierarchies and dichotomies and sustaining of them through

the silencing of opposition (e.g., homosexuality). Here is an clear demonstration of this power-

over dynamic in action in Jacob's life "…whenever I talk to her[mother] about it [begin gay],

she's always telling me to be quiet…she accepts it but she doesn't think it's right, but it's

different…and that hurts me more."

Inauthenticity emerged as a second noteworthy subtheme within the larger theme of

relational disconnection.

> …when I got to high school…I just really wanted to do things that were cool, that were
> manly…I was on the football team and I used to ask myself why am I doing this? I don't
> want to do this. Then I would just say, oh, because, because you make friends. I would
> make excuses, but I didn't like it…But I forced myself because I wanted to be athletic.
> Because I wanted to be just like a guy.

Bake and Miller (1994) have written about this inauthentic presentation of self as the

central relational paradox of connections and disconnections, "in the face of significant

disconnection, we believe that we yearn for even more connection…we become afraid of

engaging with others…we keep important parts of ourselves our of connection; that is, we

develop strategies of disconnection." (p. 1)

While the *central relational paradox* was certainly present in Jacob's narrative, there was

the suggestion this behavior was arguably adaptive within the context of an invalidation

environment. When Jacob reported that he was "pulling back" from peers and not "putting

myself out there" anymore he was creating in effect disconnecting,-however, he was

disconnecting from a non-mutual, non-empathic relationships that have taught him that in order

to keep an important part of himself alive it is best to not bring it fully into an unsafe or rejecting

relationships. Within this context, *inauthenticity* appears strategically adaptive.

"Ethan" (0119)

   Introduction.

   Ethan was a 21-year-old, self-identified African American, gay ("fully-blown gay") male

with a history of bisexuality at the time of his interview.   He was one of six children, a fraternal

twin to a female sister, and one of three same-sex attracted children born to a single mother.

Ethan reported a close relationship with his sister and a distant one with his mother. Beyond his

family, he reported a large relational circle of mostly African American gay male peers with

similar backgrounds to his own (i.e., low SES, single parent households). Ethan's narrative was

notable for the report of 65 past romantic/sexual relationships, including romantic and sexual

relationships with women and sex-trade activity with men.

   Ethan described himself as "charming, lovable, and easy to get along with," but added

that he was once "sarcastic…bad tempered…and defensive."   Noting a history of physical

aggression, school suspensions, drug use and sale, foster-home placement, homelessness, and

prostitution, Ethan reported "barely" graduating from a public high school on Chicago's far

south side and having no immediate plans for furthering his education.

   Themes.

   Relation connection was a prominent theme in Ethan's interview; as in the preceding

there was evidence of interpersonal as well and community relational phenomena. At an

interpersonal level, Ethan reflected on finding a supportive, nurturing, and authentic adult while

living at his last foster placement:

> I found a lot of support there from the staff members. I told them about my sexual
> gender and it was like, well, it's fine...but in a way, it's just not cool to express yourself
> just to ANYBODY...Because some people don't just feel comfortable...with the
> counselors telling me this, I gradually began to grasp and understand what I should do at
> a time when I'm in different areas or in different surroundings or different environments,
> how I should address and approach people and how I should act.

The above illustrates not just a willingness to be affected by others in relationship (i.e.,

supported vulnerability and authenticity), but a willingness to take in information about other

people that helps you to relate to other people are reflect key relational processes of growing in

relationship, a relational process that proponents of RCT have termed "achieving clarity about

others (Fidele, 2004) that is suggestive of relational awareness.

Later, Ethan details one of these relationships further to note themes of respect,

acceptance, and being listened to,

> …she was…a mother that I didn't have. The supportive side of giving me that comfort,
> to let me know that my sexuality is okay. It's okay, because I'm human and everybody is
> different…she was always there to like shadow over my behavior…that's what made me,
> that's what made ME become attracted to her more. Because of the way she talked about
> me.

While connections to individuals served to affirm Ethan's gay identity, group

membership provided him with a sense of belonging, introduced him to others with shared

experiences, and allowed Ethan to make new meaning of personal struggles.

> I was going to Horizons…I was attending the group settings and I started meeting a
> couple of people there…we started um, hanging out on Belmont and other places and I
> got to…network.

Being part of a group for group for SSA youth meant that the Ethan could talk with and

share with other youth who may have also experienced living as "other". Being with and

growing with others was also reflected in taking part in gay community events. Asked how

being at the Pride Parade was helpful, Ethan's words were:

> ...that was fun, I loved that...*did that help you see yourself as gay*? Yeah. Because
> everybody was around doing it. Everybody was around just being gay. Walking hand in
> hand, smiling and taking pictures and ohhh, on the stage dancing and things, just stuff
> that I like doing.

While *trust* emerged as a noteworthy subtheme within the context of supportive and

growth-fostering relationship, Ethan linked this relational feature to engaging in health-

compromising, higher risk sexual behavior:

> …on the condom thing, um, I do protective sex…But if you're in a one-man's relationship, and you have that one partner….and you go for consistent, on a consistent basis about being fair…not screwing any other person behind your back…then it's okay to NOT have condoms. But if you feel like you cannot trust this person, then don't take the risk.

This finding suggests likely tension between Ethan's clarity and confusion regarding

trust. By confusion, I mean an inability to see or understand clearly-an inability that requires

careful attention and address by those relationships that aim to help Ethan.

Relational disconnection was a second repeated theme in Ethan's interview, where he

discussed *relational disconnection* at both an interpersonal and community level. Here are his

words regarding interpersonal disconnection at home with his mother:

> The hard part [about being gay] is my mom, she doesn't accept it...she is now an evangelist...she don't like for my twin sister, myself and my brother to bring our friends around that are gay or bisexuals...she calls them spirits...I said, can one of my spirits come over with me [to Thanksgiving dinner]? It's like, you know how I feel about that, bringing spirits around me. It's already bad I gotta have you all around me. It's like, okay, mom. She don't, she don't, she does not condone it.
> *Shame* or *being shamed* appears embedded in the above excerpt, as well as peppered

elsewhere in Ethan's interview. From a relational perspective, shame represents "a felt sense of

unworthiness to be in connection, a deep sense of unlovability with the ongoing awareness of

how very much one wants to connect" (Jordan, 1989). A desire to connect with his mother is

clear in Ethan's words, "But however she [Ethan's mother], um, we are still her children and she

recognizes us as her, her children and she still loves us and give us, give us the support that she

can give us."

The use of the word "spirit" is provocative, as it appears intended to inform or reinforce Ethan's understanding of self as deviant and as less valued.   The use of this word is not unlike other dominant groups that do not want to deal with a subordinate group or do not want to allow them to express open conflict or expression and thus devalues, invalidates, and dismissed them altogether. The use of this word diminishes the empathic possibility within a relationship, cutting off the opportunity for the Ethan and his mother to progress toward mutuality and authentic connection (Jordan, 1989).

Proponents of RCT posit that in an effort to east the pain of chronic disconnection (i.e., chronic shame and humiliation), some individuals may engage is maladaptive and self-destructive behavior that may initially represent an attempt to connect with anyone or anything, but in fact create further problems and compounds *relational disconnection*. Ethan's history of prostitution may serve to illustrate this point. Here are his words:

> ...I have been with 65 people...Now for me to be 21, that's a hell of a lot of people...I was thinking to myself, if I've been through all these people, why the hell am I still looking for love? Something just wouldn't let me go...I need that type of, that, that comfort, that secures, that know, knowability [sic] to tell, for somebody to tell me that everything is gonna be okay...Or I don't have anybody, but me. And it is lonely...it's, it hurts, and it makes you feel weak and it makes you feel not wanted. And I'm thinking to myself, I'm so fucking fine, how come I ain't got nobody...this is why I was prostituting, because I knew because the way I look, my beauty...Come here. $200. Pay the price, you get what you want.

Reflecting a history of disconnection, and the subsequent mistrust linked to a need to protect oneself from relational rejection, Ethan discusses how even the disconnection of prostitution may not be enough to keep one relationally safe: "...I'm telling you, saying protect your heart is because if you give your body up, you can have feelings behind that. So just be careful with your heart, too."

Ethan also discussed a *relational disconnection* from larger social groups, often as negotiation of self as "other" vis-à-vis the larger and more dominant group. As an African American, gay male, Ethan has had to negotiate self as both African American and gay. Here are his words regarding the "negative" things about being African American:

> …its hard to find a job. It REALLY is…even if you had prior experience….have good communication skills…I'm using my background because this is true…now trying to find a job, it has been HELL... however, I have not lost my cool because I've been doing good with my anger management skills.

Ethan links this disconnection to messages about African Americans emanating from the majority:

> ….some people say that African Americans, they're failures in life because all they do, especially the younger um, generation, all they do is sit on the corner, sell drugs, smoke pot….never go to school and they don't want to become nothing.

The construct of *passing* emerged as an important them within the larger framework of *disconnection from community*. Asked how he "fits" into the African American community he has just identified, Ethan words are:

> …even though I'm gay, and I'm open with it…I don't approach them [AA males in his neighborhood] with my sexuality…my name is T, you can call me…you dig? That type of, not (high voice) hey, hey boys. Not like that…then they want to whoop your ass…

While that above excerpt illustrates unique empathy and attunement to the relational and interpersonal dynamics that affect relational partners within a unique socio-cultural context (i.e., *relational awareness*), it also suggests inauthenticity and purposeful distance from others that served to illustrate how some gay male youth navigate a heteronormative culture that dominates and oppresses them.

The decision about when to be authentic and speak up involves a good deal of careful weighing of possible risks and consequences and the exercise of judgment of the safety of the situation.   Ethan's gender policing or "passing" allows him to avoid discrimination (Goffman,

1963), because society routinely assumes that most persons are heterosexual (i.e., compulsory

heterosexuality; Rich, 1980). It is noteworthy, that his *passing* does not appear to negate his

sexual identity but instead represents an essential skill in order for survival in homophobic and

heterosexist culture, "I mean, you can live your life openly, but you don't, you don't have to be so

flamboyant...Everybody in the neighborhood knows that I am me...they respect me, because I

respect myself."

Linked to a reported need to "respect" oneself, Ethan also stressed the importance of *self-*

reliance and taking of others within the context of what it "takes to be a man,"

> …being able to support yourself AND also the companion that you are with…being
> prompt, always, always on time. Whether it's work…paying bills, all these things are
> important because they are priorities that are a part of life in order for you to get through,
> through life…that's my main thought on being a man.

While apparently echoing socialization messages imposed upon men that enforce power

over dynamics, there is something different in how Ethan is doing "self reliance;" self-reliance

for the sake of self-reliance does not appear to be the case here, but instead self-reliance in order

to do with others. A challenge to traditional standards of masculinity is further present in the

following,

> …my whole aspect on being a man is just being able to handle responsibilities and being
> able to accept criticism, that's part of being a man, and it's a part of life. Things that you
> have to go through life, because if you, if you are able to accept criticism, then you are
> able to make room for improvement.

A man who is makes available to the influence of others is one engaged with a central

feature of supported vulnerability.

"Michael" (0143)

Introduction.

Michael was 23-year-old African American ("Black African American"), gay male at the time of his interview. The oldest of four children born to a single mother, Michael was living alone in an apartment on Chicago's near south side. He reported a strained relationship with his mother and most of his siblings. A high school graduate, Michael was working full-time as a delivery man in Chicago, but had hopes of starting a career in the culinary arts in the near future.

Michael described himself as, "a quiet type person. [I like] to go out and have fun...church, work, and getting myself back in school. I DO have like mood swings sometimes, but they don't have to get in the way." He reported being "happy" about being gay, adding that he had many friends, and that he was very much involved in his church (ushers on regular basis and involvement in several church ministries).

Themes.

Disconnection was a repeated theme across various relational groups and settings. With regard to peers (mostly male peers), Michael referenced sub-themes of rejection and marginalization, "the friends I had [in high school], they all dissed me…saying, okay, he's gay, then we don't want to talk with him. He nasty and all of that."   Michaels' "failure" to measure up to the expected and rewarded standard of heteronormativity led to experiences of isolation and aloneness that left him feeling shut out of the contact with his peers-an experience RCT terms "condemned isolation," (Miller, 1998).

> *So what was that like, like losing that many people?* I called that the game of rejection. Because first of all, you get to know a person and then they turn around and stab you in the back. And then they don't want to talk to you, they don't want to socialize or kick it with you. Because they find out your sexual orientation...Like my first 5 friends that I went to school with, they all was cool about it...So I still in contact with five of them. The other 5 are going about their business. So it's been rough.

In "condemned isolation," Michaels reported feeling alone, immobilized and somehow at fault for this state-a state that he also experienced after telling his mother about his sexual identity, "my mother, when I finally came out and told her, she acted like she didn't…she ignored me…it's like a big challenge."

The preceding *relational disconnections*, along with that reported at work, "I had a lot of issues about it at work…oh, he's gay and we're gonna leave him alone…we're not gonna talk to him," reflect key features of what RCT would term a non-growth promoting relationship (i.e., disengagement, a lack of empathy, and a lack of mutuality. Michael's capacity to bring his real experience, feelings, and thoughts into his relationship with his mother and friends at school is noteworthy and reflective of his authenticity and desire for a more honest connection (i.e., a capacity for relational resilience). Unfortunately for Michael, and for the development of a truly growth-promoting relationship with his mother, his authenticity was not met with reciprocation by key relational players in his life,

> …I told my sister about my sexual orientation and she was like, okay, that's your business…I ain't got nothing to do except to say you're my brother and I'm gonna love my brother just for who he is…Now my mother…She'll say, well, I don't want him to be in the lifestyle there, turn around and say, okay, I'm cool with it…Like I call her the Two-Faced Thing. Because that's how she is. My sister, she's just cool with all my friends and stuff. She real cool about it.

While the above does indicated *relational disconnection*, it also reflects respectful listening to difference in an accepting and nonjudgmental fashion on the part of Michael's sister to suggest the existence and or potential for a growth-fostering relationship in Michael's life.

Within a narrative marked by repeated and varied disconnection, traditional messages regarding the performance of masculinity (i.e., hegemonic messages regarding masculinity)

emerged as an important subtheme. Here Michael gives voice to the messages he grew up

hearing,

> Men are dominant...we supposed to have more power. Like if we had a male figure in
> our life, for example, our fathers and stuff...they'll set the ground rules...that okay [to
> do]...[men] don't have to do this...[so that I] go through life not...feminine. They want us
> to be like the stronger person...dominant...in control… Knowing how to survive on
> theyselves [sic]."

This excerpt echoes Gilligan's (1982) description of how individuals and relationships

are forced toward disconnections dictated by patriarchal culture that enforces a code of

disconnection early in a boy's life. The social injunction here is to be stoic, stable, independent,

and, most notable, to not be like women-that is, to not be dependent, warmth, and empathic. "No

sissy stuff" appears to undergird this injunction.

For Michael early messages of control, power, and masculinity have extended to

messages regarding sexual behavior and how same-sex attracted men may perform these

messages with a sexualized context that can lead to lack of mutuality, empowerment, and l likely

disconnection,

> ...if two guys get together and be in a relationship, you know you gonna have one that's
> gonna act like a female [passive]. And one that's gonna be acting like a male, more
> control over that person. And that [feminine] person might be acting a little subditty
> towards the other [dominant] male...And then the [passive] man might end up turning
> around and getting mad at that person, and that's be a big argument and then they break
> up...

The extension of hegemonic messages regarding masculinity and the performance of

gender roles with a sexualized context was noteworthy as it underscored both the complexity of

these messages and the extent of the work required by males to overcome and grow (relationally)

beyond these messages.

Despite noteworthy and repeated *relational disconnection*, Michael's more recent history

suggested the presence of growth-promoting (relational) connection. He identified his

connection to a best friend who also happened to be gay as an essential relationship. Connecting

because of their identity, the two have helped each other out through difficult times, "we help

each other out…I took him in when his mother kicked him out and he mother took me in when I

got kicked out…So it's like a two-way street"-or what RCT would term *mutual empathic*

involvement.

Asked what this friend did for him that was "helpful," Michael suggested verbal and

nonverbal respect and value for his needs (i.e., engagement), including his romantic needs,

> *What things did he teach you?* How to get to know a [gay] person and how to spend time
> with that person. And I'm like, well, this is gonna be complicated...[and] he be no, it's
> not...Stop being scared. (chuckles)...My big issue about dating...[my best friend] was sort
> of showing you how to like date and be comfortable about dating…He was actually
> trying to show me how ah, how to accept yourself in the gay lifestyle, how to be more,
> not out, but how to experience it more....

The above suggest that *relational connection* to an individual served as a pathway for

confirmation and affirmation of Michael's identity as a SSA. The two friends connected because

of their marginalized status and provide one another with the support and friendship to deal with

the challenges they experience living as members of a marginalized group. The friendship also

served to help Michael connect to similar identified male youth and thus foster connection to

community,

> ...my friend was telling me about [CBO that works with SSA youth]. When I first when
> over there, it was like, well, you can go over here...they give you condoms and stuff, how
> to have safe sex and all of this stuff. I'm thinking like okay, fine. And so I kept going
> over there,...And then when I completed THAT program, I went over to [2nd CBO
> working with gay youth]...I had a few friends over there...they was like, well, oh, we cool
> with you, oh, we fine with you.

There appears to have been fruitful empowerment from Michael's relationship with his

best friend cultivated a desire for ongoing and new connection with other people and

communities. While there was no reported evidence of what RCT would call mutual

empowerment, there is the suggestion that both Michael and his best friend felt stronger, more

alive, more able to create, and desirous of bringing their feeling of empowerment to others.

While disconnection linked to sexual behavioral practices and gender were noted by

Michael, he elaborated this point by suggesting that honest and open communication regarding

one's needs (*authenticity*) and an awareness of their impact on one another are key aspects of

relational (connection) equity

> …I really don't think sex is the number one thing that's um, with
> men…it's…communication…You gotta work something out…Okay, first that person
> gonna say, we gonna have sex tonight. And then the other person might say, okay. Then
> it would be like, okay, if they not in the mood for it, then they would just tell the mate,
> like okay, I'm not ready for it right now…the dominant one might be a little supportive to
> that person, try to help him out, try and explain his problems and stuff and then trying to
> see if that person would explain their problems to the dominant person, try to work
> something out with it.

The above quote echoes acknowledging and owning vulnerability as a growth promoting

phenomenon (Jordan, 2004b). Openness to being affected by a relational partner is central to

intimacy and to growth-fostering relationships, according to RCT and reflective of *supported*

vulnerability. Michael appears to echo Jordan's (2004a) statement that "vulnerability per se is

not a problem; it is disowned vulnerability that becomes problematic" (p. 33).

Yet it is not only *supported vulnerability* that is echoed in the above, but also the idea of

mutual empathic involvement. That is, being mutually engaged, committed, and attuned to the

interpersonal dynamics that affect both relational partners. Through this supportive, mutually

empathic relational dynamic, Michael suggests the development of clarity about the movement

of the relationship, including an awareness of patterns of disconnection and re-connection-in the

language of RCT, this refers to *relational awareness*. Issues of masculinity are here interwoven,

as Michaels challenges the presumption that two sexually "dominant" gay males are challenged

in having an erotically and sexually equitable relationship.

"Jayden" (0209)

Introduction.

Jayden was a 22-year-old, self-identified African American ("Black"), gay male at the time of his interview. On his own since the age of 17, he reportedly spent most of his adolescent years in either a group home or foster care setting. Unemployed at the time of the interview, Jayden was hoping to earn his high school diploma through the Job Corp while also learning the trade of bricklaying.

A self-reported former troublemaker, "I kept all the fuss going, all the fights going between my friends and whoever was with me," Jayden described himself as an "old child" with both wisdom and (relational) experience that made him a positive role model and sought after "mentor" to friends,

> ...I actually talk to my friends about anything, so usually it's something going on with a person...they need some type of guidance...they look at me in the situation I'm in. And the things I've been going through. And how I'm dealing with it. So they ask me about what I think they should do.

Themes.

Connection was a rich and nuanced theme in Jayden's story. At an interpersonal level, he spoke about connecting with several staff members at the last group home where he lived who, according to Jayden, acknowledged and validated his status as a gay man. Here are Jayden's words:

> When I finally talked to him about it [being gay], it was kind of funny because I used to always beat up boys in my group home for saying I was gay. And I wanted to prove to them I was straight...But once I came out of the closet, I didn't worry about anybody talking about me...it seemed like everybody cool with me, because I was still me.

Connection to this identified staff member was instrumental because it provided a model for dealing with adversity, provided a caring relationship, and helped to facilitate Jayden's

positive connection to other youth that in turn affirmed his identity.   For Jayden, having just one

person to affirm his gay identity was the connection he needed to accept himself.

Jayden's words further suggest that this and other relationship with adults staff members

were characterized by nonverbal and verbal respect and value for Jayden's needs (i.e.,

engagement and empathic involvement),

> …I didn't have no roommate, they made [staff] that part easy for me, because I told them I don't need nobody having no accusations on me, oh, I tried to touch on them or something like that…it was good that they cooperated with everything I pretty much wanted, they dealt with me through my phases, it was kind of good. I enjoyed my time with them.

Authenticity and *respect* within the framework of mutual engagement emerged as key

features of these identified relationships. Here are Jayden's words regarding a relationship that

echoes these features:

> She [staff member] was a sweetheart...any time we needed anything, she was there...and the one most thing that make her stood out from anyone on my staff, is she was real. If you hit her, she was gonna hit your ass back, fuck with the rules...She told us what the real world was about. That's why I think she prepared us well...I trust her a lot to this day.

Being seen, being heard, being cared, and not being judged are subthemes of this and

other identified relationships. Here are Jayden's words regarding his current best friend:

> ...my best friend. To that was like my diary, whatever was going on in my head, she knew…her whole, whole attitude was like something that you would always want from a person…That person just gonna sit there and listen. And that's what I loved about her. Even like with the relationship problems I go through now, she sit on the phone and she listen…she ain't gonna say oh, do it this way because that's what I feel like, or do it this way because it's what everybody else feel…And I like that.

 A history marked by relational conflict and disconnection from both family and peers,

Jayden reported that while at his group home he grew through a relationship characterized by

supported vulnerability and *mutual empathy*. In particular, the attunement of group home staff

member to Jayden's inner-struggle with his same-sex attraction and gay identity appears to have marked a turning point for this young man with regard to relational skills.

Through these relationships, Jayden appears to have grown moderately open to being affected by others. *Relational confidence*, including confidence that he can influence relationships, echoes in Jayden's report regarding more recent relationships with friends who see him as a "role model" and seek him out for advice and guidance. These relationships appear based on mutual trust and commitment to one another and the relationship.

As in prior interviews, *relational disconnection* emerged as a second salient-spoken to by this young man with nuance and richness. Disconnection from the dominant (European American) cultural group emerged as an important experience of disconnection, "...the hardest part for me being a 22-year-old, gay, African American is being an African American…trying to go to work...when you go into interviews, you often is compared to what the average 22-year-old African American is…they put a label on me…a troublemaker…[a] 22 black gay young man, only job that I can only see for them is the party line, hustling for money.

Jayden's voiced experience served to remind us that the context of *relational disconnection* and by extension connection is inextricably linked to a person's racial/cultural/social identities. This is consistent with RCT scholar Walker (2002) who notes that relational movement is made in relational contexts that have been "raced, engendered, sexualized, and situated along dimensions of class, physical ability, religion or whatever constructions carry ontological significance in the culture" (p. 2). Jayden's reported disconnection from the dominant European Community further underscores that an awareness of relationships must consider the ways in which cultural oppression, marginalization, and various

forms of social injustice lead to feelings of isolation, shame, and humiliation among individuals from devalued groups.

Shame and humiliation linked to heteronormative messages regarding masculinity (i.e., *socialization of gender*) emerged as a related subtheme. Here Jayden relates the messages he received while growing up about what it takes to be a man:

> ...that you were tough. You didn't show emotions and you didn't complain about stuff...you shouldn't be scared of anything...You should just bear it, whatever it is, even if you don't agree with it.

This finding is noteworthy because it underscores how traditional socialization practices that emphasize the development of autonomy, separation, toughness, and relational disconnection represents an early silencing of young men's genuine expression of an interdependent, humanly vulnerable self (Pollack, 1998, 2000) and thus a clear challenge to the development of growth-promoting relationships and *relational resilience* in their lives. Given their power to foster disconnection, it was surprising to find that Jayden appeared to embrace a key feature of these messages (i.e., *self-reliance*).

> Being a man is knowing that ain't nobody else in this world gonna take care of you but you…once you become good enough to hold a job…And not have to go home and live with your mom and not asking everybody for this or for that…That makes you a man. That's all about being a man to me is.

Why *self-reliance* was so important to Jayden was not completely clear but appeared linked to the experience of disconnection from his church,

> ...I have been in the church, I had walked out...when I hear a pastor talking about it's so wrong to be a homosexual and just preach so much against that sin, and say how much that sin's not welcome, it makes me mad and I just get up and leave

From a relational perspective, Jayden's embracing of *self-reliance* (disconnection) can be understood as the result of chronic disconnections in relationships. RCT posits that yearning for connection is basic to life and that a lot of pain results when this basic need is not met. As such,

in order to self-protect, individuals may engage with what RCT names "strategies of

disconnection" (Stiver & Miller, 1997) that take individuals out of authentic, complete

connection with relational injurious contexts (e.g., a rejecting church) while allowing them to

keep vital parts of themselves alive.

Related to the idea of disconnection in order to self-protect was the theme/behavior of

passing.

> ...the ones with the high-pitched voice…they just the one that stands out from
> everybody…do everybody need to know you're gay? That's your business….it's not to be
> broadcast out, because that would ask for trouble. That to me, when you're trying acting
> all gay and want to get out loud and stuff, girl, and all this…When you can just nip that in
> the bud and…don't worry about everybody else, don't say nothing to nobody about you,
> and you can take that whole ride, nice smooth and quietly.

Instead of highlighting "passing" as being inauthentic, Jayden underscores it survival

potential for avoiding oppression and discrimination across various contexts within a society that

routinely assumes that most persons are heterosexual (i.e., compulsory heterosexuality; Rich,

1980). This is in keeping with RCT's pattern of reframing as strengths many characteristics that

have been viewed as weaknesses (e.g., emotional responsiveness and interdependence; Jordan,

2004).

Naming and exploring experiences from a relational perspective moves members of

marginalized groups away from internalizing negative views of themselves imposed by a culture

that devalues them. The idea of self-protective disconnection whether this involves "trying to

pass" or concealing ones sexuality for others serves to develop a new value system, which values

disconnections as opportunities for future and further relational growth while resistance. In the

preceding excerpt, Jayden appears to be organizing behaviors of cultural survival to maintain

psychological well-being, enriching relationships and communal support without shame about or

humiliation for his noncompliance with a heteronormative standard.

"William." (0210)

   Introduction.

   William was a 20-year-old, self-identified, Latino ("Mexican American), gay male at the

time of his interview. The youngest of four children born in the United States to Mexican

immigrant parents (described by as Spanish-dominant, "very traditional," and "very Catholic"),

William reported, "I'm pretty close with my siblings and mother", but emotionally "distant" from

his father (described as "not sociable" and "quiet").

   William grew up in a predominately Latino, immigrant neighborhood, where "straight

females from my neighborhood" were his best friends. He reported no close male friendships.

At interview, William was junior a larger, urban, Catholic university in Chicago with no declared

major, but a strong interest in photography as a career option. He moved out of his parents'

home and in with his older sister in order to be close to school.

   Themes.

   William articulated a unique connection to the gay internet community, including gay

internet erotica, that appears to have helped him understand, consolidate, and feel less shame

about his status as a gay man.

> ...on the websites...it seeing another man with another man that helped you kind of put
> those pieces together? [Before this] I wasn't calling myself anything. Because I hadn't
> done anything or met anyone...or seen anything...It was seeing these images that I
> [realized who I]was really attracted to.

> ...It [gay internet community] was just a way to meet people or talk to people...It's just a
> lot of men and trying to get to talk to other men about sex and meeting people and that
> type of thing....it was just a way of getting close without really meeting anyone. It was
> like I was scared, but not scared enough, and then now it's like I'm not, I'm not afraid to
> actually like talk to someone...it was like a stepping stone.

Yet, in similar, yet safer fashion, this internet community allowed him to see that two men could be together-intimately and with pleasure-and that somehow this connection was part of who he was.

William identifies his current and former boyfriend as people who have been supportive, validating, and nurturing of his same-sex status. In discussing these relationships he gives evidence of owning vulnerability and openness to be affected by his relational partner (i.e., *supported vulnerability*)

> ...my boyfriend and I see an ex-boyfriend...[they were] more experienced, older...And like no so fearful about everything...*did you trust them?* Um hum... because we've been together longer and um, more supportive of the whole condom scene...were *these people that you feel cared about you?* Yeah. I looked up to them.

> ...*do you still [see] your ex-boyfriend?* Now and then...for like a year...*And your current boyfriend, how often do you see him?* Every day pretty much.

Evidence of *mutuality* and *empathic involvement* was linked most to matters of romantic and sexual behavior between William and both current and past boyfriends. He was particular aware of how the "fear of catching something" impacted how he and his boyfriends related to one another, how this informed their sexual dynamic and practices and where is obstacled relational growth. Linked to the empathic involvement between romantic partners was clear evidence of relational confidence linked to growing trust between partners. Paradoxically, growing trust in William's narrative lead to both protective (introduction of safe sex practices) and high risk (engaging in unprotected anal sex) sexual behaviors. A lack of experience, guidance, and close intimate gay male friendships were all linked to the engaging in higher risk sexual behavior.

Acknowledging and owning vulnerability as a growth-promoting phenomenon is only possible if William asks for support-to do so, there must be trust and confidence in the

relationship. Trust and confident is presented in the quote above, while apparent clarity in

regarding the movement of the relationship and ways of connection and disconnecting (*relation*

awareness) is demonstrated in what follows:

> my boyfriend now, he's just more, more caring and maybe it's because we've been longer, but more caring and more supportive. Like actually meeting the people in my life, like my friends and my family...just emotionally [supportive]...I care about him and he cares about me...[But] it can be difficult. It can get like a parent figure. So it's been difficult at times....he is older, so he's done the whole…he's done the whole, I just want to have fun thing, blah, blah, blah.

Within this relational context, William's presentation is authentic with regard to what he

needs and wants and, most importantly what he is able to contribute to the relations that suggest

relational awareness and confidence

Authenticity linked to relational growth was an important sub-theme in this interview.

Since "coming out" to family and friends at the age of 19, William reported being able to relate

more authentically to his friends-linking this increase in authenticity to wanting and being able to

make more (male gay) friends.

> I've been meeting a lot of like new [gay] people…I get to be very open with my [new gay] friends and family, so that's a big plus. *Where are you meeting these people?* And through [gay] friends, basically….And what do they [new gay friends] do for you? Just being able to talk about the same things and not having to feel awkward. It's nice.
> The experience of *relational disconnection* was a also a salient and varied theme in this

case interview. William first reflected upon disconnection at home, specifically disconnection

from his parents,

> ...they're [family] still getting used to it [gay identity]…My parents, it still a little sketchy, though….I never told my dad, just because we're not close at all…and then I told my mother but she doesn't really talk about it…she's all religious and the whole, heaven and hell thing.

The distance or disconnection reported at home was linked directly to messages regarding

societal expectations of male gender and masculinity, "being strong…sticking up for

yourself…having a girlfriend just like keeping your feelings to yourself and not showing

emotion or crying." William's story indicates that these messages were modeled ("my day never

talks") and embedded within a specific cultural framework ("my dad is all macho and stuff").

In addition to interpersonal disconnection at home, William also reflected upon

disconnections from different community systems. First, he discussed being disconnected from

the dominant European American group, most poignantly illustrated when he discussed

competing messages he heard about his ethnic community while growing up:

> Messages?...well, from my own community, the Mexican community, proud….and then
> from the media not so proud. Just like we're always like the gangsters or the drug dealers
> or stuff like that

> … like the main successful people will always be like white and yeah. And like everyone
> else is just left behind.

As a Mexican American male, William is "calling out' a system of oppression and

division that serves to keep some groups at the margin of a socially constructed norm that is

privileged and praise. The concept of diversity is here interwoven and appears important to a

culturally embedded understanding of disconnection in William's life.

Within a hierarchical society, diversity denotes enormous issues of power as well as

privilege and advantage. Honoring diversity or difference involves flexibility-and curiosity

about diversity can create opportunity for learning and better connection, according to RCT.

However, to honor, learn, and connect, mutuality must be manifest-and this is what appears to be

lacking in William's reflection with the following outcome reported, "we [William's family]

didn't get along with our [EA} neighbors...we never like interacted...we just stayed to ourself ."

Adding yet more complexity to the experience of disconnection, William discussed

d*isconnection* from his own ethno-racial group because of his sexuality:

...my brother's girlfriend, she lives in [historic Mexican community in Chicago] and I was going to their place…and it was very awkward just walking through that community at that time. Just because you could tell I was gay and I kept getting these looks so…it was just very awkward. So I'd say that at certain times I, I, I'm not part of that community...

This discomfort and disconnection leads William to feel less authentic within this

particular community setting-one that he identifies as his own:

"...like the way I am around other Mexicans and then the way I am around everybody else just because around everybody else I'm um, I'm more...[around] my family, like extended family and like relatives in Mexico, I'm more closed off and quiet. Just because I don't, sometimes I don't know how to act around them.

Mitigated authenticity may reflect internalized *shaming,* which RCT proponents stated is

form of "social control" (Hartling et al, 2000) by which

the dominant group benefits when members of the subordinate group blame themselves for their

assumed inferiority.

The excerpt above suggest that *shaming* may be exceptionally problematic for same-sex

attracted youth of color, who may have additional pressures of ethnic cultural survival and

familial interests that may take precedence

over personal interests.

As suggested by the preceding*, socialization of heternormantivy* emerged as a repeated

subtheme with the broader narrative on disconnection. Here are William's words:

What messages to you get about being a man?...being strong and um, sticking up for yourself, and um, having a girlfriend…keeping your feelings to yourself and now showing emotion or crying…

He went on to say that the messages underscored that men are suppose to take care of

women and that women are inferior to men.

William reported that he neither agreed nor identified with these messages, adding that

forming close relationships with women was "easier" because they, like he, did not fit the

traditional gender stereotype for men (i.e., that men should not be emotionally expressive, needy, or weak). William was clear that the primacy of self-sufficiency and a tendency to see vulnerability as a weakness were common features in the gender messages he learned at home regarding what it meant to a man. (i.e., *relational awareness*)

Disconnection from rejection coupled to *movement toward connection* marked by validation, commonality, and safety was a noteworthy development in William's interview.

> I'd rather be in a gay area than a non-gay area...the South Side [of Chicago]...it was just so closed off and I didn't know one other gay person. And on the North Side it's like you look around and...*They're everywhere?* Yeah, It's nice.

Moving away from harmful disconnection, according to RCT, requires removal of the self or emotional investment from sources that exclude and isolate one from relationships, whether individual or institutional (Miller & Stiver, 1994, 1997). Moving toward connection, according to RCT, promises developmental growth through at three processes; healing, resilience, and resistance (Miller & Stiver, 1997). In the preceding, and by his action, William is demonstrating resistance, healing, and resilience, as he is not being silenced or immobilized by the messages of invalidation and silencing on the "South Side."

"Alexander" (0304)

Introduction.

Alexander was a 19-year-old, self-identified Latino ('Hispanic"), gay ("queer-identified")

male at the time of his interview. A high school graduate with no immediate plans for college,

Alexander introduced himself in the following manner:

> I'm a really goofy person, really spontaneous. I don't think of things. I just do them...I
> can be like really crappy and moody. That happens rarely...other than that I'm a really
> nice person and like to go out, I like, I'm still young inside...I'm mature, I just like to
> have fun. Have a good time.

Themes.

Alexander's interview began with a discussion about the stereotyped cultural messages

he grew up hearing about what it meant to be a "man' and the impact these messages had on his

ability to express his feelings authentically to important people in his life, especially his father.

Here are Alexander's words,

> *What messages do you get about being a man? Or what it takes to be a man?* ...be
> responsible...not be feminine....a man doesn't cry...A man doesn't do this, doesn't do that.
> Like emotionally-wise...just be there, like a stone wall or something... So practically
> because of them [these messages], now I find it really difficult for me to cry

The primacy of invulnerability, of certainty, of power-over dynamics undergird these

gender-specific messages, "a man is…gonna take care of the family…know what to do." A

central idea here is that Alexander can or should only feel productive-even safe-within the

exercise of power over others. According to RCT, "power over" is a concept that keeps

individuals at a distance, enforces traditional notions of hierarchy, and does not encourage

mutually empowering relationships (Miller, 1998). The disconnection that can result from these

messages is made clear by Alexander,

I don't have a relationship. Me and my dad, we can't be in the same room. *Is it around this idea of what it means to be a man?* Ah, it has a lot to do with it. I mean, my parents don't know about me [being gay].

The *inauthenticity* suggested in the preceding excerpt may reflect the efforts of a young man who twists himself in order to fit into the available and needed relationships in his life, in this case a relationship with his parents. As noted by RCT proponents, power differences often keep individuals from being able to speak authentically (Jordan & Cooley, 2000). Alexander appears to have learned to keep a central part of himself alive by not brining it into rejecting relationships.

Within this narrative line, Alexander's interview was noteworthy for a dialectical tension between rejection and acceptance of these messages,

...I don't really fit into their idea. I have my own ideas. Being a man is just being you...a man to me is a really successful person who will actually take up the family regards of other things and yeah…it's a whole different idea from theirs. It's somewhat similar, but just with emotion and not emotionless.

Thus, while Alexander eschewed some aspects of these messages, there were other pieces that he appeared to agree with and even support. Finally, while no specific cultural exhortation regarding gender roles was found in this interview, their influence in Alexander's life was clearly suggested,

Tell me some of the negative things about being Hispanic. Machismo. That's like, that's the whole idea that gets, the whole, my dad's idea that you have to be strong. Be really, really manly. If um, yeah, that's like, to me that's a bad thing...

Connection to helpful individuals and communities was a second important theme to emerge from this young man's voiced life. As discussed by Alexander, these *connections* suggested *mutuality*, *empathy*, and *empowerment*.

Asked whether there had been anyone who was supportive and nurturing of his gay

identity in his life, Alexander reported on a SSA female peer with whom he had nurtured a

growth-promoting relationship. Here is Alexander's voice,

> ...my friend, M, she was attracted to women and we grew up together. So it was kind of awkward because it was really silly. I came out to her and she came out to me and we're like all happy, it was a true moment. And from the, it was just us two...we would hang out a lot.

Alexander then discusses how through and by this relationship he was able to extend and

grow a relational network,

> I started making a lot more friends...when I came out completely, at school, I lost a lot of friends, but made a lot more friends. So I was happy, I was really happy...I was just sick and tired of having to hide, and I just wanted to be me, so…I was just out...we [Alexander and identified lesbian peer] were just happy hanging out because we felt comfortable talking, we were able to talk to other people.

A member of the Alexander's expanded relational network at school included the school

nurse-an adult identified as great "ally" and someone with whom Alexander felt "safe" and

"protected." Being able to just "hang out" with someone who is "real" were important and

noteworthy features of this relationship,

> ...the nurse, she's always been there for me...And we get along...We have good times, just being in there. We joke around a lot. She's a really goofy person. [I] just love her...She watched out for me a lot.

Empathic involvement, *respect*, and *mutuality* were key relational features of Alexander's

relationship with this school staff member.

Disconnection from certain aspects of heteronormative and racist culture with movement

to safer, validating, and welcoming places (i.e., subcultures) was discussed as a strategy by

Alexander to build self-pride, confidence, and a desire to be with others:

> ...my junior year I had found out about [CBO working with gay youth]...And they were all queer-identified. They all just said queer-identified...we were just happy hanging out because we felt comfortable talking, we were able to talk to other people. And by senior

year...I had found like a whole new community. I was just, and I felt a lot more comfortable.

Connection to community of similar self-identified young men-in terms of both sexual

and ethnic identity-was important for Alexander,

Well, as [CBO targeting Latino SSA youth], I'm around Hispanic LGBT youth, so I feel like a lot better, compared to like some groups...where it's nothing but African American and White people over there. So I [don't] fit in...And here if I'm Hispanic LGBT men around....they're really accepting and so I feel like I can openly talk to them about practically anything.

Disconnection emerged as yet another rich theme with Alexander discusses disconnection

from both individual relational partners and larger communities. *Disconnection* marked by a

lack of sensitivity to Alexander's needs characterized the relationship this young man reported

having with his parents, "my parents…practically planned out my whole life. And I can't do

anything to prevent that from happening…That's how my parents own my life." Alexander

linked this lack of empathic involvement to his socialization as male;

Well, from my parents [I got the message that being a man was] be responsible...not be feminine...I really wish they hadn't. There isn't a good relationship between me and my parents.

These messages have contributed to relating inauthentically, "my parents don't know

about me, and a state of deficiency in processing or describing emotions (i.e., alexithymia), "my

brothers and my father...burned into my head is that men don't cry and men don't do this...now I

find it really difficult for me to cry."

Chronic disconnection from the dominant European American community, as well as the

cultural community within which he was grown-and with which he closely identifies-was

discussed by Alexander. Experiences of open racism underscore Alexander's disconnection

from the European American community. Here is Alexander's voice regarding challenges he

experience with regard to employment and just walking safely and unmolested down the street,

....it is difficult for me now to like be certain things, certain jobs. Even though they're not supposed to be like racist towards a certain ethnic group. They do that now. Or when I'm walking down the street in a certain neighborhood, there will be like, oh, look at that beaner over there, or something.

From within a more proximal context, Alexander also discussed disconnection from key

cultural settings where he felt "judged" and marginalized for his gay identity. Here is

Alexander's voice regarding what led to his foregoing involvement in his church,

I used to be really religious...It's [the church] supposed to make people feel welcome, but I always felt really judged... I went to confession one day that I told my priest...he told me it's okay that your family don't love you...And that really bothered me...And he said something about you're just, you're just a sin and God forgives sin. You have to go like women and just really bothered me. That was the last time I went back.
Moving in more proximally, Alexander further notes *disconnection* from his family as

whole-a disconnection where sadness and pain are evident,

...I love to see my family...You feel really warm and welcome around them. But at times I can't be around them...I feel like an outcast around them. I can't really say I'm the black sheep of the family, but I just feel awkward, because they have this whole idea that I'm supposedly gonna be this and that, and I can't tell them otherwise...

While the inauthenticity referenced in the above-quote is noteworthy, more noteworthy

still is Alexander discussing inauthenticity as a protective and adaptive skill,

 Be proud of yourself...[but} be careful of like you don't run into like those certain people that's gonna hurt you...Be careful who you tell [that you are gay]...Because there's a lot of homophobic people out there.

"Noah" (0305)

    Introduction.

    Noah was an 18-year-old, self-identified African American ("Black"), bisexual, high

school graduate at the time of his interview. Although denying any professional aspirations,

Noah had a long history as an amateur dancer. The oldest of four male siblings, he reported a

"good" relationship with his parents (reportedly separated) but a lack of support for his "passion"

for dance from his father and brothers. Noah described himself as,

> ...very open-minded...easy for someone to come and approach with a conversation...about anything...I like to have fun, so if you're looking for a good time, just find me and we'll find something fun to do...

    Themes.

    Traditional messages regarding the performance of male gender emerged as an important

and recurring theme. Here is Noah's voice regarding this theme,

> ... being a man would, would pertain um, not so much not showing your emotions but not letting them take control of you...being able to stand your ground...Provide for your family...

> ...[be] cool, calm, and collected...whenever an issue occurs you can control it....not start to panic or feel overwhelmed...you should try to get a family or settle down with one.

    According to Noah, these messages, which emphasized *power over* dynamics, were

"pounded into my head at home." Although verbalizing resistance to these messages, "I just

don't agree with them," Noah also reported support or agreement with the idea of self-reliance in

order to meet one's responsibility toward others,

> I see myself as...[a man] who tries to take care of himself and his family and doesn't let outside influences have a negative effect on my viewpoint...makes it really so people will feel comfortable talking to me or um, just um, just someone who's going to be around or fun to talk to.

The relational importance of the above excerpt, from a RCT perspective, is not only that

Noah is open to being influenced by others (a key feature of *supported vulnerability*)-as long as

this influence is positive and does not compromise his responsibility to others-but that there is a

awareness of and commitment to being part of something larger than the self or, as noted by

Jordan (2004) a" resonance with" others that reflects relational awareness and confidence.

Consideration of others and the needs or relational partners was echoed in Noah's

refutation of the messages that men should only have sex for the sake of sex, "…men should…be

in control or be the dominant one in a relationship in a bedroom…they should be the one to get

most of the pleasure." In contract to this message, Noah sees, "sex as a shared moment between

two people" where mutual engagement, commitment and attunement to the (sexual) relationship

and to the sexual dynamics that affect both relational partners are key.

Connection with an interweaving of individual partners and a unique community group

was given prominence in this young man's narrative. Initially denying the presence of one single

supportive and nurturing persona in his life as a bisexual male, Noah went on to identify two

male staff members at a local CBO as positive relational connections in his life,

> ... a couple of the counselors at [CBO]...we talked about the same issues... I just kind of
> threw myself out there and see what happens...They opened up their homes and we can
> go there to watch movies or play video games.   *Do you trust them?* Yeah...With
> everything. Yeah. *Do you feel that they care about you?* Yeah, I think so. Like if I
> missed a meeting or if I'm supposed to go to a party or a phone call with them, and I
> don't, for a couple days, they always call me, well, you know me, and track me down and
> see what's wrong. So I would say yeah.

Particularly noteworthy from this relational account was how though these connections,

Noah experienced a growing openness to being affected by others (i.e., a key component of

supported vulnerability),

> ...one of the counselors, like he has a boyfriend and they live together...And I asked them
> like um, how they worked it, like how did you guys meet...They say it kind of just

happened, like they met and they talked for a while and then they just started meeting more and more and more...And I said like wasn't it hard...And they said, no...And I figure it was so easy for them, and eventually if I want to stay with a guy, which I might, then I just asked them if there are, anything they could teach me or show me that they've overcome.

Connection to a group of similarly identified SSA male youth at a local CBO appears to have been important to Noah's sense of meaning, well-being, and relational confidence,

> ...my first meeting was Saturday, and there's about 12 people within age 15 and 18 and three of them who are courting and everything. And the first thing that came out of one of their mouths was, okay, who sucks dick? And I said, uh, what kind of, I started laughing, I thought they were funny. But they were serious. So a few raised their hand and all of a sudden I was thinking, okay, ah, and from then on, they just say whatever comes to their mind. And how long have you been going? For about probably 18 months...Saturdays is when they have their group where they talk...

Hanging out and discussing the banalities of life appears key in these relationships characterized by *mutual trust*, *mutual empathy*, *respect*, and *equity*, "it's sounds like you're pretty connected. Yeah...We talk about whatever, we say whatever…

A final recurrent and nuanced theme in this interview was disconnection. As in preceding case interviews, Noah discussed disconnection from both individual relation partners and communities.. The first noteworthy disconnection discussed by Noah involved his reportedly "closest" friends-relational partners, relational partners from whom Noah had chosen not to disclose a central part of identity,

> I would say 85% of my friends, like they mostly think I'm just completely straight. And um, I want to keep it that way. That way I won't feel not so much intimidated but like if an issue came up, like a conversation like gay marriage or gays in the military, I don't want them to immediately come to me and harass me, basically, or ask me some of the questions.

While Noah did not discuss any specific adverse consequences to this lack of disclosure or inauthenticity, the same might be assumed given his report that he feels more authentic and "free" around those friends to whom he has disclosed his sexual identity, "[with] the friends I've

told that I'm bisexual...I feel more free with them because I can do or say things [what I

want]...go and talk to a guy...and they're more supportive."   Noah reported only disclosing his

sexuality to other SSA male youth.

      Not surprising, fear and uncertainty regarding how people could react to his bisexual

identity was put forth as an explanation for a lack of self-disclosure. Disconnection from his

parents, for example, was embedded in these features,

> ...the fact that I can't be openly out about everything, like me being bisexual, um, it might
> be an issue if my parents found out...I'm not sure actually, I have no clue of how they
> would react, so it's just one thing holding back my mind if I should ever tell them one day
> or not. I might tell like my mom, but we'll see.

      Disconnection form at least three different communities was discussed by Noah. First to

be discussed, or *suggested* [stress mine], was disconnection from the dominant cultural group-

experiences of being *made other* by those in power. I stress the word *suggested* because Noah

denies explicit experiences of disconnection from the dominant European community in form of

bias and discrimination, for example, but suggests disconnection through the messages he heard

about African American people while growing up,

> ...from society...misconceived notions like...people should fear black people because they
> want to rob, steal, kill or um, they're less educated or they're only good for manual labor
> or um, they um, they're just inferior because they don't try as hard or they let things like
> drugs get into their way and they don't finish school or they get pregnant at an early age
> or…so many things...

      The second *community disconnection* discussed by Noah, and the first discussed

explicitly, was disconnection from the traditional (dominant) gay community. As the only self-

identified bisexual study participant, this finding was particularly noteworthy. Here is Noah's

reported "lack of welcome" from "other gay people" and the ideas some members of his

community have about self-identified bisexuals,

...[gay] people sometimes say that bisexual people...[are] that way because they don't know what they really want...So bisexual is a way...[to] experience both sides...which I don't think is true...in my case, I think it's just, if I'm attracted to someone, regardless of their gender

This within group disconnection is reportedly compounded by the nonexistence of a bisexual community and a silencing of their unique needs when they are "grouped" with other SSA individuals, "there's obviously a gay community....the straight community, but I've never experienced any or seen or noticed a bisexual community, so that they just kind of lump the B in [gay community]."

Finally, disconnection from his own racial community linked to educational achievement was made clear by Noah. Here Noah discusses how his academic achievement serves to distance him from the "black community."

...I used to live in one of the projects...when I tell people that they don't believe....because like I don't talk how people they would think you from that area should talk...I pronounce my syllables...I'm actually completing school and doing more with life...
This experience of disconnection is painfully accented by full denial of his racial identity by member of his community, "someone [in the community] looked at me and said, why you talk like that? What's wrong? Are you white? While pain is noted in response to this invalidation, Noah speaks of this disconnection as an opportunity to reconnect and for a growth promoting relationship with his community,

...by me going out and experiencing more things, I try and bring it back to the community. I'd say that's helped me to connect with them...I'm trying to show that there's more out there and they have to actually try, or if they want a change or um, to have their voice heard in a community or world, they must at least try to do something to get it out there..

This commitment to community empowerment, to activism suggests a unique form of community empathic involvement and relational awareness in Noah's life.

"Daniel" (0307)

     Introduction.

     Daniel was a 23-year-old, self-identified Latino ("Puerto Rican"), gay male at the time of his interview. The third of four children born in Puerto Rico, Daniel was living with his mother and three siblings in a predominantly Mexican immigrant neighborhood in Chicago. Daniel reported that his parents divorced when he was very young and that despite a "good relationship" his father, Daniel had no regular contact with his father.

     At the time of his interview, Daniel was a third year college student majoring in political science at a competitive state university in Chicago. Self-reporting as "confident" and "self-assured," Daniel made a point of underscoring his long-standing "passion and commitment" to issues of social justice. His plan for the future included seeking political office.

     Themes.

     Connection was a rich theme in this interview case. Whether discussing his relationship with his mother, his mentorship by an older male neighbor, or his connection to a number of community groups, Daniel underscored the benefit of positive connections in his life.

     At an interpersonal level, Daniel first discussed his *connection* with his mother, a relationship that was briefly challenged by Daniel's disclosure of his sexual identity, "My mom went through the whole traumatic thing that lasted about ten minutes," but soon thereafter was characterized by acceptance, validation, and support of her son, "and then she was trying to set me up on dates, so she's very accepting of it...A little too much sometimes." Daniel spoke of his mother with humor and gratitude, noting that she is "like a friend now" and "me and her are always together." His voice suggested that the relationship was characterized by mutual empathy, respect, trust, and a free spirit.

Later in the interview, when asked about the presence of someone unrelated and more

experience who a positive influence on his development as a gay male, Daniel identified an

older, gay male neighbor who lived in the same building as Daniel-a neighbor whose empathic

understanding of Daniel's emerging sexual identity was made clearer in retrospect,

> ...he knew I was gay before I knew I was gay...we lived in a three-floor thing and the [he]
> on the first floor...When we met, it was so funny...I was watching the "the Bodyguard" he
> came in, he came in, my mom went out, and he's like, here, and he gave me the
> soundtrack to *The Bodyguard*....that is so gay! He's like, you're coming along...

 According to Daniel, being with someone who "just gets you," with whom one can just

"hang out," who is "interested in your life," and who "doesn't tell you what to do" served to

further distinguish this connection as positive.

> ...he's just like, I'll be your big sister, we'll just talk, blah, blah...he never tried to guide
> me or he never told me what to do. It was like more how do you feel about this and how
> do you want to handle this? Stuff like that...*Did you trust him?* Definitely.

Within the mutual and open spirit of simply "hanging out and having fun," Daniel

appears to have experienced both mutual impact and mutual effect, "I mattered...her mattered."

In this relational dynamic, the power imbalance between mentor and mentee was less operative

and in its stead equity and mutual growth were allowed to manifest.

While interpersonal connection was noteworthy in this interview, connection to

community served to truly distinguish Daniel's narrative. The constructs of *personal awareness*,

awareness of others, and *awareness of reciprocal impact* (i.e., central features of the RCT

construct of *relational awareness*) were echoed in Daniel's story regarding how he connected to

his ethnic community.

> My first connection...the most important one is that I live there...I experience what my
> neighbor would experience. The second...work at a public service office...So I got to see
> people, hear their story, get to know people...and [what] doesn't work for the
> community...third...sit down with people and hear what's going on each individual block.
> And just know whether they want to have a clean-up or a block party. And people be

like, can we do that?...I'm like, well, do you know who your neighbor is...So I talk these people...kind of building that sense of family within a block.

In addition to *relational awareness*, Daniel's narrative also speaks to *mutual empowerment*, that is, the idea of a two-way dynamic process by which relational partners-in this case Daniel and an entire neighborhood community-move toward greater effectiveness and power within that relationship (Jordan, 1987; Surrey, 1987).

> I think I feel pretty fortunate, actually. Because I've managed to find several different outlets where I can plug into. Whether it was starting up a youth leadership group...or working with my block to organize a block club...I've found that people are receptive...on my block, a lot of people are still concerned with that day to day living...people in my community are living paycheck to paycheck...[I] sit down with them and letting them know we can change this. We can work together to do something better. And I've gotten really good responses from them.

*C*ommunity connection was also discussed vis-à-vis the gay community. Extending his social justice focus to the gay community, Daniel communicated a fine attunement and awareness of the factors that affect members of this community.

> ...the stereotypes that are behind it [heterosexism]...the way that society portrays it and moves to oppress it [being gay]...One of the things is like the liberties, kind of power and privilege the heterosexual people have. I was [at an amusement park] with a friend and we were just playing...hugging...some hater coming up to us, somebody trying to do something to us. Because we were being affectionate in public.

Disconnection from oppressive mechanisms and processes with movement toward or creation of a collective where greater safety, affirmation, and welcome are found served to create Daniel's connection to the gay community. Here is Daniel's voice:

> *How did you come to develop that connection to the[gay] community?*...I didn't really have a direct connection...So I decided to create one when I went to _____college...I founded the PRIDE organization on campus, and when I did that, my vice president came out, she's like, I'm a lesbian. I was like, damnit! She's like, well, if you have the guts to do this... create a safe zone just to make sure that people knew that there was somebody here watching over them. And just be mindful of other people's experiences. Which was cool.

Disconnection was another prominent theme in this interview. Although explored in no great detail, Daniel did provide some evidence of *interpersonal disconnection* at home. He discussed, for example, his sister's reaction to his sexuality as quite negative, "she was like, I'd rather have you be into drugs than be gay. She's like, there's nothing lower than being a homosexual. I was just like, damn!" The data do not speak to how Daniel's sister's perspective affected their relationship with her, but we get a sense by the following, *How did you feel about that [statement]?* I'm sending her to the bottom of the list...it kind of hurt...[but] I was able to shrug it off. I told my mom."

Daniel's interview provided richer data regarding *community disconnection*. Experiences of disconnection from the dominant ethnic group (i.e., European Americans) due to ethnic and sexual identity were noteworthy.

> ...when we got here from Puerto Rico...Because I didn't know English...they said oh he's Puerto Rican, put him in the English as a second language classes. When I learned English and I was going off the charts in English, they kept me in those classes...*what does that say to you at that young age?* ...that my language was inferior to this language. And for that I had to be punished.

> *What are some of the negative things about being gay?* I think just the stereotypes...the way that society portrays it and moves to oppress it...One of the things is like the liberties, kind of power and privilege the heterosexual people have...Because I think that there's nothing negative, I can't think of anything directly negative with being gay, but I can think of a lot of things with homophobia out there.

While Daniel dismisses the impact these experiences had on him, his choice of word (inferior and punished) in the first quote and the tenor of the second quote suggest that there was pain linked to these experiences of disconnection. It is noted that Daniel reported no feelings of isolation, depression, or self-blame linked to the above experiences.

Evidence of further community disconnection was found in the part of the interview where Daniel discusses the challenges of being a Latino gay male.

...it's difficult [being Latino and gay]...because you know that there's a lot, you're potentially working in the community that does not like you. Or there are a lot of people in the Latino community that have stereotypes, and I know I've heard it over and over again, from the Latino/Mexican American community, damn, you're kind of bringing our community down by being gay.

Disconnection linked to heteronormative standards regarding gender and sexuality were identified as barriers to authenticity of self and connection early in the interview.

...the message I got growing up was that [men] were tough. You didn't show emotions and you didn't complain about stuff....you shouldn't be scared of anything... [be a] provider, but only in the materialistic sense. Never... show what they called weakness or emotion. Any of the feminine traits.

These messages, reportedly learned from his mother's various "traditional" and "macho" boyfriends, were countered by Daniel's mother encouragement for open and honest expression regarding feelings.

...my mom...she was strong, provided for me...At the same time, she provided that other caring aspect where like "que de pasa?", sit down, let's talk about this...I had a lot of up and downs...depression, and she would be like, talk to me...as opposed to [a boyfriend] where he'd just be like, what the hell's wrong with you?

Continuing to discuss messages of disconnection specific to his gender, Daniel discusses how men are arguably taught to detach within the context of sexual intimacy, "*What do people say about being a man and sex*? I think that it can be done without emotion...It can just be an interaction.

While disagreeing with messages aimed at promoting emotional distance, Daniel appears to agree with messages linked to self-reliance and doing for others:

I like being handy... sometimes when people do stuff for you it kind of disempowers you...my ex used to fix my car...That's fine, but all that time I didn't ask why didn't you show me how to do this. And then I just kind of started learning from observation so then when I started to do it myself, I started being proud of the things I was able to accomplish.

This is not a rejection of help; on the contrary, Daniel appears thankful for his

boyfriend's support. However, being able to do for oneself in order to do for others appears to be

the issue here-and this is made clear in the following:

> ...as a Latino my responsibility is to get as educated as I possibly can and come back and
> give to the community where I grew up in...I can't leave my home [community]. And
> that is how I make things better, by just knowing that, having that commitment, I think.

"Aiden" (0325)

Introduction.

Aiden was a 19-year-old, self-identified Latino ("Hispanic"), gay male at the time of his interview. The youngest of seven children, Aiden emigrated from Mexico along with his mother and siblings when he was 14 years old, severing his relationship with his father at this same time. At the time of his interview, Aiden was no longer living at home, but instead living with a roommate in their own apartment because he had "family problems."   Aiden was a high school graduate but had no plans for any post-secondary education. He was working full-time as a sales clerk. Asked to describe himself, Aiden stated that he was a "nice, out-going, fun, and caring person."

Themes.

Within a context of chronic disconnection and harmful relational institutions (e.g., a rejecting and hurtful family), Aiden has experienced socio-cultural isolation, which compels a strategic disconnection from said institutions to create a healthier context for connection and growth.   A local CBO that works with/for same-sex attracted youth is the place where he has gone for this strategic connection.

> *How did you develop this connection to the gay community?* There is this place so I start going in. I keep going a lot…Like [CBO for gay youth]...And I liked it, I liked that feeling. That was my space…I could talk about anything, they wouldn't care...I have friends [there]" "I learned there a lot. How it is, how it's to be [gay], not to be, all that stuff...like tops and bottoms, I didn't even know that when I came out"

This gay community connection balances strategies of disconnection for Aiden while he lives within a heteronormative culture that is shaming, pathologizing, and intolerant of his same-sex attracted sexual identity (Jordan, 1997).

Initially denying that there was any one person who had been uniquely helpful and supportive of him as a gay male, Aiden finally acknowledged two SSA, same-age peers a important in his life. He first discussed a SSA female "best friend" from high school, "She was just, she would just listen...I'm glad she was there. I mean, she was my friend." Pressed to discuss his best friend, Aiden narrative suggested authenticity and an openness to being affected by a relational partner (i.e., *supported vulnerability*), empathic sensitivity to the unspoken needs of the other (i.e., *mutual empathic involvement*), as well as trust and confidence in the relationship (i.e., *relational confidence*).

> ...she would like go with me. Like she would like, you know how you don't want to do it yourself, and with someone else, like that. She would go with me to places, she would like support me, I guess. But, um, I still remember that I stayed over at her house and we used to go out, give me advice, whatever. So that was supportive, I guess...she wasn't like a pushy person that would push you to do stuff, but she'd be like, okay, let's go. Let's go with the flow. Like that. So I liked that about her.

> Aiden also identifies his gay male best friend and roommate as a key relational partner.

> My friend, my roommate, he pushed me, I didn't want to move out...couldn't... but then he pushed me so hard…because we had to do it. Let's do it. I found this, this place, let's go see it. And I was, I was so scared…but I did

We see movement toward equity and empowerment within a relational dynamic when Aiden discusses his gay male best friend's effort at helping Aiden move away from the isolation and rejection he experienced at home-rejection that injured him and left him feeling hopeless:

Disconnection was another rich theme in this interview. Aiden discussed *disconnection* from one other person as well as disconnection from community. The first *interpersonal disconnection* discussed by Aiden involved his mother. Approximately one year after *coming out*, Aiden moved out of his mother's home because of her reaction to his sexuality, "since I came out, it seemed like problems...my mom...always used to tell me, you have to leave because your way of living...is not acceptable in this house." We later learn that his mother's rejection

of Daniel was not a singular event within his family, "The only one that I'm talking right

now…is my sister...all my family...they don't talk to me."   The severity of *interpersonal*

disconnection within Aiden's family setting is illustrated by the following:

> My brother...he didn't talk to me...but he would talk to my mom and say all this bad stuff about me. That he feel like, he say, oh, I don't want to see him because I'm disgusted. He's like I don't want to eat, if he eats from this plate, because I don't know where he's been and stuff like that...And my mom...she wouldn't even care. Like that. And I was like, man, how could she be like...

Aiden's subsequent move out of his mother's home reflected the realization that safety

(connection) was not be found at home, "Like I was like, man, I'm not even in a safe

environment here. I need to get out of here. And I did."   While disconnection was perpetuated

by Aiden's move out of his mother's home, disconnection was arguably adaptive and self-

protecting-moreover, it was linked to connection with a safer and validating relational context

with a gay roommate. Strategic disconnection, however helpful, bore a price-for the yearning to

reconnect is reportedly never gone, but must instead be kept in check especially when the pain of

rejection is still fresh:

> …she [mother] didn't talk to me for a whole week [after moving out]… And I do miss my family a lot, but I mean, I don't want to say I do, I don't want to go and tell her that. Because I don't want her to kind of know that I do miss her...

Disconnection from family members at home was paralleled by disconnection from peers

at school. Asked about his former school, Aiden reported tolerance, if not acceptance, of his

sexuality from peers, "It wasn't as bad…I was out like the third year…And everyone

knew…They didn't care…I didn't have that much problems at school…comments once in a

while…Like oh, faggot…But I mean, nothing like bad…But at home...it was hell." While

tending to dismiss the seriousness of the events at school, Aiden's interview indicates that he had

no friends at school and that this was linked to his being perceived as "the gay guy."

Disconnection from the dominant social group was communicated via the messages

Aiden reports hearing about Latinos.

> *So what messages do you get about being Hispanic?* They think we're dirty...they think
> you're like, oh, I just came here to get a job, they used to laugh at us so much...

There is *active shaming* in the above quote. As an active political force, shaming

humiliates, silences, discredits, and keeps quite those that seen as different than the dominant

social group (Jordan & Dooley, 200). Whether Aiden internalized any of this shame is unclear.

However, his reported disconnection from the Latino community seems suggestive of some

degree of internalization, "I'm not into anything they do …I tried to join the Mexican Hispanic

club [at school] and I couldn't either. I just didn't like it. I didn't like the people in it at all."

Disconnection from the dominant social group was also linked to sexual identity by Aiden.

> *...how about some of the negative things about being gay?* People don't like you. You
> even can like lose your job because of it...like if you're walking down the street...a person
> can usually get beat up for gay. Like people on the street I walk into, don't like me...I
> have less opportunities. I'm holding to it like so much, because I think I'm so afraid that if
> I leave it, I don't get another chance.

Disconnection from the gay community was also discussed by Aiden. Within this

context, Aiden stressed not fitting in because of not meeting an idealized and unattainable gay

male image.

> I don't fit into that at all…My face is messed up, you should not have pimples if you're
> gay…I'm too tall. My hands are gay. I'm skinny…I don't fit into their perfect men…I
> don't fit into it. I don't fit into that at all.

Asked about any sort of connection, Aiden's reply suggests that he has foreclosed on

establishing any connection.

> *Are you connected to the gay community now?* Not a lot. So I'm not doing anything in
> the community. I was there at Boystown for PRIDE, but that's about it. Yeah. I'm not
> really connected with them. I'm just doing my own thing right now, to survive.

Suggesting acknowledgement of vulnerability and the need for others, feature characteristics of the idea of *supported vulnerability*, Aiden discusses his needs for his friends within social contexts:

> …I go out sometimes…I'm not into it though… I think I'm more mature than a lot of people my age…I went out [to a party] and there was this guy there. He just passed out, it was a drunk, and they called like the ambulance…I just stood there…I was like, man, is this the life that I want for me?...So that's why like sometimes if I go out, I go out with my friends…I guess I'm needy. I need my friends…

With regard to his sexuality, Aiden stated, "It's hard. Really hard…I recently came out…you have to get used to it [being gay]. You have to like put your pants on, be strong, because if you let it get to you its sad. You be [sic] depressed…and want to kill yourself…I guess I am strong…I'm making it." Aiden's proximal relational network consists of his mother, siblings,

Finally, gender socialization emerged as a prominent subtheme. Here Aiden discusses shares some of messages he received about what it takes to be a man while growing up:

> A man should not like shopping. Women are supposed to do the shopping...A man should walk straight... not supposed to talk like girly. Use all those bunch of words that we use. Because like, he uses these words, he's gay...A man should be strong…They can't be weak, like I'm weak…

These exhortations suggest a crippling socialization process for men in terms of intimacy and relationships, Aiden suggests that there are features of these messages that he agrees with- features that echo the importance of self-reliance and caring for others:

> …I still infer myself as a man…Like I think a guy should have a job and support his family, and I think that's the right way to do it...I mean, that's what God made us a little stronger than women so we can work and support a family, kids, whatever...

In what was presented as a humorous anecdote, Aiden reminds us that these heteronormative messages are detrimental for both heterosexual and homosexual males:

…lat work and there's this guy…he thought I was crying…I guess he wanted to go and comfort me...he was gonna give me a hug…And I was like, what, you were gonna hug me? He's like, no…Like he's all tough like…what's wrong with hugging another guy?...It makes the people feel better...you were gonna hug me, right? And he said, no...I'd never do that…he knows that it's not wrong that he would do it, but just society it seems like it's wrong.

"Anthony" (0404)

> **Introduction.**

Anthony was a 16-year-old, European American ("Italian American"), gay male at the time of his interview. The second of two boys born to a reportedly "very traditional Catholic and Italian working class" couple, Anthony was enrolled as a junior at a very competitive public high school in Chicago. He reported that he was doing "very well" at school and that he had definite plans of going to college after graduation.

Anthony described himself as "serious" but "fun" young man who likes to spend "as much time as possible with close friends" and "always tries to see the positive" in things. Asked what it was like to be a gay, 16-year old, Anthony responded, "I didn't get to be gay until I started high school, and ever since then...I fell in love with it...really enjoy... being able to be myself.

> **Themes.**

Anthony discussed *connection* with impressive flexibility. To begin, Anthony discussed *connection* (integration) of self coupled to commitment to community undergirded by an awareness and acknowledgement of systemic bias and discrimination:

> ...the biggest responsibility every gay person has to [be]...accept who you are... [also] helping out others who haven't quite got to that point yet...[helping] the youth, having a place to, so they can grow into being themselves...educate [them] or to just show the way into the gay world...helping them get through. Because...it can be a very tough thing to do, especially growing up in a place, in a world where...it's not always considered right...it can be kind of tough for younger people to deal with it.

At an interpersonal level, Anthony discussed two relationship illustrating key RCT conceptual pieces. To illustrate, *mutual empathic involvement* and *supported vulnerability* were illustrated in how Anthony described his longstanding best SSA female friend.

I mentioned my friend, the one that I first came out to, who is a lesbian. She came out, we were in fifth grade, and she was out of the closet...I hadn't known, I was the first person she told and I had never told her. Like I had never said anything about my sexuality...But I knew that she would be the first person I would come out to, because, I don't know, it just seemed natura...she took me to my first Pride Parade. We both went to our first Pride Parade together, with her mom, actually.

Coming out to someone entails owning vulnerability-seeing this as a means to growth and fulfillment-and it entails communication (direct or implied) of a need for support and acceptance. We see all of this in the above. Moreover, we see commitment and attunement to a relationship and to the interpersonal dynamics that affect both partners. Finally, we see relational confidence-the belief that one has something to contribute to a relationship.

Mutual empathic involvement and *supported vulnerability* were also present in the following reported relationship, as was evidence of relational growth:

…my best friend now, he really helped me…we just became friends within the last few months, and since then it's just like we're best friends...Maybe it's just because we have a lot of fun together. Maybe it's because we talk about anything. But like the point of that is just he's there and I'm there and that's why it's just a support thing for me and why it's such an important thing for me…I don't always think about him as just my gay friend...now that that's not the main part anymore. It's more about it's at a place where I'm happy that it's about people...

Anthony's interview was also rich with regard to *community connection*. This narrative richness, however, was limited to connection to the gay community. While acknowledging a strong tie to his Italian American family, "I have people that really support me and that love me," Anthony denied a real connection to his cultural community.

…I don't really ever connect myself first and foremost to the Italian community. I mean, I identify myself as Italian...but I don't always um, first think of being a part of the Italian community…Like I don't ever talk really a lot about being Italian...

In contrast to the preceding, Anthony richly discussed his connection to the gay community and often did so without much prompting. He first discussed his connection to the gay community when identifying what was positive about being a 16-year-old, gay male.

...there's just so much available now that like I really like to utilize. Like there's so many organizations...and there's gays everywhere...there's dances to go to. I love to go dancing...I really am lucky to have available to me, like when it comes to in terms of like things that are oriented for my sexuality and for people that are like, and for places that I can go and be safe...That's very important to me.

Movement toward a community of likeminded individuals where safety, welcome, and

validation can be found and reciprocated were was characteristic of Anthony's connection to the

gay community.

...tell me more about how you feel connected to this community? I just see it as a very um, as a place where I really want to be...Because it's just showing me how much, how like great it is to be able to have personal acceptance within yourself and then go with a bunch of people that are, have that too...

...I just see that I fit in...I'm connected to the community and all these other people that we share that trait [being gay] between us, and we share common experiences, maybe, and we share common like ways of thinking and stuff like that...But, and it's just like for me it's just like reaffirming maybe who I am, and it's just like reaffirming who other people around me are.

Growth through and by community, as well as acknowledgment of (community)

vulnerability as a source of (community) growth and empowerment were echoed as Anthony

described why he felt connected to the gay community.

…I see it as very strong…but also a community that by other communities is like looked down upon sometimes and discriminated against...because it's a smaller community…it's just more in a place to be more vulnerable …but at the same time, it gives the community more of a chance to be strong…to like rise up over that and to just be united in that sense that we're all have this common thread between us and know that that's very important.

it's a community that when you're in it, it makes all the bad things kind of diminish…Like it just makes it less, it just, it doesn't make it less hurtful, it doesn't make it less bad. It just makes it less um, important to you, kind of.

Connection to the gay community was reportedly facilitated by connections to other SSA

youth, specifically gay males.

...within the last year I've seen myself become more, grow more into my homosexuality...like a year and a half ago, it would have taken a lot for me to come to like a place like this [CBO working with gay youth]...I would have been nervous and I

would have been a wreck...just having, being more able to have other people...other people who are gay, especially gay men has been very helpful...

The emphasis given to being a gay male who has gay male friend was noteworthy in this interview.

...within the past like six to eight months started having a larger group of gay male friends. Which I didn't really know how important it was and how much I was missing out on it...if I were ever to have a boyfriend, it would be short-lived because I [would] not now to be with him

...freshman year...I didn't have any gay male friends...I love my lesbian friends to death, but I mean...I didn't want to like just be the gay guy, with a bunch of girls, because, I don't know, it was just like I didn't have anyone that I could talk to about like about being a gay boy and having gay boyfriends and stuff like that. So it was really important for me to have someone else who was going through exactly the same thing, pretty much, and to just know exactly where they're coming from, because I'm coming from the exact same place, pretty much.

...having...gay male friends, it's just easier to be, not only to be myself, but to have more chances to be myself maybe, or to want to be myself more and just to, just, it's more fun.

In addition to be noteworthy for its reference to connection, Anthony also discussed disconnection in a fashion that gave it importance. For example, disconnection from community was discussed to good length by Anthony. He first discussed disconnection from the heteronormative, dominant groups experienced via verbal harassment and intimation.

...This morning I was on the bus and I got down, I'm wearing my little girl's hoodie...my little messenger bag...someone called me a faggot... I was like, what?...I was really surprised...and like just living in my neighborhood...I'm kind of nervous around there... That's why I don't really go around there that much... it's not a place where you can just be openly gay

...I was walking around waiting for my boyfriend...and these three kids came up... and they started like calling me names and saying [you a faggot?]...we're gonna kick your ass...And like they were videotaping it...I didn't say anything them to them when they went away...I was just really confused...kind of nervous

While there is little elaboration, and Anthony is clear to point out that his parents never insisted on a standard performance of male gender, he did point out that he learned that he was

"not suppose to do girly things" but that this was not clearly explained to him-but "I got the

message.

    Protective inauthenticity emerged as a noteworthy subtheme within the broader theme of

disconnection. Behavior that could unjustly be interpreted as "hiding in the closet," may actually

reflect a strategic and protective maneuver aimed at keeping on safe until context is less hostile:

> I went to a very like kind of close minded place (grammar school), so I didn't come out at all...even though....I was generally assumed to be the gay kid...I didn't tell it to other people until basically until the day I graduated almost...I couldn't just, just be okay with it [at] that time, being okay and open about it, because it was just something that was too nerve-wracking at the time. So I [was] waiting for it [the right time] for a while.

"Joshua" (0407)

Introduction.

Joshua was a 22-year-old, self-identified, European American ("Caucasian, non-Hispanic"), gay male at the time of his interview.   Joshua was an only child born to "hard working, blue-collar, German American, Catholic" parents. He reported that growing up his parents were very strict with him an had clear plans that he "would have a better life" than they had. A college senior at the time of his interview, Joshua majored in political science because he reportedly had a long-standing commitment to "making things better for other, especially gay people." Asked to describe himself, Joshua stated,

> ...I'm very open about my sexuality, my sexual orientation and I let people know and only in situations that you have to. I mean, no one goes around saying I'm gay or I'm straight in their everyday life. It just happens to come up. But I wouldn't change it. I mean, I've had people come up to me and ask me, well, if you had the choice would you be straight, and I kind of look at them, and I'm like, how dare you ask me that question?

Themes.

Joshua spoke at considerable length and with notable richness to his connections to key individuals in his life and the community, particularly the gay community. With regard to *community connection*, Joshua stated that there had definitely been a gay community in his life-a community that played an important role in his sexual identity development through its affirmation and validation. *Finding others like you* and feeling safe and welcome were noteworthy subthemes.

> ...Ifeel at home, I mean, in the gay community when you're gay...you're going home. I mean, you're around people who more than likely than not are gonna already accept you. That's not gonna be a prohibiting factor for you at all, in your relations, when you're out and about in those neighborhoods. Um, but it hasn't really been that big of a problem for me, either, in any other neighborhood that I go into. I interact with other people just the same. But there's a certain comfort level, I think, just because they're people that share your same backgrounds and maybe your same kind of like history of growing up and struggles and things like that. And you kind of find some strength and courage within

that community and it's kind of maybe like an energizing center so that when you are out in other areas of your community, you have that courage and that backbone not to worry about one thing.

In addition to growth through and by the gay community, Joshua discussed the important role that being part of his school's gay community, via membership in the school's GSA, with regard to his developing a positive sense of self as a gay man and as someone who can create growth and change in others (*relational confidence* and *empowerment*).

> ...my junior year of high school, I had joined the Gay/Straight Alliance kind of a thing that we had at my school...through it I was becoming more comfortable with myself and I was ready to own, own who I was and I was becoming more comfortable that I was gay, and I, um, for the Day of Silence I wanted to organize um, the school to be part of it and to go around and to be quiet and um, my mom and I made rainbow bracelets and, which was awesome, because my mom was taking part of something that was important to me. And um, as someone who was directing and leading this um, kind of like groundbreaking thing for my school, because they had never done it before....

Joshua discussed how through this community connection at school he grew empowered to create (with other gay students) a support for young gay men from other schools; a support group characterized by a*uthenticity*, *mutual respect* and *empathy* and *supported vulnerability*. These characteristics would go on to foster greater authenticity and growth in Joshua's life as illustrated by the following excerpt.

> ...we created a safe haven, an environment where at the beginning we said, this is a place where you can be safe in yourself...You're gonna let your guards down and your walls down...they were able to share with other people the issues that they were dealing with and they found out they weren't alone...*And so for you, was the part of planning this also part of what supported you in your process?* Yeah. Being able to have, to plan it, and I actually came out in one of the workshops... and people were just inspired. And people were genuinely touched and they showed it

Interpersonal connection was also discussed by Joshua. He identified his relationships with two older adult males as "helpful and nurturing" to his status as a gay male. He first discussed his "mentor" of seven years, a relationship that was facilitated by "some good friends" within a context of disconnection at home.

...when my parents had found out that I was gay, like it was really kind of a bad living situation at home...so it was kind of my outlet to get away was to seek out this mentor who shared a lot of the same things that I did...*did you feel like you could trust him or like what was*...I did...I did have this rapport with him, that I looked up to him like a father and stuff like that and he talked to me about his life and stuff...he let me into his life.

The second important interpersonal connection Joshua discussed was one the had with a teacher at school. In discussing this relationship, Joshua noted times of clear mutuality, empathy, and mutual empowerment. According to Joshua, this teacher was open to being affected by Joshua, to be in a relationship characterized by equity if not equality.

I had asked him to be one of the adult staff leaders, for the weekend chaperones, and they got, he was someone I respected a lot. And when I came out, he came off to the side and he was like, you know, R, I kind of had a feeling that you were gonna say something like that...He's like, I just want to let you know that you're a very brave individual in being able to be very open with people and do the things that you do...he said I inspired him to just, as a mentor and as an adult, come to me and say, I really admire you, you've got guts, R.

Disconnection was not very richly discussed or referenced in this interview. However, community disconnection from the dominant group manifested early in Joshua's life and appeared to be intimately linked to dominant cultural messages to boys.

I always knew that I was different than the majority. I felt that I had, that I had things in the back of my mind ever since, as early as I can remember, about being attracted to males and, and knowing that that was different than the majority and that it was, it was kind of suppressed...and then it got to be seventh or eighth grade and, and I felt like I was having to suppress more and more and that wasn't who I was. That I wasn't able to fully be who I am and to be honest with the people I cared about, because I was unable to, to talk about this part of me, unable to portray this part of me openly.

"Mason" (0410)

    Introduction.

    Mason was a 21-year-old, self-identified European American ("Caucasian European

Polish), gay at the time of his interview. He was the only male of a sibship of two born in

Poland to "very Catholic parents." Mason emigrated from Poland with his family when he was

15 years old.

    Mason reported that he was "outed" to his parents by an aumnt when he was 18 and that

his parents had a "very hard time accepting" his sexuality. He reported that since this time his

relationship with his parents has been "really hard" and that trust of him as never been the same.

> ....after I came out, I wasn't allowed like to go out too much. I couldn't talk on the phone.
> I couldn't go out. I didn't have a lot of friends. I, and it stayed like that for two years. It
> got better once I went to college...

    Themes.

    While Mason failed to report a "real" connection to any one community, he discussed

one particular relationship in his life that was particularly important to his status as a gay man.

He discussed a long-standing relationship with a female friend he had back in Poland. While

distance prevented Mason and his friend to maintain regular contact, he reported that this

relationship was one of the most important relationships in his life because she was "real" and

"she really cared about me and she still does."   Asked how this relationship was helpful, Mason

responded,

> She was helpful because she knew a lot about me. She knew a lot about my family, a lot
> about my sister and the home that I was growing up in. And she knew about a lot of stuff
> that was like going on inside of me. She knew pretty much better to. And she was really
> open about things. Like so I could talk to her easily...like she actually encouraged me to
> tell my parents, like. *So she was kind of like a coach to you?* A little bit. In a way, she
> was...She helped me be more confident in who I am...because she says, she told me like it
> does not matter who I like. My sexuality. It matters what I do as a person. *So she, okay,*

she was affirming of you? Yes. And I think I need it because nobody at the time, I don't think they would have, I didn't have anybody else to help me be strong...

Mason's relationship with this female friend underscored mutual empathy as critical to the growth of the relationship. However, mutual empathy here not only entailed empathizing with Mason's experience, but also encompassed empathizing with his strategies of disconnection (Miller & Stiver, 1994), the strategies that allowed Mason to survive sometimes unimaginable, dehumanizing encounters with others.

The practice of Masons' friend's authenticity was about facilitating his growth. It is not about self-disclosure, but about being fully present and engaged in the relationship, a point in keeping with RCT. (Miller & Stiver; 1997).

Mason's interview was unique from all other because he discussed the idea of chronic disconnection within the context of immigrant status and general disconnection from the English dominant community.

> When I first came I didn't have any interactions with any gay people. I didn't know anybody. Which is kind of hard, because all the stuff that was going inside of me and just absolutely nobody to talk to, absolutely nobody to talk to...At school, I was in high school, I was talking to people but I didn't know where I should go. I didn't know what to do with myself. *Now was that, was that made more difficult because you were new to English or they just didn't have any help or services, or there was nobody that you could turn to?* I would say it was both of those things combined at the time. What could have helped. If I would have met someone who would guide me through. Like just help me out.

"Christopher" (0411)

   Introduction.

   Christopher was a 19-year-old, self-identified Latino ("Mexican American"), gay male at the time of his interview. The middle child in a sibship of six children, Christopher was born in the United States to Spanish-dominant immigrant parents. A sophomore on break from a small, liberal arts college in Wisconsin, Christopher was living with parents in a predominantly Mexican immigrant community at the time of his interview. Asked to describe himself, Christopher reported,

> I don't know. I think I'm pretty lucky. Like I mean, I have good health, like I'm, like I go to school, like I have a job, like I don't feel like a loser. Um, I'm pretty sure of like the direction that my life is going right now, pretty satisfied. Like I know that I can never been like fully satisfied, but I'm pretty content to like where I am right now.

   Themes.

   Christopher noted positive connection with a number of people, including same-age, same-sex peers, teachers at school, and his mother, "teachers were supportive, classmates, friends were supportive. Um, my parents, yes," However, it was his relationship with an older male teacher at his former high school that he discussed as being most *authentic, mutually supportive*, and *mutually empowering*. These features of RCT were linked to his sexual identity.

> ....I didn't know he was gay until like...I happened to be dating someone in my school at that time, and he had, he had mentioned it to him that we were dating. And then he...he started to feel more comfortable and he told me about his partner. So, and then I would go up to him for advice, I think I did that like maybe three times, couple of times. *Did you feel like he really sort of cared about you?* Yeah...it was kind of cool because I felt like he really trusted me. Um, I guess that made us feel more connected and in the same way...

   Messages linked to heteronormative ideas regarding masculinity embedded with specific cultural values were discussed by Christopher and barriers to connecting authentically to people in his life.

What messages did you hear growing up about what it meant to be a man? I guess just the basic that everybody, everybody hears, man has to be brave, a man has to be macho. *What does that mean, to be macho?*...someone that's tough. Someone that um, they have the say in everything. Someone that is dominating. Someone that's, I don't know...they make it hard to be real you know...with friends and stuff...

While Christopher verbalized disagreement with these messages in general, there were features of this messages that he discussed as important to his role as a man.

Like I agree with some things but not with others. *Which ones do you not agree with*? To be able to be responsible. To…take care of others.

Later in the interview, Christopher linked messages of emotional stoicism and expected and encouraged separation and independence as making it difficult for him to reach out to other; he discussed this in terms of an inability to trust.

...it's very hard for me to trust someone. Like I, like even to make a friend, like it's hard for me to, um, I don't know, it's just something that, I don't trust people right away, so it's kind of hard for me to even, I don't want to say I have an issue trusting people, but just because it's kind of hard for me to trust people, it's not, it's even harder to find someone that I would like to even date.

In common with other Latino and African American male participants, Christopher discussed experiences of separation and being "othered" by the dominant European American community. An experience of difference noted in the messages he heard about Mexican while growing up.

What messages do I get about being Mexican. I don't know. Sometimes I feel that a lot of Mexicans are misjudged, I guess. *In what way?* Well, I mean, there's like this whole big stereotype about how Mexicans aren't educated, working class, I mean, they're sometimes seen as inferior, sometimes.

Shame, humiliation, and internalized inferiority emerged as subthemes within discussion regarding this disconnection from the dominant group, "Sometimes you feel like you're stupid, but then…

"Andrew" (0414)

> **Introduction.**

Andrew was a 20-year-old, self-identified European American ("Caucasian"), gay male

at the time of his interview. A college student at a large, urban, Catholic university in Chicago,

Andrew reported moving to Chicago from rural Indiana in order to attend college in a "very

homosexual-friendly city." Movement to Chicago and enrollment in his university meant

welcome, validation, and safety-as well as the possibility of authentic expression.

> I feel, I feel very at home and I feel very accepted in this city, and um, I really haven't
> experienced any negative repercussions at all. Um, I just feel like Chicago and DePaul is
> such an accepting area that it's kind of helped me become more comfortable in myself
> and more comfortable portraying myself on a daily basis.

Andrew's transcribed interview offered no more data regarding his background,

including family constellation.

> **Themes.**

Dominant cultural messages regarding male gender were repeatedly discussed by

Andrew, emerging early from the interview as an important theme, "the man is looked on as

being the provider, being the stronghold of the family, being um, the less emotional of the wife."

These repeated messages carried a noteworthy subtheme of *shaming*. That is, of an intense

painful experience of believing that one is flawed and not worthy of acceptance for who one is.

> ...growing up, it was very hard for me...I would see straight males and I would get that
> impression from my family, from the media, and then I would see the portrayal of
> homosexual males and I would compare the two and I feel that the portrayal of
> homosexual males, when I was growing up, was so negative that it was easy for
> me...even though I knew that I embodied many of those characteristics, it was easy for
> me to just say no. That that's not the type of person I am.

Within this narrative, *protective inauthenticity* emerged a second important subtheme. In

order to fit into the expectations of others, Andrew altered himself to fit in with those

expectations and to preserve relationships in his life-even if these relationships were not

accepting or validating of his true self. This behavioral response echoes RCT's idea of the

Central Relational Paradox. Here is Andrew's voice echoing this RCT construct:

> It was very easy to, for me to see the homosexual portrayal and say...I may embody one or two of those characteristics, but I don't like their portrayal... I'm going to strive to really try and fit myself into the other, the other, the straight male, because that's what, that's what's looked highly upon in our society. And that's what's more accepted and that that is what, that's what's socially easy in our society. And I feel that that's what, that's what I should be doing.

Disconnection from varied groups or communities was discussed at length by Andrew.

First to be discussed by Andrew was his disconnection from the dominant heteronormative

community-a reported disconnection made noteworthy by Andrew's acknowledged unearned

privilege due to his racial and gender identities (European American male), "There are people,

individuals and groups, that, that don't accept it, that don't understand, so um, so it's easy for

these people that are different to, to look upon them negatively."

Purposeful disconnection from the gay community was an unexpected and repeated

finding in this interview. This movement from connection appears linked to early negative

messages Andrew received about gay men and their "unmasculine" and negative behavior.

> ...personally, um, as far as like the gay social scene here in Chicago, I feel that I've wanted to separate myself from it somewhat because it's very easy to get absorbed in that and it's very dramatic and it's just not the group that I was looking for.

> That there tends to be a lot of drama [in the gay community]...I tend to separate myself from, from the dramatic aspects...I feel like sexual um, that being sexually promiscuative (sic) is very accepted in the gay community and that's something I'm, I, I hold very strong morals against and I separate my identity from that one.

Andrews disconnection from the gay community extended to his school life-an

environment that interestingly enough he noted as exception for its acceptance of SSA

individuals.

...there's a gay organization on campus...many gay individuals who, who are struggling with their identity...can have something in common with that. It's very easy for them to, to go to this group and it's very accepted. *...how do you feel like you fit, like you mentioned it's very accepting.* Um, it's very accepting that um, I don't play an active part in the gay community here...I don't surround myself with.

Interpersonal connectedness to a supportive individual was a notable finding in this interview with *affirmation of self* emerging as an important subtheme therein.

...a friend of mine that was two years older...he was openly gay and it was, it was nice for me to, to be friends with him and, and know about him and see how happy and successful he was and for me to see that and, and see how positive that was...he's gay...[a]nd it's accepted, and I can be gay and be happy and be like him. He was a mentor.

Andrew identifies this relationship as important and positive because he felt respected, listened to, and validated by a relational partner who was keenly attuned to who is was and where he was in his development. This relationships *authenticity* and *owned vulnerability* as Andrew grew toward honest expression of his needs and desires.

...he was trying to, to have me come out, but I feel that um, that, that he helped me kind of discover and accept who I was. So through, through seeing him that it was okay, that I was able to become more comfortable in myself.

....my first year in high school, I um, I came out to him. I felt that I was at a point where, where even though he knew, that it was a big deal for me to say the words to him, I'm gay. And that I felt that, very, very trustworthy of him and even now, um, five years later, I feel that I can still go to him for, for any kind of concerns...That he's somebody that I value as a friend and value as a mentor.

Finally, the reported characterization of this relationship suggested mutual respect, sharing of feelings, being part of a growing connection together and mutual responsiveness, and initiative. In other words, this relationship characterized the key feature of relational resilience according to RCT-empathic mutuality, "I've shared so much with him and, and we together collectively have shared so much with each other that now we have, we have a bond that, that I think will last for our lives.:

Finding others like you was underscored as an important subtheme by Andrew. Here is

discusses how commonality facilitates connection:

> ...when you do find somebody that is, that is very similar to yourself, it's very easy to find a connection with them because they've endured a lot of the same hardships that you have and, and you, and it's easy to talk, I feel like it's very easy to talk to somebody else who is gay, because they've experienced a lot of the same things that I have in coming and developing their identity.

Asked to identify messages about being Caucasian while growing up, Andrew spoke to

the issues of power as well as differences in privilege and advantage.

> I feel that it's the dominant um, racial group in our society...even though um, other races are integrated and are becoming more accepted...we're still in a society where Caucasian rules...white is viewed as being the dominant, the better, the more socially acceptable.

> *So other racial groups may feel like they're excluded or*…Exactly...they're excluded...because they aren't part of that dominant group that they're often looked at differently and, and um, that they aren't treated as fairly as the white.

The importance of these data lie in their suggested movement from self-focused

awareness to consciousness of being part of something larger something relational and that one

has impact and influence over others. In essence it reflects *relational awareness*.

"David" (0415)

   Introduction.

   David was a 19-year-old, self-identified Latino ("half Hispanic and half Italian, but I think of myself as Hispanic"), gay male at the time of his interview. He was in sophomore studying political science at a prestigious and highly selective private university located just outside of Chicago.

   One of two SSA children, and only son, born to a bi-cultural family, my mother's Italian and my father is full Mexican," David was living with father and sister at the time of his interview. He reportedly had little to no regular connection with his mother. Asked to describe himself, David reported, "my personality is really active, so I have a lot of friends. So I'm never really bored. That's fun...I'm so spontaneous and stuff, it's hard to like keep a boyfriend or anything."

   Themes.

   Heteronormative messages regarding masculinity were noted by David as challenges to being authentic and relational.

> Well, society kind of imposes on us that like through media and stuff that a man's generally like straight and straight acting...*What is straight acting?* Mmm, not feminine. Masculine...they shouldn't like act too excited all the time, and just play it cool...they shouldn't express themselves, really. Um, they should just act masculine and be better than women, basically.

   Apparent in the quote above is a pervasive societal devaluing of women and of the emotional and relational qualities they represent. From a dominant cultural perspective, maintaining a close, connected relationship will likely lead David to develop "undesirable" attributes (e.g., empathy and inclusiveness).

Community disconnection from the "traditional" Hispanic community was a noteworthy theme for at least three reasons. First, discussion of this *disconnection* suggested confusion regarding ethnic identity. Second, David's narrative suggested additional *disconnection* from the larger Euro-dominant community. And, finally, *disconnection* from the Hispanic community suggested a unique *between-and-betwixt* situation for David with regard to ethnic identity and community affiliation.

> *What messages do you get about what it means to be Hispanic?* I really don't get any messages. No, I don't really connect with them. Like I just feel white, to be honest. *What does it mean to feel white versus feeling Hispanic?* Well, I don't, I don't know.

> What does it mean to be white? It's about stereotypes of being Hispanic...like tacos or burritos. It's like a lot of racial prejudice that I hear, like being called spic and stuff, or um, being poor, um, yeah.

> I've never really called myself Italian, but I don't know why, because my mom's family is Italian, but I don't live with them. I live with my dad. So, and he's full Mexican. But um, I never really like got along with his family either, his side of the family.

With regard to interpersonal disconnection, David discussed protected distance and relational disconnection with his father-a man he described as "your idealized straight man-disconnection David linked to his own sexual identity. Fear or rejection or marginalization reportedly "compel" David to keep his true sexuality from his father.

> ...my dad's brother, but he died before I was born. When he came out to my dad, like my dad outcasted him, treated him like crap. So I haven't come out to my dad yet.

David also discussed feeling clearly connected to the gay community. He reported experiencing this connection as a means to engage a broad range of individuals for a broad range of needs.

> ...it [being in the gay community] makes it really easy to find other gay people to relate to and like connect with and so, um…Sometimes you find like older people, whatever, that are there like for fatherly figures, they just give you advice. *Mentors?* Sometimes you find just people who want to hook up, which is okay every now and then.

Movement from self to involvement with others was a notable subtheme in this part of the interview. Here David champions movement away from a narrow self-consciousness into awareness of being part of something larger than the separate self-what RCT proponents would call "resonance with" and an important feature of relational resilience (Jordan, 2004).

> *What are the specific roles and responsibilities of being gay...*Trying to get equal rights. Proving that we are equal to everyone else, so like just keeping, making sure that there's a good name out there for us. Um, yeah... I think like AIDS awareness, that's big.

While disconnection was noteworthy in this interview, David also spent time discussing *relational connection* at an interpersonal. David identified his relationship with his SSA sister as a key and positive connection in his life. In discussing this relationship he echoed key conceptual pieces of RCT, specifically *supported vulnerability*, *mutuality*, *empathy, relational authenticity*, *mutual growth,* and *relational growth*.

> ...my junior, senior year, like my sister and I both came out to each other at the exact same time. So that was helpful. To see it. Yeah. Because we were always like really close, like best friends, so that just like brought us closer together. *How did that happen?* Um, she came out to me...She's being like really dramatic. And then, I'm like, I just like said LOL me too...*How did she respond to you?* ....totally fine with it. She loves it.

> *What other types of things does she do for you?* She like listens to me whenever I have problems, and like helps me through them. Like there's this guy like completely broke my heart, um, back in September or whatever, I'm still not over him, I don't know why, but yeah, um, she like, no matter how busy she was or whatever, she'd always like make time to listen to me like vent. And I do the same for her like with her ex. Yeah.

Having commonality was an important feature of this realization, but it was finding someone "real" someone who owned her own vulnerability and nurtured the same in others were emphasized repeatedly by David in discussing his relationship with his sister.

> I admire that she does make mistakes and she realizes that and that she let's me see that. Um, it makes her more human and it makes it okay for me to make mistakes as well...So I admire that...I actually idolize her a lot so…

"Matthew" (0512)

Introduction.

Matthew was a 21-year-old, Latino ("Mexican American"), gay male at the time of his interview. The youngest of three children born to Mexican immigrant parents, Matthew lived at home with his parents and older brother. Matthew reported, "I like my parents...I'm real close to my mom so I like being there when she's there and stuff. My dad, not so much. It's not...a bad situation at home." Asked what was it was like to be a 21-year-old, Mexican, gay male, Matthew responded, "it hasn't really been positive...if I was a 21 year old white straight male, I think things could have been a lot easier."

Matthew was enrolled at a college student at a large, urban Catholic university in Chicago, but was taking time off from school because he "needed a break." Asked to discuss his decision to take time off from school, Matthew noted, "I just don't actually fit in well with my peers or with anybody actually." He added that despite an interest in the arts, he had "no drive to express it" and guessed this might be a "sign of depression." Matthew denied any employment of engagement in any kind of activity.

Themes.

Asked if there was someone in his life who was helpful and supportive of his gay male status, Matthew initially denied it, "There wasn't just like one person, I mean, I never really felt like a special, special connection with anyone," he later corrected himself to acknowledge the special role played by his gay best friend.

> I did have a gay best friend. Ever since I was like 15. And went to high school together and everything, and it wasn't like a sexual relationship, so it was like, we would just talk, try to be friends, and that was nice. Because it was just like we were regular teenagers... We were both out...both open and gay together...just talking about positive, like role models, whatever...I guess he helped me out, being my friend. Well, we, we helped each other, really.

The capacity to bring one's real experience, feelings, and thoughts into relationship, with

sensitivity and awareness to the possible impact on others of one's actions (*authenticity*) coupled

to active participation in the development and growth of one's relational partner and the

relationship (*relational growth*) (Miller & Stiver, 1997) appear as characteristic features of this

relationship

> So how did he, well, I guess, um, how did he help you out? Ummmm, it wasn't what we
> said to each other...We could just be real, real like, but just the fact that we were both gay
> together, it's like we didn't HAVE to say anything. We're both gay. It's, it's a
> comfortable situation. I think just, just the situation, the relationship helped...I could talk
> to him about things that, whatever, being gay.

> Disconnection from community emerged as a richly discussed and nuanced theme in this

interview. Experiences of disconnection from the dominant heteronormative and European

American group were first to be discussed.

> Being gay...you're not really welcome...even though our society is where it is right now
> with gay people and being open accepting, it's still like gay men are just kind of like, like
> de facto like kind of like something went wrong. Like something, something is wrong
> with you, even though people are like more polite about the open accepting...

> When I walk around my neighborhood, I live in a mostly white neighborhood, I don't
> know how many times people have said stupid stuff to me about my race or whatever.
> And it's like, what the hell?

> The challenge of managing more than one marginalized social identity underscored

continued report of disconnection from dominant groups.

> ...I went to a mostly white [grammar] school...and I just remember this like racist
> comments and crap. It's just like if I was white I sure as hell wouldn't have to have deal
> with that or felt...so isolated, people talking about bad things about Mexicans or
> whatever. And I went to a predominantly black high school...[I] got angry comments
> every day for me being Mexican from people, it's just like what the hell? And then I got
> a lot of comments for being gay, too...just fag or whatever the hell. I mean, that's hard.
> It's not easy to deal with.

Matthew also reported that he didn't "feel" like he belonged with the gay community, underscoring a longstanding disconnection with other gay men.

> I always felt, I always felt distance from my gay peers and like when I would talk to other gay people and just felt like, just couldn't connect, or I don't, I don't know.

These feelings of disconnection from the gay community were later linked to experiences of disconnection due to his ethnic identity.

> ...it's all segregated...the black people hang out with the black people, the white people hang out with the white people. I've gone to like all kinds of different places and parties and stuff and it's just like, it's, it's just weird, because it's like when I go to like white parties, I'll, I'll see like there will be, there'll be like one black person or some crap like that...I think gay men will accept like a black or Latino, whatever person, other race, just [if they] act like a white person, basically...I don't fit in...I wish I knew why I don't fit in.

In addition to not finding connection with the larger or traditional gay community, Matthew reported addition failure in finding connection with other gay youth, specifically a gay youth group.

> ...these gay groups...They just weren't really helpful to me. Like I, I went to the Oak Park one...my [best friend] would kind of like drag me along there, but I never felt really connected to the people there.

Inathenticity, a *lack of trust*, and *power-over dynamics* were noteworthy subthemes in Matthew's narrative regarding why he failed to find connection at these youth groups.

> ...some of the staff were perverted and so I got mixed messages like they wanted sex...I had to be careful of who I talked to and what I said still.... and sometimes I wouldn't know, maybe is this guy really being sincere or is he trying to have sex with me or, it's kind of like, and that, that could just be my paranoia. That could just be me, too, or I don't know…

The adverse consequence of not connecting with the gay community was notable in what Matthew reported.

> Disappointing. Really disappointing. Really depressing. Probably why I'm really depressed still. Probably why I'm not going to school, probably why I um, I hate my life...if I had felt the sense of, of gay community...[I] probably would have been able to come out of my shell...

Finally, disconnection from his own ethnic community was discussed by Matthew.

> ...with other Mexicans...it's just like feels like they might look at me different because I don't, I don't even talk Spanish. I'm not really, I know that I'm not really down with whatever they do... they would probably be like look at this *gringo*...like who's this white, it's acting all preppy and shit.

Feelings of *shame* and an *internalization of inferiority* linked to sexual and ethnic identity were evident and important subthemes in this interview.

> I mean, if I had a choice...it wouldn't happen like oh, yeah, I'm gay or I'm Mexican or whatever. I mean, at least not here. It's not really like it's some kind of horrible disadvantage, like I'm gonna be like totally grossed out because I'm gay or Mexican or both or whatever, but it, it just makes things a little bit, a little harder. I think.

Disconnection from individual relational partners was not discussed as richly as community disconnection. Despite the narrative brevity, disconnection from other people was noted by Matthew, "And the whole everything with coming out to my parents and them [being] mad at me and just because to deal with it is like…hard."

Finally, gender socialization of males emerged as a repeated theme in this interview. Heteronormative messages undergirded by subthemes of control and relational and emotional distances were notable.

> *What messages do you get about being a man or what it takes to be a man?* ...be aggressive, um, be in control, dominant, um, (sighs)...you can't...be not like a girl, basically. And talk in a deep voice...don't want to dress too flamboyant and whatever, that's not manly.

> ... not really have any kind of emotional bond or it's just, you know, bag as many women as you can or whatever...sex without any kind of love or emotion.

Matthews feelings about these messages and the *disconnection* they have created in his life were clearly articulated by Matthew.

> I think it's the wrong message to send to men...I don't think that men should be aggressive or dominant or, it's, it's, and the same goes for women. I think they should just have more, more of a, like balanced message...

"Logan" (0603)

Introduction.

Logan was an 18-year-old, self-identified European American ("Caucasian"), gay ("gay but also queer") male at the time of his interview. The transcribed interview suggested that rapport with Logan was easily established and that he was comfortable throughout the interview, answering most questions with great detail. He reported that he was living at home with his parents and older brother, but that this setting was stressful and generally chaotic for him.

> ...my mom has been going insane for like ten years. And now she's hit menopause so it's even worse. And my dad can't handle it all, my brother's going to jail and everything's just going really crazy...

A second year community college student, Logan reported that he did not do well in high school, but that he was determine to "do better" at his current school in order to transfer to a large, urban Catholic university in Chicago in the near future. His hoped to study journalism in the future. Asked to describe himself, Logan stated,

> ...kind of creative and just artistic...trustworthy and fun to be around and just like a good guy.... *Do you have a lot of friends?* I have a lot of friends but like no one, not many who I'm actually close with and like trust , a lot of trust issues.

Themes.

Connection emerged as a prominent theme in this Logan's interview. He discussed positive connection to same-age peers, adult non related "mentors," as well as connection to the traditional gay community and gay youth community groups. Connection to the gay community was an important and early sub-theme to emerge from the data. Involvement with other gay youth at a local CBO working with gay youth was credited for the development of an important relational network, "I met most of my friends through like youth groups or youth support groups... *So those have become really close bonds.* A few of them are.

Personal (*authenticity*) and relational growth was a notable feature of Logan's involvement with this community of SSA youth.

> *Have you noticed yourself change in any way?*...I've actually become a lot more open with like other people about myself...I'm a lot more talkative, a lot more social than I used to be and more confident...*When did that start to change?*...I made a few friends at [CBO] and then they seemed to really like me. They kind of just started forcing me to like meet new people and people seem to like get to know me like get to like me very fast, so I just kind of went with it

Logan's voice suggests not only an increase in self-worth through this connection, but also confidence in his ability to be successfully relational with other people (i.e., *relational confidence*). Jean Baker Miller coined the term "zest" to describe the energy one feels in a "growth fostering relationship" (Miller & Stiver, 1997). According to Miller, from "zest" their flows five "good things"– clarity, an increase ability to act, an increase in self worth, and the desire for more connection.

Finding welcome, commonality, and safety were reasons given by Logan for why being connected to the gay community was so important to him, "I have a place to go and feel comfortable and safe." Later in the interview, Logan poignantly links movement toward the gay community with personal healing, resilience and resistance, the three primary processes through which development is facilitated by positive connections, according to RCT (Miller & Stiver, 1997).

> ...when I first came out...I thought that God hated me and rejected me...that's what I've been told since I was a kid...and [at] the Pride parade...like I saw people say, with these like queer signs and, like, queer activism and there were like queer cheer leaders in the PRIDE parade...I met friends that day and I was marching with them...they're kind of giving me [the] support that I needed...like I'm not alone in the way I feel... You can be gay and a good person.

Self-awareness, self-efficacy, and commitment to community were important features of Logan's connection to the gay community. Asked what the responsibilities of someone who identifies as queer, Logan responeded:

> ...to be better than everybody else...it is my duty as a gay queer whatever teenager to like, to stand up and like set a good example...how I behave will kind of be what people expect from the next generation of gay people. And I want to make it as easy and good for them...

In addition to community connection, Logan also spoke to experiences of growth through and by positive connections to specific individuals in his life. He reported that following in-patient treatment for depression-an outcome linked to familial rejection of his sexuality-Logan was referred to a gay youth group where he established a relationship characterized by *empathic involvement*, *supported vulnerability*, trust, and respect. Connection to this group coordinator appears to have served Logan as a pathway for confirmation and affirmation of his identity as a SSA male and sexual minority

> She's the coordinator of [the youth group]...she never asked...what I identified as...she just kind of let it alone, didn't ask any questions...Like I told her...I first started liking girls, she was just like, oh, that's no big deal. It happens...if people give you crap for being out, just don't listen to them. You like who you like and you don't have to change your identification for anybody. She's never been like, so what ARE you? She never forced me to make any decisions. She was just always supportive in whatever I did. And she was, the person who really supported my, my being queer for the longest time.

Finding authenticity ("realness") and the freedom "to just be" and "hang out" were additional characteristics of the relationship highlighted by Logan.

> ...she's just like a parent...but not like being a parent...she takes care of us, but she doesn't really do anything...like doesn't clean up after us and doesn't like, do anything like that, but she always says like, I'm not your mother. I don't clean up after you. Clean up your own shit. Whoa! Okay.

Finally, Logan discussed how the youth group leader a respectful interest in Logan's needs, desires, and ambitions and how through this relationship he grew to experience awareness

that he had something to give the relationship (i.e., *relational confidence*), something to grow the

relationship.

> ...she asked me to join the speaker's panel, which was really nice, because I had been talking about how I wanted to like do some activism thing and this was when I was a freshman...I'm like, okay. And so I think I'm doing my speaker's panel every now and then like for three years. So that's one of the greatest things, because like it opened me up to the whole activism thing.

A second relationship discussed by Logan was a longstanding friendship with a

heterosexual male peer, a relationship that, according to Logan, "survived" his coming out as gay

in part because of its history of *mutual empathic involvement* and *supported vulnerability*.

> ...one of my best friends...his family has practically adopted me as their second son...if I have a fight with my parents, I can just kind of walk, like go over to his house and like...I can always talk to him about anything...and I want to...and he can talk to me.

Disconnection was a second important theme in this interview. Logan first spoke of

relational disconnection vis-à-vis important individuals that he linked to disclosure of his sexual

identity.

> ...the whole coming out thing...my friends are Catholics, my family is Catholic...they're gonna hate me...I told my best friend I was gay, my best friend in the entire world, and the first thing he said to me was, no, you're not...I've been told by like some of my best friends and people I just that I tell like, hey, you're going to hell and we can't talk anymore...that kind of added to my trust...[I] learned to be more discreet about who you tell things to, like who do you trust.

> ...my parents said you're blind, you're just confused, you don't know what you're talking about. I'm like oh, my God.

Learning the importance of carefully weighing relationships for validation, trust, and

safety appears to be key outcome of Logan's experiences of rejection, invalidation, and rejection

from key figures in his life.

Closely linked to reports of disconnection were many reports regarding heteronormative message of male gender to which Logan was exposed while growing up and that have contributed to his "trust issues" with other people.

> ...you have to have this just disgusting false personality. You can't be, you can't be sensitive. You can't be caring, you have to be this strong like, I never cry, I never feel any emotion except for like happiness and occasionally anger....

> ...lot of people, especially in the Caucasian culture, like view [sex], and it's just like...I'm gonna have sex with you rather than an actual display of passion and love because I am a man. *So where have you gathered all of these ideas about, messages that...?* Family.

Asked what he thought about these messages, Logan responded in a manner to clearly indicate his anger, and possible pain, "I think it's disgusting...[they do] nothing but make people just hate themselves...why do you have to conform to this false idea of masculinity?" Resistance to these gender messages, including messages regarding how men should relate sexually, was also present,

> ...I don't think that you should have to worry about fitting into some kind of stereotype or to be like the typical masculine stereotype. And be the typical flamey fag or lipstick lesbian or any of that stuff. I don't think you should have to worry about, like, well, if I am gay, I have to act like this, or, if I don't want them to think I'm gay I have to act straight, like. All it does is create like depressed people...

> I think you should have sex with someone because you love them. If you have sex, like not just for the sake of having sex, because I'm like, it's a display of passion and romance, it's like, sex is supposed to be from emotion.

"Elijah" (0606)

Introduction.

Elijah was a 17-year-old, self-identified European American ("Caucasian"), gay ("gay with heterosexual tendencies") male at the time of his interview. An identical male twin, Elijah was living with his parents and only siblings in an "okay" but at times "rough" home life. A high school senior at an exclusive, suburban, college prep school, Elijah was also taking courses at a local community college in order to "get a head start on my prereqs." His future plans included enrollment at an urban Catholic university and a combined career in architectural engineering and business.

A self-reported ambitious and sociable young man, "I know a ridiculous among of gay people," Elijah reported a strong commitment to serving the gay community, "my life goals, I want to be a philanthropist because I don't like the way things work now [for gay people] and apparently nobody can do much about it, so I want to see what I can do."

Asked what it was like to be a 17-year-old gay male, Elijah reported acceptance of his sexuality and resistance to social pressure, "I'm happy...I've never wished to change...I've never questioned it...like oh, should I be straight?...My real pet peeve is some people try to tell you who you are, and they aren't you."

Themes.

Connection to individual friends, as well as connection to community, was a notable theme in this interview. In terms of connection with other individuals, Elijah discussed his friendships with other gay male youth as particularly important in his life. He stressed parity of gender performance as a key variable to this "good relationships." Here is what he said about a friend he has had for a number of years.

There's a guy named J...he's 363 days older than me...he is a very good friend of mine, yeah...he has helped a lot because he is not the typical homo, he is like me. He doesn't fit into a category, like and like I can understand him a WHOLE lot better than I can understand like a friend, F, who's like extremely flamboyant, extremely active.

In discussing this friendship, Elijah suggested the presence of *empathic involvement*, *supported vulnerability* and respect. Asked about their first meeting, Elijah stated,

...like we talked for like hours...he's like, you're gay, right? Like he really didn't want like be rude or anything...and like he was really cool about it... he had that had the same feelings as me and that I could debate topics or talk about anything...Particularly the gay thing.

While connections to individuals served to affirm Elijah's sexual identity, group membership provided him with a sense of belonging, introduced him to others with shared experiences, and allowed him to make new meaning of personal struggles.

...this group helps people so much like being able to like sit there and like be, if they're not out they can be completely relaxed...like they can talk about anything... [with] heterosexual people, a gay person like may not feel as comfortable discussing a topic, gay or not, with that class...But I can come here and talk all I wants about any topic and not have any uncomfortable feelings within.

...people that I've met that are gay...[are] less biased than heterosexual people...They understand like other minority problems...I think that's the most important thing...

Disconnection from community was another noteworthy primary theme in this interview. While acknowledging the benefits he derives from being a member of the dominant social group,

...people not wanting to talk to you or listen to you or try to understand where you're coming from just because you're gay and to some people that's a sin and to some people that's unnatural, to other people it's just wrong altogether, for whatever reason, whether or not they're religious, whether or not they think it's unnatural.

The themes noteworthiness rested in large part on the fact that Elijah spoke to disconnection from what he called the "traditional gay community" characterized by older, predominantly European American gay males. He discussed feeling distanced and rejected by a community because of his attraction to both sexes.

...a lot of [gay] people have problems when I say like I'm attracted to a girl sexually or emotionally, um, there's like, oh, then I'm bi, but I don't, I don't say bi because it's once in a blue moon.

Elijah reported the "traditional gay community" as rigid, inflexible, and as imposing of their own social standards, "you have to be like a straight acting guy or you have to be an extremely effeminate guy, there's no like real in-between."   These gender standards for gay men were among the reasons why Elijah did not want to connect with the gay community.

Elijah reported a clear awareness of the heteronormative standard dictating and expecting males to be strong, athletic, large, emotionally reserved, and heterosexual and how deviance from this standard is equated to homosexuality (i.e., not being a man), "If...you're supersensitive...they think you're a fag...oh, geez, that's hard." Emotional disconnection within the context of sexual behavior was a noteworthy gender admonishment noted by Elijah, "*What do people say about being a man and sex?* Try not to have any emotional attachment to the person you're having sex with...one-night stands are okay..."

Strong opposition to these gender-specific messages was noteworthy in Elijah's interview. He made a point of underscoring the importance of emotional attachment to relationships, including intimate sexual connection.

"I don't agree with being unemotional, because to me it's a kind of big thing [emotional attachment]...I feel like the person that I was having it [sex] with each time was special enough, like I feel like I had a greater emotional attachment to the person before I'll give them everything."

Discussion of gender expectations within a heterosexual framework extended to the expected gender performance of gay males, and expectation with which Elijah has marked difficulty since he identifies as a "masculine" gay male.

...like quite a few friends that are girls, but I don't like hanging out with them as much because again I take it...This girl that I know...I've grown up with her...for graduation at

the end of the semester...she wants me to be Jack from "Will and Grace" and I feel the Will side as opposed to Jack's side...It's totally insulting.

"James" (0704)

    Introduction.

    James was an 18-year-old, self-identified European American ("White"), gay male at the

time of his interview. A recent high school graduate, James was attending a small community

college while deciding whether to pursue a four-year degree elsewhere. He reported that he was

living with maternal grandparents but the circumstances leading to this living arrangement were

not clear from the interview. James described himself as, "very outgoing,

spontaneous...conservative, but at times unconservative (sic)...I like to try new things and

experience[s]...not judgmental of people...I want to care...know the person for who they are, not

the masks [they] wear.

    Themes.

    Connectedness emerged as an important theme and as a process through which James

was able to demonstrate resilience. *Connection* to individuals and to groups represented two

avenues by which James began a process of coming to into his status as a gay male.

    Early in the interview, James made a point of underscoring that he had an extensive and

varied relational network, "I have a variety of friends...gay friends...straight friends. I have

friends that um, from church," but notes that authenticity does not characterize all of his

friendships, "it's kind of hard for me to talk to [church friends] about my sexuality."

    While unable to relate inauthentically with all his friends, authenticity and supported

vulnerability were characteristic features of James' friendships with a small number of gay male

youth.

        It was after high school. Because I said finally...I keep on running away and this is who I
am. *Did something happen?* ...I think, the support of my friends, that they've loved me for
who I was...They said it was okay and I was afraid. I was afraid of coming out of the
closet. I mean, it's so much safer in the closet. And once you come out to some people,

you put yourself in a vulnerable position to be criticized. Um, hurt. And I felt comfortable enough with these people that I could tell them that this is who I am. I've been hiding it for a while and…

Within this circle of friends, James highlighted his connection with two female peers as particularly important in his life. As discussed by James, these connections were characterized by authenticity, *mutual empathic involvement* and *supported vulnerability* and empowerment. Affirming of self was a noteworthy subtheme.

> My lesbian friend, I just feel so connected with her...like seeing her like her coming out to her parents, I can go to her, like when I make the choice that I want to come out to my parents. How did you do it?...I've heard her – parts of her coming out story. But it's something that if I need to ask, for instance, like she will be there. She'll be there to support me.

> ...my one friend...she's straight, but she's always been very supportive of, of me regardless. I mean, I would, I was able to go talk to her about who I thought was cute. And she did to...*And how is something like that helpful then?* Because I'm able to be who I am. I'm able to not hide, like I could not do this with some of my friends. I could be who I am and say, oh, look at that cute guy. I can't say that with some of my friends...she just loved me.

In contrast to the affirmation of self found in the above relational connection to one other person, *finding others like you* (commonality) was a subtheme in the James' reported connection to community, specifically the gay community,

> I just feel very comfortable, I mean, it's, I feel safe...I feel like I'm supposed to be a part of this, of this community because I feel comfortable. I feel like it's where I can be who I am. Um, I'm not afraid. I feel safe...I can trust people, too. That's very important to me...knowing that you're not alone. That's it people like me.

Asked how he developed his connection to the gay community, James' discussed how growth in the area was facilitated through a network of positive, growth-promoting relationship with supportive friends.

> I have like a lot of lesbian friends that I made friends with and that helped me, pushed me further into the community. And then I started talking to others, becoming a part of PRIDE here and PRIDE at my college and um, going to Boys Town, just being a part of the community...

Finding others like you was also featured as central to his connection to a LGBT student

organization at his school.

> ...And PRIDE here, I feel it's good, where it's a support group and we support each other.
> And it's just nice to know that you have a group of people that you can fall upon to, when
> things get rough or call or talk to.

Disconnection from multiple relational partners and different community contexts was a

noteworthy theme that James discussed richly and without much prompting from the interviewer.

Disconnection from the dominant heteronormative group framed James' disconnection from key

relational partners in life-disconnections linked this to fear of being hurt, rejected, or event

disowned because of his sexuality. In this regard he made a point of highlighting the

disconnection (inauthenticity) between he and his parents, "I haven't told my parents because I

fear that they'll disown me...I don't tell people that I'm gay or anything...because I mean, our

culture is very homophobic." Additional problems of survival within unique cultural values are

discussed by James as reasons why he relates inauthentically at home with his grandparents.

> I'm afraid to tell my family. Because it's something very different and they don't
> understand...I'm very afraid to tell my grandparents. Especially my grandfather, because
> he's very strong follower of Christ, Christian, and I'm afraid if I tell him I'll have no place
> to live. That he'll kick me out... I'm just afraid that they won't love me just because if I
> tell them that I'm gay, they'll think of me differently and not see that I'm the same person,
> but I have a different sexual preference.

It was noteworthy that while acknowledging his own marginalization and imposed

inauthenticity, James illustrated his empathic attunement to the relative incremental

marginalization experienced by members of the non-heteronormative community who are also

members of racial or ethnic minority groups, "but I think because I'm not part of like a minority

that it's not as hard as Latinos or African American people, because they, they're part of a

minority and they also being gay, I mean, that makes it even, I think, rougher, so I feel like I kind

of have it easier than them."

Disconnection from the dominant heteronormative group, "you're in a minority...you're

different," was further echoed when James talked about his experiences in school (current and

past experiences).

> I didn't tell people I'm gay because...people fear it and that's why I feel that I cannot talk
> to them about I'm gay. Because they'll think of me differently, they'll treat me
> differently...you have just stupid idiots at school that will just ah, make fun of you
> because you're gay. Especially the guys. Guys can be very cruel and just keep teasing
> you about that and it's, it's, it causes, it hurts a lot. Because you feel kind of alone...

> In order to protect himself from rejection and/or victimization, as well as to preserve

important relationships in his life (e.g., the support of his grandparents) James adopts what RCT

would term *strategies of disconnection* or survival (Miller, 1998).

> ...you have to hide and kinda sometimes live a double life um, because you're afraid to
> tell people, because people, I mean, we have Matthew Shepherd that was murdered by, I
> mean, that was just because of his sexual preference. And you're just, I mean, you have
> Christians that they say it's sinful and everything, and you're living in sin and stuff, and
> pushing us away...I don't, I don't go flaunting it. If a person asks me, I'll tell them, but it's
> just, it's, it's living in fear sometimes.

> Although reporting feeling connected to the gay community at large, his connection was
challenged by experiences of disconnect with that communities reported emphasis on youth and
"beauty."

> ...it's hard because the gay community...is very high on what you look like and your
> youth...people love you for your body and...[f]or you age, too, yeah. And they don't love
> you for something that is not gonna be changing as much, like the personality...I'm very
> connected with the personality and I put a high esteem on personality.

> Heteronormative messages regarding gender were identified as barriers to connection by

James. In discussing these messages, James was clear to point out his disagreement with them.

> ...men are suppose to be strong. They're, they don't show their feelings. And I'm
> completely opposite. I show my feelings. I'm sensitive. I cry. You hear so much in
> culture, or like guys aren't supposed to cry. And I grew up being told that I cry too
> much...

....I'm not society's, what they call a man. I'm more in touch with how I feel and how I express myself, whereas it's completely opposite with what society says...it's like guys are like aggressive, too. I'm more passive. So it's like I, I feel like I don't meet society's thing of ideas and I'm content with that.

"Joseph" (0706)

Introduction.

Joseph was a 15-year-old, self-identified European American ("White"), gay male at the time of his interview. He was a sophomore at a large suburban public high school where he reported noteworthy connection, "I have a lot of activities…student council, sophomore class, math team, scholastic bowl, peer mediation, band, best buddies…soccer, swim [team] and water polo." Asked to describe himself, Joseph stated:

> Like I don't really have any problems with it and like I'm open at school and stuff and most people really don't have a problem with it and the people who do choose not to say anything, because they know I have like people on my side and like, and like I'm liked with the teachers, so like I have a lot of teachers like who like will help me if I need just like help like that, so it really doesn't really, I don't, it's not, it's like sort of good, I guess. And I really don't have any problems with it and…

Themes.

Interpersonal connection was highlighted by Joseph as a key relational pathway toward affirmation of his sexual identity. In discussing these relationships, Joseph suggested evidence of *supported vulnerability* and *mutual empathic involvement*

> ...my best friend...she really like understood like more of, like how I felt and she like really helped me like come to terms with it and understand that like I'm okay...

> ...she would always like be there when I wanted to talk and like she wouldn't never like say my opinions were wrong...like she would not really like comfort me, but just like let me know that like she was there...she like had knowledge about like what I was going through...

Upon further probing Joseph went on to indicate that within these relationships, he felt relationally confidence and in a position to exert impact on his relational partners and the relationship.

> *So you said your friends feel like you know like what they're going through. In terms of being gay or just…*Just like in general. Like I understand problems more and like how to help them deal with problems they have for like any issue and that like I have like more,

like I can help them tell it by like how I went through and they can sort of apply that to how they like might be able to like use it...it helps everyone involved, I guess.

In addition to relational connections in his life, Joseph also discussed noteworthy *disconnection*-gain with notable need for prompting. He discussed how because of his sexuality he lost several close male friends, who could not "cope with it." Asked to discuss this loss of friends, Joseph references a pervasive and systemic negative attitude toward SSA individual that undermines the ability to connect with non-SSA individuals.

> *What is bad about being gay?*...probably just people's reactions to it...they are sort of taken back...like I lost like a few friends sort of like that way...they just really couldn't understand that it's me coming to terms with myself and not them...

He then proceeds to discuss purposeful, protective disconnection vis-à-vis this dynamic and the loss of friends.

> ...they [lost friends' sort of like changed...they weren't, not necessarily as open, but just more reserved and they really weren't, like when they were around me they like changed how they were and like weren't really like how they used to be, like [inaudible]. *And had you guys stopped being friends?* Um, it was really mostly me just not like hanging out with my other friends instead, instead of doing stuff with them, so, and then it just like "Hi", and that's all…

Within this context of this disconnection focused on disconnection, Joseph wove the challenge that heteronormative messages regarding masculinity have on relational connection for men.

> ...I see the messages and like how they're supposed to be like the strong, more masculine, more athletic...they make more men like deviate from how they would naturally develop, I guess. And instead of just naturally developing, they're trying to fit an image.

Cross-Case Findings

The preceding section of this chapter presented findings from each selected interview case, illustrating where and how interview transcripts suggested key features of growth-promoting relationships posited by RCT as central to the construct of *relational resilience* (Jordan, 2004). The following section combines the voices of the interviewed young men to note the themes echoed across all interview cases-an effort that in essence creates a single voice from many different voices. For this process, code summaries for each analyzed interview were first merged into a single summary of codes, then organized, narrowed, and reworded until overarching themes emerged.

Relational connection was the first cross-case theme to emerge. Here participants discussed *relational connection* to individuals and to larger groups as two avenues by which their consolidation of a SSA sexual identity was more positive. Participants generally associated affirmation of their sexual identity with a connection with a supportive individual, while reference to mutual empowerment, commonality, and simply "finding others like you was typically linked to connection with a community, specifically the gay community.

Integral to understanding the first cross-case theme was the theme of *relational disconnection* that emerged as the second cross-case theme discussed by all study participants vis-à-vis individuals and/or communities. While *relational disconnection* was not the focus of this study, the process of discovery suggested the importance of these themes in the lives of study participants and thus ignoring was not an option. Linked to reported relational disconnection was the third theme-*gender socialization*. That is the socialization process by which study participants learned to be male, to be distant, and to be disconnected. Finally, *context and culture* emerged as the forth and final cross-case theme, illustrating how relational

processes of connection and disconnection can best be understood when socio-cultural contexts are accounted for and reflected upon.

Relational connection

The first theme was derived from across all case interviews and underscores the importance of connection in the lives of SSA male youth.   Regardless of sexual identity, racial or ethnic identity, or educational status, all participants stressed the importance of growth-promoting connections with individuals and/or communities in their lives.

Interpersonal relational connection. All participants expressed a need for positive interpersonal, one-on-one connections in their lives-specifically, connections with caring individuals who afforded or could afford study participants with a kind of safety and opportunity for personal growth not found or available elsewhere in their lives. Participants reported experiencing this type of connection with individuals who, as indicated by "Mason," seemed to genuinely care for them for "who they are" instead of for they were "expected to be."

As suggested by "Ethan," there was clear evidence of *social support* in these relationships (e.g., emotional, directional, and instrumental), "she was actually everything of the aspect of a mother that I didn't have. The supportive side of giving me that comfort, to let me know that my sexuality is okay;" this support was reported by study participants as most effective when offered within a relational context characterized by mutual respect, authenticity, and the opportunity to help shape the relationship (i.e., *supported vulnerability and relational empowerment*),

> ...she knew about a lot of stuff that was like going on inside of me...And she was really open about things...so I could talk to her easily...she actually encouraged me to tell my parents...She helped me be more confident in who I am...and she asked for my opinion...no body did that before to me...So it was very important to have her. (Mason, 22, EA, gay male)

According to RCT, authenticity involves being able to bring oneself as fully as possible into a relationship with an awareness of the possible impact one may have on the other person (Jordan, 1999; Miller & Stiver, 1997). As stated by "Christopher," "I happened to be dating someone [another gay male] in my school...And then he [identified supportive adult] was like, oh…that's when he started to feel more comfortable and he told us about his partner...I guess that made us feel more connected and in the same way..." Here "Christopher" notes how being heard, seen, and responded to created room for his lived experience as a gay male to count, to make an impact on the relationship, and to foster relational growth. According to RCT, active listening involves a spirit of vulnerability and openness in both relational partners (Jordan et al, 1991) and it is within this expressed openness that trust and respect reside.

Connection to an individual served as a pathway or bridge for clarification, confirmation, and affirmation of sexual identity for most study participants. Here "Anthony" identified the relationship that served to affirm his status as gay male,

> ...I had already come out to myself...the only problem for me was getting from that point to extending outward... I did it maybe with my lesbian friend and that's pretty much all that I needed at that time...I really didn't go to any older people in the community.

For "Anthony" this relational pathway served not only to further affirm his sexual identity within a more public sphere but also to nourish a desire for new connections and the development of an affirming social support network, "after the point of coming out...I went to [school GSA], and that was one of the big things that introduced me into the gay world, like showed me all the things...available to me." His relationship with his lesbian friend contributed to increased efficacy in relationships and resulted in greater and more positive connection.

"David" described a number of key relationships that have helped him deal with his "otherness." First, his relationships with several friends at school, including SSA female friends,

were helpful to him as they validated and acknowledged his gay identity when he "came out" to them. Yet it was the presence of his lesbian sister during his junior year that reflected key features of a *growth-promoting relationship*, "my sister and I both came out to each other at the exact same time. So that was helpful. To see it...we were always like really close, like best friends, so that just like brought us closer together." Engagement, *supported vulnerability*, *mutual empathy*, authenticity, and *mutual empowerment* were characteristics of this relational process, powerfully underscoring that there is something uniquely powerful about finding oneself in others as they are likely to listen, believe, and empower one to take action.

"David's" relationship with his sister suggested a sort of fusion or enmeshment between relational partners. Here fusion or enmeshment represents not the maladaptive relational processes underscored by family systems theory-a condition where two or more people weave their lives and identities around one another so tightly that it is difficult for any one of them to function independently-but an adaptive relational mechanism by which relational partners whose need for relational closeness has been dismissed or negated by a heteronormative standard find commitment and strength via an inseparability, an intense closeness, and a mutual dependence.

This "queer fusion" differs from total spontaneity or reactivity, which does not include awareness or concern for the impact on the other person. This authenticity is ordinarily compromised in relationships of unequal power, where the less powerful person is expected to conform to the expectations of the more powerful person (this is true for power differences based on age, gender, race, class, etc.). In caring relationships of temporarily unequal power (e.g., adult and child, caretaker and child, teacher and student) however, the more powerful person will actually be encouraging the growth of authenticity and full voice in the less powerful person.

There is an active intention to bring this person into the fullest expression of her or his

personhood" (Miller, 1976).

Drawing our attention to a unique relational need of gay males that does not receive

necessary attention in the literature, "Anthony" discussed the importance of having gay *male*

[emphasis mine] friends in his life, "I didn't have any gay male friends and I was missing out...if

I were ever to have a boyfriend, it would be short-lived because I couldn't [do it]...like I need

[gay male] friends. An opportunity for unique authenticity as a *gay male* [emphasis mine] is

further noted by "Anthony," "it's just easier to be, not only to be myself, but to have more

chances to be myself maybe, or to want to be myself." Mutuality is also noted by "Anthony."

> ...situations for, for gay men and for lesbians are different...I didn't have anyone that I
> could talk to about like about being a gay boy...So it was really important for me to have
> someone else who was going through exactly the same thing..

While also stressing the important of having gay male friends, "Joshua" noted a unique

sexual tension that may be present within this dynamic that merits attention when attempting to

develop a growth-promoting relationship between two gay males.

> I guess the hard part is...trying to have guy friends in general that are gay, I mean, it's
> very difficult, because there's always that underlying like sexual tension. Are we gonna
> just be friends or is this gonna be something more? Which can be really difficult,
> especially like when you're trying to make genuine friendships

The participants in this study discussed their ability to identify when someone was not

engaging with them authentically and their desire for this type of engagement, in part because it

seemed to make the relationship more pleasurable. When talking about the staff member at a

group home for boys, one participant said, "She was real and she told you like it was."

Participants strongly agreed that good listening was a key component of authentic engagement.

Some participants reported that it was particularly helpful when adults and peers indicated that

they could relate to or understand the young their struggle by drawing parallels to their own experience, suggesting *mutual empathic involvement*.

Participants expressed a personal dedication to the relationship. By this term, I mean that interviewed youth described a commitment to being together not because of external constraints, such as psychological pressure from families or peers, but instead because of the quality and mutual benefits received from the relationship (Stanley & Markman, 1992). Participants placed the relationship as a priority; they were personally dedicated to its success and to their relational partner's satisfaction.

Community relational connection. Beyond noting interpersonal *relational connection* with one other person, the majority of study participants discussed the importance of connecting with a community and how essential this connection was to their development as SSA male youth. These findings underscore the fact that humans are social beings who wish or need to participate in the growth of others. This is in keeping with RCT, which embraces the building of community and suggests that human beings have a deep desire to engage with others in creating meaning and good (Jordan & Dooley, 2000). It was noteworthy that while connection to community was noted by all participants, the communities identified extended beyond the expected (i.e., gay community) to include ethnic and cultural communities (e.g., Mexican-American, African American, and religious community).

For study participants, connection to a gay community led to real personal growth and change by helping them develops new ways of understanding themselves, including their own patterns of connection and disconnection. Here "Anthony" talks about personal growth, greater understanding, and healing:

> ...it's a community that when you're in it, it makes all the bad things kind of diminish...
> any like bad things, experience having to do with that part of your, you as a person. Like

it just makes it less, it just, it doesn't make it less hurtful, it doesn't make it less bad. It just makes it less um, important to you, kind of.

Study participants appeared to grow through these community connections as manifested by a greater sense of mutuality and empathy for others. For some this would lead to action to address oppressive systems.   For "Joshua," being part of a school-based community of gay youth not only informed his handling of his sexuality, but also empowered him toward community action, "for the Day of Silence I wanted to organize um, the school to be part of it." Underscoring the importance of *mutual empathic empowerment* we also learn from "Joshua," "my mom and I made rainbow bracelets…which was awesome, because my mom was taking part of something that was important to me."

"Joshua's" behavior reflects central ideas from Cohen's (1955) influential work on subcultures-that subcultures emerge when individual group members face similar problems and by coming together they create solutions for said problems. As noted by "Alexander" when discussing being a part of the gay community, "it's about embracing everybody and being able to move forward on the issues...we're all dealing with the same discrimination. So why isolate ourselves?"

Community membership provided study participants not only with a sense of belonging, but introduced them to other youth with shared experiences that allowed them to make new meaning of struggles. Here "Joshua" and "Ethan" give voice to these relational group processes,

> ...you feel at home in the gay community when you're gay...they're people that share your same backgrounds...like history of growing up and struggles...you kind of find some strength and courage within that community and it's kind of maybe like an energizing center so that when you are out in other areas...you have that courage [to cope]. ("Joshua")

> I was attending the group settings and I started meeting a couple of people there, here and there, and then we got together and we started um, hanging out on XXX and other places and I got to meet...people, network ("Ethan").

School- or community-based youth community settings were consistent forums described by study participants as important to their sense of self as SSA males and to their sense of safety in the world. "Joshua," for example, discussed joining his school's Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) and from within this relational dynamic growing toward greater authenticity, "I was becoming more comfortable with myself and I was ready to own, own who I was and I was." Here "Anthony" discusses what joining his school's GSA meant for him, underscoring Joshua's reported mutual growth and coming into being with and by others.

> ...my freshman year...I was the only one who was gay...having people that are also [gay] was kind of important...have some common feelings about who we are and to have some common problems...that you're not in the world alone and that it's just like you either sink or swim and there's no one there to help you, and there's no one there to cushion the fall or whatever, maybe, in a way, but something like along those lines that are just like not just there but also support and supportive and um, like maybe like unconditional like help and love and stuff like that.

Through school- and community-based groups, participants found friendship and positive connection in the face of disconnection and isolation and, as was the case for "Joshua," a forum from which to take some type of action against a system that has historically alienated them. Findings from the present study suggest that from community connections, several participants went on to manifest greater vitality and energy, an increase desire to act, an increase in self-worth, a more accurate picture of the relationship and what they can contribute to it, and greater motivation for connections with other people beyond the immediate relationship. These features are what Jean Baker Miler, 1988) refers to as "the five good things" that emerge from growth-fostering relationships. Here is Joshua's expression of the "five good things,"

> ...[I] was directing and leading this...groundbreaking thing [Day of Silence Event] for my school...I had to get up in front of like 500 faculty and um, staff members and tell them that I was gay and tell them why this day was so important to me...it was one of the ballsiest things I'd ever had to do...but I was able to do it. And I actually got a standing ovation after I was finished with my speech about what was gonna happen and why we

were doing it. They were just in awe that I was able to be honest and talk about why it was important and um, that was huge for me, just getting the acknowledgement... Like they were supporting this and they supported me and everything that I was doing and um, that helped a lot in my process.

"Joshua's" reported experiences suggest that connection to community or groups has the

potential to enhance the ability of SSA male youth to work with difference, conflict, and

disconnection at a group or social level. This is illustrated by "Alexander's" account of his

community work in his Mexican American community-vitality and energy that he linked to

being involved in a CBO group for gay, Latino male youth,

> I got to see people, hear their story, get to know people, get to know how the process worked and doesn't work for the community...[I am] able to go out there on my own time and organize...And people be like, can we do that?....I'm like, well, do you know who your neighbor is? And they're like oh, yeah, people, blah, blah, blah. So I talk these people in it and just like kind of building that sense of family within a block

"Alexander's" interview suggest that though community connection at the CBO, he was

able to build and practice an awareness of personal and relational experiences, as well as an

awareness of cultural and societal factors that lead to personal and community well-being and

how the two are inextricably linked.

Reminding us that all development, including community relational development occurs

with a particular cultural context, several study participants discussed the importance of being

with male youth who were not only similarly identified with regard to sexuality but also ethnicity

and race. "Alexander" discussed that while he "fits in" a predominantly African American and

European gay male youth group, he feels "find of awkward around them," preferring to be

around Latino gay male youth like himself,

> I feel like a lot better, compared to like some groups...where it's nothing but African American and White people over there...if I'm [around] Hispanic LGBT men...the people who I talk to there, they're really accepting and so I feel like I can openly talk to them about practically anything.

While clarity regarding how racial and ethnic factors played into these relational

situations was needed, "Alexander's" voice makes clear that dominant cultural attitudes toward

marginalized and minority groups may impact the development of self-esteem for ethnic and

racial minority youth even within the context of similarly identified gay youth. As pointed out

by "Christopher," "being gay ain't enough sometimes." Suggestive support of the fact that

racism and class are pervasive challenges for ethnic and racial minority SSA youth is offered by

"William."

> And that's how you connected with the Mexican American community at school?
> Defending myself. Against what? Just like stereotypes and racists, things like that....Do
> you think that being challenged by racism and prejudice created your sense of
> community?   Yes.

Findings from this effort suggest that SSA individuals may create communities that are

separated and disconnected from the heteronormative culture to allow for safe expression

identity and (physical) closeness of like individuals. Here is "Aiden" discussion his movement

toward this unique relational group setting,

> ...I used to go a lot...I liked it, I liked that feeling. That was my space...I could talk about
> anything, they wouldn't care. I have [heterosexual] friends, but all the time I got
> them...Like I know you're gay but I don't want to know. I don't want to be seeing that
> from you, like that. So by going to [identified CBO] it's like, whoa, I can say whatever I
> want...

This, of course, represents disconnection, but disconnection with adaptive purpose-

disconnect to connect with/to mutual welcome, validation, supported vulnerability, and history.

Disconnection for SSA male youth can be seen in a positively defined construct of *strategic*

separation (Jordan, 2004).

Reframing as strengths many of the characteristics that are viewed as weaknesses (e.g.,

relational need, emotional responsiveness) serves marginalized groups who have been

historically invalidated for these same characteristics. Study participants reported that being in

community moved them away from internalizing a negative view of themselves imposed by a culture that devalues interpersonal attunement. Here "Andrew" speaks to the reframing process that happens in community:

> ...two years ago I came to Chicago for the PRIDE festival...that was the first time in my life I had really been surrounded by a group of gay people.. I just sort of remember...being so proud of, of being gay...and that this was the community that I belonged to and, and that it was very accepted. And that, that for the first time in my life, it, it felt like that this is officially okay now...I have this group that I can count on...

For several study participant connection to community was facilitated by presence of a supportive and nurturing relationship. Many of these youth either had not known how to connect with the community, or did not know it existed but connection to community extended this awareness and growth,

> ...[in] high school...I was kind of ambiguously gay for the first week or two, or month...I don't even think I had to really tell anybody in my high school...[later] I was just being able to talk about boys...being able to be more gay and openly about it...and then eventually I joined my gay organization at school...So it was then that I started to get less nervous about it...And that led me into having like, having a lot more friends of, of gay and lesbian and bisexual and having more visibility in the community (Anthony)

While connection to a community appears intuitively important for adaptive functioning and development for all youth, for SSA youth it may be imperative as they are raised within a socio-cultural framework that expect and values heteronormativity. The question, of course, then becomes what happens relationally within this particular connection that reflects both the central conceptual pieces of RCT and a unique benefit to SSA male youth. Does connection to community serve to counteract the effects of homophobia, as has been documented in the current literature and work focused on social support (Robinson, 1994; D'Augelli, 1989 D'Augelli & Hart, 1987), for example?

Relational disconnection

All of the participants selected for this study described many experiences of *relational disconnection*, including disconnection from parents and peers, formalized institutions (e.g., church and school), and communities. While the present study was not aimed at examining these relational processes, careful study of the transcribed interviews suggested that my understanding of the relational mechanisms that may serve to promote *relational resilience* among SSA male youth would be incomplete without equal consideration of where an how this population experiences disconnection. More important, however, was the fact that participant after participant spoke richly, and at times with evident pain, about their experience at being rejected, marginalized, silenced by relational partners in their lives-a finding that in light of the heteronormative standard against which they were growing up was not surprising (Anderson, 2007).

In some accounts, participants recounted experiences of homophobia and heterosexist in their relationships with parents, friends, and co-workers. In other instances they recounted social institutions such as church and places of employment as contexts of disconnection. Within these narratives *relational disconnection* from one other person and from community emerged as salient sub-themes.

Interpersonal disconnection. *Relational disconnection* from significant relational partners was present in all examined interview cases. In most of these cases, the disconnection was explicit. Here is "Ethan's" voice, "The hard part [of being gay] is my mom, she doesn't accept it...she does not condone it.   In "Daniel's" case, the rejection and invalidation acted upon him by his mother due to his nonconforming sexual identity served to literally push him onto the street,

It wasn't really hard to tell my mom [that I was gay]. It was what happened after
that...she didn't talk to me for a whole week. And that was nothing. I didn't care. But
what happened afterwards what was really worst. I had to leave.

Despite the severity of his mother's rejection it was noteworthy and telling of "Daniel's"

capacity for *relational resilience* (i.e., the ability to connect, reconnect, and/or resist

disconnection; Jordan, 1992) that he was desirous of reconnection with his mother within a

framework of obvious pain, "I do miss my family a lot...but I don't want to go and tell her that.

Because I don't want her to kind of know that I do miss her."

For "Ethan" and several other study participants the rejection and invalidation

experienced at home with a parent were also experienced with peers at school and work. Here

"Ethan" discussed his friends' reaction to his disclosing his sexual identity with them, "they all

dissed me and stuff, saying, okay, he's gay, then we don't want to talk with him. He nasty and all

of that." Rejection from work peers was discussed by "Jayden," "I had a lot of issues about it at

work...everybody trying to figure out, oh, he's gay and we're gonna leave him alone. We're not

gonna mess with him, we're not gonna talk to him."

A "game of rejection" is how "Ethan" refers to the aforementioned relational insult, "first

of all, you get to know a person....And then they don't want to talk to you, they don't want to

socialize or kick it with you. Because they find out your sexual orientation...it's been rough."

"Ethan's" words aptly capture the experiences of disconnection Jean Baker Miller (1988) was

attempting to capture when she coined the term "condemned isolation," which refers to the

experience of isolation and aloneness that leaves one feeling shut out of the human community.

While not explicitly stated, "Joshua's" voice suggest that in response to his friends rejection he

feels alone, immobilized regarding reconnection, and at fault for this state.

For many participants, moving away from harmful disconnection, such as that discussed by "Joshua" and "Ethan," required removal of the self or emotional investment from sources that excluded and isolated them from relationships (Miller & Stiver, 1994, 1997).   For participants moving away from harmful disconnection was compelled by experiences in which they were not allowed to represent themselves fully through action or behaviors. In order to protect themselves from this experience several participants discussed choosing to not disclose their sexuality with key relational partners, as was the case with "Christopher," or purposely trying to conceal their identity behaviorally-most dramatically illustrated by attempting to pass as "not gay" or not have it noticed. Here "Jayden" richly discussed the benefit of police gendering oneself and "passing."

> They the ones with the high-pitched voice, always gots to be noticed...[they] asking for the problems...I don't think everybody, they don't realize that your sexuality is only really between your friends, your family, and yourself...when you're trying acting all gay and want to get out loud and stuff, girl, and all this, they're saying please say something to me...When you can just nip that in the bud...don't say nothing to nobody about you, and you can take that whole ride, nice smooth and quietly.

This inauthentic presentation or concealment of self was yet another form of disconnection and reflect RCT's idea of the *central relational paradox*, which posits that in the face of repeated disconnections, people yearn even more for relationship, but their fear of engaging with others leads to keeping aspects of their experience out of connection. As a consequence, in order to stay in connection individuals keep more and more of their genuine self out of connection by engaging in what RCT calls "strategies of disconnection," becoming silent and inauthentic, as illustrated by "Alexander's" voice,

> ...my parents don't know about me...I love to see my family...But at times I can't be around them...I feel like an outcast around them...I just feel awkward, because they have this whole idea that I'm supposedly gonna be this and that, and I can't tell them otherwise.

"Alexander" and "Jacob" voices suggest that they alter themselves to fit in with the expectations and wishes of the other person, and by this process, their relationships lose authenticity and mutuality, becoming yet another source of disconnection (Jordan, 2004).

For several young men, chronic disconnection from significant relational partners in their lives was linked to the opposite of the "five good things" as discussed by Miller (1989), that is, these young men linked disconnection with depression, confusion, low self-esteem, social withdrawal, and lost productivity. In the case of a small number of study participants this maladaptive and negative state was further linked to the adoption of maladaptive, higher-risk behavior. Here is "Alexander's" voice:

> …my first gay experience...was really dirty. It was in the bathroom at some university...I was like a 16 year old boy and then I remember just going out on the streets, just, with people, you know what I'm saying? It was real unhealthy and stuff...I just didn't like myself. I did it because it felt good, it felt good to know that I was making someone feel good when I couldn't make my own self feel good.

By his report, "Alexander's" sexual behavior developed within a context of isolation and disconnection from his parents. It bears repeating here that from a relational perspective, "Alexander's" sexual behavior is attributed to relational interaction dynamics, not to "Alexander" himself.

Community relational disconnection. Moving away from harmful disconnection, according to RCT, requires removal of emotional investment from sources that exclude and isolate one from relationships, whether individual or institutional (Miller & Stiver, 1997). The present effort suggested that moving away from harmful disconnection was common for SSA male youth participants who were often are compelled toward community disconnection by experiences within these same communities where they were not allowed to present themselves authentically.

Experiences of disconnection from the dominant heteronormative community was discussed or referenced by all study participants. Here narratives communicated a keen awareness of a heteronormative culture undergirded by heterosexism and homophobia. This disconnection from the dominant group lead some young men into protective inauthenticity in order to simply survive, while in the lives of other young men, it compelled them to commingle disconnection with connection. That is, some SSA male youth may strategize alternatives for a healthy and growth-fostering connection in separate, safe places. To experience the uniqueness of their relationships fully, SSA male youth are compelled in the heteronormative culture to create not only strategies of disconnection, but subcultures that provide safety without hiding or modifying their identities (i.e., movement to gay community's or groups). Such disconnection from the heteronormative culture may then become survival for gay male youth. In this realm, these strategies can be named protective disconnection and genuine acts toward *relational resilience*.

Gender socialization

Socialization processes emerged as a common theme across all interview cases. More specifically, traditional socialization messages for males that emphasize the development of autonomy, separation, and individualistic coping style emerged from the data as a major obstacle to the development of *growth-promoting relationships*.

All study participants identified their gender socialization as a specific barrier to building authentic, growth promoting relationships. Regardless of racial, ethnic, and educational attainment, participants discussed the unique set of social expectations placed upon them because of the sex-messages that called them to "suck it up," achieve independence (autonomy), stoically mask their emotions and pain, and, above all, avoid doing anything that might shame either

parents or communities. Here "Jayden," "Alexander," "Noah," and "Andrew" share the

messages they heard while growing up:

> …being strong and um, sticking up for yourself, and um, having a girlfriend (chuckles), those type of things ("Jayden")

> ...between my brothers and my father, what they practically burned into my head is that men don't cry... ("Alexander")

> ...not so much not showing your emotions...not letting them take control of you, or your feelings... Like cool, calm, and collected...whenever an issue occurs you can control it or basically understand it and not let you, not start to panic or feel overwhelmed ("Noah").

> …being the provider, being the stronghold of the family, being um, the less emotional of the wife (Andrew).

These rigid gender guidelines, or "gender straitjackets" (Pollack, 1998), led some study

participants to repress their yearnings for love and connection and to build an invisible,

impenetrable wall around themselves—a "cool pose" (Majors & Billson, 1992) hidden by an

emotional "mask" of masculine bravado or invulnerability. For example, Alexander discussed

how the messages he heard from his brothers and father challenged his *authenticity*, his ability to

express affect, "it is really difficult for me to cry," and to establish connection.

Shaming emerged as an important subtheme within the larger theme of gender

socialization. "Andrew" spoke about how the heteronormative standard for males shames him

into extremes of self-containment, and separation.

> …growing up, it was very hard...I was struggling with my own identity... I would see the portrayal of homosexual males and I would compare the two and I feel that the portrayal of homosexual males, when I was growing up, was so negative that it was easy for me to see that and, even though I knew that I embodied many of those characteristics, it was easy for me to just say no.

The messages heard by "Andrew" not only shamed him regarding his sexuality, but also

led him toward inauthenticity and disconnection from self. These findings echo what William

Pollack refers to at the "boy code" (1998, 2000), a code that shames young males away from

their emotional vulnerability and basic need for human connection, just when they need it most. For "Jayden," heteronormative messages that glorifies aggression and power-over interaction may have served as relational template for how to cope with feelings of fear and perceived threat from others, "someone called me fag....I was always fighting."

From the dominant cultural perspective, maintaining or desiring proximity leads young males to develop "undesirable" traits associated with women (e.g., empathy and emotionality). Gilligan (1982) described how individuals are forced toward disconnections dictated by patriarchal culture. Participants reminded me that for males, this disconnection comes early in life when they are pressured to distance and differentiate themselves from their mothers to prove their masculinity. To the extent that masculinity is defined in opposition to femininity, "Jacob" learned that he should not be like "girl' if he wants to be "real man."

> My dad's like ultra machismo. I remember when I was little he used to hit me...I use to play with dolls...and tell me that he didn't want a faggot...And he would give me cold showers and stuff, and then um, my mom just sat there...she probably thought that by him doing that I wouldn't grow up to be gay.

Kimmel (1995) notes that the traditional ideology of masculinity is the chief obstacle to healthy development in young males, particularly males from marginalized social groups (e.g., SSA young males), a sentiment articulated by "Joshua."

> ...being Caucasian in the United States is always been viewed upon as the majority ethnicity...you're white, you're gonna get better treatment wherever you go. Um, it's kind of like the power position, um, and that message has been with me ever since I was a little kid.

Context and culture

Gilligan (2001) writes, "While resilience may previously have been seen as residing in the person ...it is now more usefully considered as a variable quality that derives from a process of repeated interactions between a person and favourable features of the surrounding context in a

person's life" (p.94). As such, *resilience* is not only a relational phenomenon but a contextual one. Time and time again, study participants suggested that the present or absence of growth-promoting relationships must be understood as positive of negative adaptation in specific *context* [emphasis mine] and culture.

Positive connection is a relational image linked intimately to family and culture by Alexander, specifically his "Hispanic" culture,

> "we are all close. Like from what I've gotten from other families, from different ethnic backgrounds, is that not many families stay close. The aunts or uncles drift away. And what the Hispanic family, Hispanic cultures, the aunt and uncle is always there. They're really, really close.

In similar fashion, "Anthony" underscores the important context of his Italian family to his feeing acknowledged, supportive, and thus his ability to engage authentically, reciprocally, and with mutuality with one other person,

> ...one of the things about my Italian family is just, there's a strong sense of family...even though I don't always think about it, even though I don't always want it, I feel like I have a very, I have people that really support me and that love me...

To understand and promote positive connections in "Alexander's" and "Anthony's" lives, acknowledgement and credit of where and how his Latino and Italian culture, respectively, nourishes growth-promoting relationships is important. This suggests that *relational resilience* is influenced by environment, and that the interaction between individuals and their social ecologies will determine the degree of positive outcomes experienced.

For some study participants issues related to ethnic heterogeneity and homogeneity were interwoven into the importance of context. Here "Christopher" talks why finding others like him within a specific context as important,

> ...I'm around Hispanic LGBT youth, so I feel like a lot better, compared to like some groups...where it's nothing but African American and White people over there...I fit in, but it's kind of awkward around them. And here if I'm Hispanic LGBT men

around...they're really accepting and so I feel like I can openly talk to them about practically anything

These findings suggest that cultural variation may exert varying influence on the presence of *relational resilience*, a finding supported in the literature (Arrington and Wilson, 2000). For "Matthew," the uniqueness of his Mexican American family and culture and their influence on him serve to help explicate his connection or disconnection with/from them.

> I'd say that there's, you probably like pick up on it, but I'd say there's like the way I am around other Mexicans and then the way I am around everybody else just because around everybody else I'm um, I'm more open and around everybody else excluding my family, like extended family and like relatives in Mexico, I'm more closed off and quiet. Just because I don't, sometimes I don't know how to act around them.

These findings suggest that whatever is outside the individual is going to have to support *relational resilience* if the relationship is going to experience growth. Resilient youth need resilient families and communities. This raises two important issues. First, assuming that a young man successfully develops under adverse circumstances, different families and communities under stress may offer a child very different resources that sustain the child's well-being.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I provided a glimpse into the lived relational experiences of

twenty study participants through the use of their own words. This was done first through the

presentation of within-case analyses and related emergent themes and later through a reporting of

cross-case thematic findings. In this fourth and final chapter, I return to the original purpose of

the study and to the original research questions to discuss how the findings from the present

effort address these questions.   In addition to addressing my research questions, I will discuss

the strengths and limitations of my dissertation, suggest directions for future research, discuss

clinical implications, and, finally, provide a personal statement regarding this project.

Revisiting the Research Problem

As I discussed in chapter one, over the course of the last three decades, research of

increasing sophistication has appeared with regard to youth who self-identify as SSA (i.e., gay,

bisexual, and lesbian youth) (D'Augelli & Patterson, 2001; Diamond, 1989; Garofalo, Wolf,

Wissow, Woods, & Goodman, 1999; Harper & Schneider, 2004). Much of the interest in

studying SSA youth resulted from a growth in empirical evidence indicating that this population

was at elevated risk for a number of health and mental health problems, including depression,

low self-esteem, substance use and abuse, and suicidal ideation and behavior (Anhalt & Morris

2003; Marshal et al. 2008; Rosario, Rotheram-Borus & Reid, 1996; Russell, 2005); and that they

engaged in sexualized behaviors that put them at higher risk for HIV and AIDS (CDC 2006;

Garofalo & Harper 2003). Moored to a commitment to identifying, understanding, and

mitigating the psychosocial travails faced by this population, this impressive body of work has

been of incredible importance to understanding this unique population and to efforts aimed at

mitigating characterological and ecological factors that challenge their optimal development.

However, with its emphasis on pathology, dysfunction, and distress this same line of work has

inadvertently constructed and reinforced a deficit-based portrait of SSA youth at the expense of a

more balanced portrait that includes an understanding of the factors that serve to protect and

promote their development and functioning (Savin-Williams, 2004, Russell, 2005; Torres et al,

in press). Beginning in the 1980s, researchers began to adopt a non-pathological perspective

(Boxer & Cohler, 1989; Malyon, 1981) to understanding the lives of SSA youth-a shift in

perspective that was in line with the then growing interest in the construct of *resilience* (i.e., that

attainment of adaptive/optimal development within a context of risk) (Anthony, 1974; Garmezy,

1971, 1974, 1985; Rutter, 1979; Werner & Smith, 1982).

Resilience with SSA youth, as a focus area for research, has gained attention in the past

years (Mutchler, Ayala, & Neith, 2005; Nesmith, Burton, & Cosgrove, 1999). Research in the

area of naturally occurring *mentoring relationships* in the lives of SSA youth, for example, has

identified the provision of varied social support (e.g., emotional, instructional, and

unconditional) as key features of dyadic relationships that support the optimal development of a

SSA male youth (Torres et al, in press). Missing from this line of research is an exploration of

the underlying processes of relationships that promote optimal development in SSA youth. The

present effort aimed to address this gap in the literature.

Revisiting the Purpose of this Dissertation

The purpose of my dissertation was to explore the relational processes in the lives of

subset of self-identified SSA young men and to do so through the lens of Relational-Cultural

Theory (RCT). In constructing this study, I was particularly interested in learning whether the

five key conceptual features of growth- promoting relationships, as posited by proponents of

RCT (i.e., *supported vulnerability, mutual empathic involvement, relational awareness,*

relational confidence, and mutual empowerment), manifested in the relational experiences of

study participants. My thinking was that if the data examined did speak to this intuitively useful

theoretical framework, then future work examining relationships in the lives of SSA youth might

be guided by it.

My goal for the present study was not to draw any objective conclusion from this study,

but rather to accurately, and to the best of my ability, convey an understanding of the relational

experiences of these young men so that we might begin to gain a better understanding of the

features of positive and growth-promoting relationships in the lives of SSA male youth. Based

on the preceding, the following research questions were posed:

I.   What role does *supported vulnerability* play in the lives of GBQ male youth

participants?

   a. How do GBQ male youth talk about *supported vulnerability*?

   b. How do GBQ male youth enact *supported vulnerability?*

   c. How does *supported vulnerability*, as discussed and enacted by GBQ male

participants, compare to RCT's conceptualization of *supported vulnerability*

   d. What role does *supported vulnerability* play in health promoting behaviors among

GBQ male participants?

II.   What role does *mutual empathic involvement* play in the lives of GBQ male youth

participants?

   a. How do GBQ male youth talk about *mutual empathic involvement*?

   b. How do GBQ male youth enact *mutual empathic involvement*?

c. How does *mutual empathic involvement*, as discussed and enacted by GBQ male

participants, compare to RCT's conceptualization of *mutual empathic involvement?*

d. What role does *mutual empathic involvement* play in health promoting behaviors

among GBQ male participants?

III.   What role does *relational confidence* play in the lives of GBQ male youth participants?

a. How do GBQ male youth talk about *relational confidence?*

b. How do GBQ male youth enact *relational confidence?*

c. How does *relational confidence*, as discussed and enacted by GBQ male participants,

compare to RCT's conceptualization of *relational confidence?*

d. What role does *relational confidence* play in health promoting behaviors among GBQ

male participants?

IV.   What role does *mutual empowerment* play in the lives of GBQ male youth participants?

a. How do GBQ male youth talk about *mutual empowerment*?

b. How do GBQ male youth enact *mutual empowerment*?

c. How does *mutual empowerment*, as discussed and enacted by GBQ male participants,

compare to RCT's conceptualization of *mutual empowerment?*

d. What role does *mutual empowerment* play in health promoting behaviors among

GBQ male participants?

V.   What role does *relational awareness* play in the lives of GBQ male youth participants?

a. How do GBQ male youth talk about *relational awareness*?

b. How do GBQ male youth enact *relational awareness*?

c. How does *relational awareness*, as discussed and enacted by GBQ male participants,

compare to RCT's conceptualization of *relational awareness?*

    d.   What role does *relational awareness* play in health promoting behaviors among GBQ

        male participants?

In the following, I will discuss each primary research question separately based on the

data findings collected from all twenty study participants. I will address the secondary question

within my response to the primary questions, again within the scope of the context of the data

collected. After I have discussed all five primary questions, I will discuss how the findings relate

to the current literature.

Research Question 1

What role does *supported vulnerability* play in the lives of GBQ male youth participants?

Findings from this study substantiate the usefulness of the construct of *supported*

vulnerability to understanding the relational dynamics undergirding positive connections in the

lives of SSA male youth. The data suggested that *supported vulnerability* emerged within

relationships characterized by authenticity, trust, respect, care, empathic listening, and

unconditional acceptance-noteworthy within this set of finding was the important of relationships

with older caring adults (i.e., mentors).

The young men from this study indicated that they tended to experience *supported*

vulnerability with adults who seemed to genuinely care about them for who they were, rather

than because they were behaving or achieving in some particular way. Although the provision of

instrumental support, such as advice, guidance, and financial support, was discussed, this type of

support seemed to have the greatest impact when offered within the context of a relationship in

which participants' expressions of their own wants, needs, desires, and strengths were welcomed

and helped shape the nature of the relationship. Positive emotions played a role in these

relationships, setting the stage for risk-taking (e.g., disclosing sexual identity to others) and

positive development (e.g., an increased sense of self-worth), and further fueling the

relationships for more positive relational work.

Supported vulnerability appeared to serve as a pathway for confirmation and affirmation

of a non-heteronormative sexual identity, particularly within those relational contexts

characterized by commonality of history and experience. Connection because of sexual identity,

for example, facilitated the affirmation of self as relational partners were able to provide one

another with support and friendship to deal with the varied adversities associated with navigating

life within heteronormative, heterosexist, and homophobic waters. This was most dramatically

noted in relationships between SSA siblings, but also evident in relationships with SSA peers,

adult mentors, and even former romantic partners. Connection with a positive and older SSA

role model was particularly useful for a number of study participants as these role models served

to model strength and resilience; in at least two reported cases, this was done publically so that

study participants were able to see relational partners struggle and learn from the same.

Within a relational framework marked by supported vulnerability, many study

participants became aware of those factors that interfere with asking for help or bringing

themselves more fully and more authentically into relationships, most notably heteronormative

messages regarding male gender that instilled shame and fear in many study participants because

of their non-heteronormative identities. Time and time again the data made clear that messages

regarding the performance of male gender, coupled to heterosexism and homophobia, functioned

as barriers to movement toward supported vulnerability and growth-promoting relationships.

For most study participants relationships characterized by supported mutuality afforded

movement away from what Jean Baker Miller (1998) calls a sense of condemned isolation, that

is a sense of social isolation where an individual has internalized the belief that he is [emphasis

mine] the problem. For participants sharing experiences and feelings that have been hurtful, confusing, and even embarrassing and deviant within relationships characterized by *supported vulnerability* allowed them to move out of isolation and into positive connection.

Study participants' movement toward *supported vulnerability* was often a difficult process that involved developing a sense of trust in sharing, of becoming more flexible and increasingly differentiated and self-protective regarding decisions about whom what can or should trust and about what. As such, *supported vulnerability* facilitated healing from former *relational disconnection* and invalidation. This was a particularly important finding as an accurate assessment of the level of vulnerability in a given relationship involves "good reality testing," and as reality testing must happen from within a relationship, it requires remaining in relationship (Gilligan, 1990). Moreover, the ability to discriminate between situations and people and select the most appropriate response from among several possible responses is a sign of *resilience* (Jordan, 2004). The data from this study suggest that relationships characterized by *supported vulnerability* nurtured this skill in many study participants. And thus learn where and to whom to disclose one's sexual identity was one of the key developmental outcomes of these relationships.

For several participants, *supported vulnerability* further nurtured learning about, appreciating, respecting, valuing and being changed by difference-difference in relational partners and communities. Within a context where asking for help was not castigated, this learning involved an awareness of the distorting influence of power on historically marginalized groups, including discrimination and disempowerment.

Research Question 2

What role does *mutual empathic involvement* play in the lives of GBQ male youth participants?

The idea behind *mutual empathic involvement* is that movement toward resilience involves not only asking for help and receiving it, but also giving help and support to others. Jordan (2004) speaks of "mutual involvement" and the reciprocal "sensitivity to the unspoken needs of others" in which both relational partners are giving and receiving support (p. 34). This idea is somewhat contrary to standard thinking regarding social support, where emphasis is given to the receipt of support; in relationships characterized by *mutual empathic involvement* the provision of support is reciprocal (Jordan, 2004).

Findings from this study substantiate the usefulness of the construct of *mutual empathic involvement* to understanding of the relational dynamics that undergird positive connections in the lives of SSA male youth. Data from the present effort suggested that the presence of *mutual empathic involvement* manifested within those connections to which study participants felt most committed; in the case of most study participants these connections were with best friends or, again, with non-related adult mentors. These relationships were characterized by listening and joining the other's lived experience, as well as understanding the other's experience and feelings. These relational experiences communicated to study participants that they mattered and that they were understood.

In similar fashion to relationships characterized by supported vulnerability, relationships characterized by *mutual empathic involvement* facilitated healing from past invalidation, silencing, and marginalization. *Mutual authenticity* was a key feature of this process, as most student participants spoke about the importance of reciprocal honest expression of one's needs

and feelings with attention to the possible impact that this might have on the other person and the relationship.

Mutual authenticity was linked to experiences of "just hanging out" and not "being pressured to do or say something" by relational partners. For several study participants "just hanging out" appeared to create a non-threatening relational setting where the power imbalances that operated in other relational areas were less operative. Within these contexts there was less pressure to accomplish a task or learn a lesson and a communicated sense that they were being heard and that their needs were being responded to-that is that group leaders worked from and with the interests and needs of study participants.

Mutual empathic involvement was also notable within the context of participants' connection to the gay community. Connection to this community-be it the larger gay community or a community of gay male youth attending a social support group-provided participants with a sense of belonging, introducing all participants to other SSA males with shared experiences, allowing them to make new meaning of past experiences, including past relational disconnections from individuals and communities. Study participants discussed connection to these communities as relational forums important to both their sense of self as SSA and to their understanding of the world as a safe place.

All but two of study participants had been involved in some kind of social support group for SSA male youth at either a community based organization or at their school. For ethnic and racial minority youth, finding other gay male youth from similar ethnic and racial identities was particularly important. Through these groups, participants found connection, friendship vis-à-vis a generally disaffirming and invalidating school or home environment. In addition to finding others with whom to share similar experience, these community and group connections fostered

some participants to toward some type of action against a system the marginalized them. For example, two study participants were instrumental in creating or growing a gay support group at their school or were active leaders in the community support youth group.

Research Question 3

What role does *relational confidence* play in the lives of GBQ male youth participants?

Findings from this study supported the construct of *relational confidence* as an underlying mechanism of *growth-promoting relationships* in the live of SSA male youth. For most study participants movement toward positions of open and authentic vulnerability involved believing that they could reach out for this support, which involved their believing that they could effect change and growth in their relational partners and their relationship. That is, they expressed a need to know that they could contribute to the movement and growth of the relationship. Trust was a key feature of *relational confidence* in the narrative of study participants. *Relational confidence* in the lives of study participants depended on mutual trust in the empathic response of the other as well as a commitment to one another and the relationship. Mutual honor and respect were additional features of relationships that fostered *relational confidence*.

The idea of *relational confidence* was not explicitly discussed by study participant, but was instead suggested as participants discussed key relationships with other SSA male peers and gay communities. Woven into this discussion, was the construct of *self-reliance.* At first glance, this finding appeared contradictory to the reciprocal emphasis given to *relational confidence* in the RCT literature (Jordan, 2004). Judith Jordan (1994) observed that Western-European society has tended to describe self-esteem based on the cultural values of individual achievement and self-sufficiency, as opposed to collaboration and connection. Consequently, a person's self-

esteem may depend upon hierarchical comparisons in which one perpetually strives to feel superior to others in one way or another. This did not appear to be the case in the data from this study. Yet, while rejecting society's admonishment that men should be emotionally stoic and relationally distant, many young men in this study did not eschew the importance of *self-reliance*. In fact, many study participants appeared to embrace the idea of *self-reliance*. The question I then asked myself was, "Can self-reliance (autonomy) and interdependence (affiliation) co-exist adaptively?"

As originally conceptualized, *self-reliance* came to mean autonomy, independence, and an "I can do it on my own mentality." For groups that have historically been marginalized by dominant social machinations, this idea of *self-reliance* may represent a defensive and self-protective move. In the case of SSA males, a history of discrimination may lead to the belief that "I cannot depend on anyone else," and therefore "I must rely on myself." Were it to end here, *self-reliance* would indicate the perpetuation of relational disconnection. However, for study participants *self-reliance* or *self-confidence* was linked to doing for others. Participants spoke about "being the best" they could be and "setting a good example" so that other gay youth could benefit from their example. *Relational confidence* for many study participants involved doing and not verbalizing their *relational confidence* (i.e., their confidence in their ability to create growth-promoting relationships). Thus, *self-reliance* appeared not to reflect separation from others but a unique form of connection specific to males.

Research Question 4

What role does *mutual empowerment* play in the lives of GBQ male youth participants?

Findings from this effort lend support for the usefulness of the construct of *mutual empowerment* to understanding positive connections in the lives of SSA male youth. Data

regarding mentoring relationships were noteworthy in this regard, as study participants

highlighted these relational dyads as a relational form of power not framed around traditional

power over dynamics or focused on winning as the ultimate goal, but instead on equity of growth

and development. However, the ideas of mutuality and reciprocity were not always clear from

the data, an artifact of the querying regarding supportive and nurturing relationships during the

interviews (See Appendix F).

Within the framework of *mentoring relationships*, the most empowering activity reported

by study participants involved what can best be described as *empathic guidance*-that is, guidance

that took the young man's relational, emotional, and development reality into account before

suggestions from relational movement were suggested. This *empathic guidance* allowed study

participants to name and explore their experiences of relational disconnection at their own pace

and to transform negative relational images and internalized negative views of themselves

imposed by culture into a more positive awareness of themselves, their strengths, and their desire

to be in connection with other people.

For several study participant *empathic guidance* was linked to a desire to "come out" to

others as SSA male. For these young men *coming out* reflected a direction of relational growth

(Surrey, 1985) by which they were seeking more, not less, authentic connection with others.

However, *coming out* was not merely a step toward personal authenticity, it was also a posture of

social and political deviance and resistance. In both senses, as movement toward authenticity and

as act of political dissidence, *coming out* became a remarkable process of relational

empowerment for study participants, as it involved owning one's own voice as a young gay,

bisexual or queer young man while building resistance to the historic insistence on separation

and individualism of the dominant culture that serves to make the minority feel less powerful and

the problems (Gilligan, Rogers, & Tolman, 1991; Collins, 2000).

Mutual empowerment nurtured within a dyadic framework also served to enhance

participants' desire for movement toward connection to a larger empowering (gay) community.

That is, participants were empowered to empower others and build community with similarly

identified individuals. This movement toward connection with the gay community involved

concurrent disconnection from harmful institutions, such as the heteronormative culture. This

movement paradox (connection with disconnection) balances strategies of disconnection while

living within a heteronormative culture that is shaming, pathologizing, and intolerant of SSA

individuals (Jordan, 1997). It involved unique actions by study participants to create strong

relationships and even become political advocates. Through forms of activism, such as speaking

publicly about being gay, forming a support group at school, or mentoring other SSA male youth

participants turned pain into action and gave them confidence and a sense of empowerment.

Based on reported accounts, connection to community may facilitate resilience by

acknowledging a group's collective experience of discrimination so that individual members of

that group do not blame themselves for their hardship. Community connection allowed

participants to reach beyond the self, take action against his/her own oppression and situates

study participants within a larger socio-historical context shifting their personal experiences of

oppression into a larger collective struggle. Community and groups that emphasize an awareness

of current forms of oppression may help facilitate a collective perspective. This may assist youth

in making meaning around an identity that has been silenced thereby contributing to *resilience.*

Research Question 5

What role does *relational awareness* play in the lives of GBQ male youth participants?

According to RCT proponents, *relational awareness* involves being attentive to one's own experience, the other person, and the relationship, a well developing clarity about the movement of relationship (Jordan, 2004; Jordan & Dooley, 2001). The complexity of this relational skill is clear. Opportunity for self-reflection with mentored guidance by someone older and more experience, as well as the acquisition of a more global perspective were characteristic features of the young men who referenced *relational awareness*. Findings from this study suggested that *relational awareness* tended to be discussed by older study participants and those with some degree of a secondary education, which indicated that development, privilege, and educational opportunity are important aspect to consider when examining this construct in the lives of SSA male youth.

For study participants *relational awareness* involved awareness of relational patterns, particularly awareness of the relational patterns of disconnection at socio-cultural level. As noted by one participant, knowing an older gay male helped him to better understand the "obstacles of being gay, " including their isolation from and inferiority to a mainstream, heteronormative culture where being SSA is devalued, invalidated, and oppressed and compulsory heterosexuality is expected (Rich, 1980).

The *disconnection* discussed by study participants was two-fold in nature. First, study participants experienced disconnection from a heteronormative culture because of their devalued status as SSA males. It is noted that disconnection for the majority was compounded for study participant who identified as Latino or African American as a result of their racial-ethnic identity; this young men felt marginalized for their sexuality and their racial/ethnic identities. Second, study participants experienced what can best be termed as purposeful or necessary disconnection from oppressive systems coupled to movement or connection toward subcultures

where safety, welcome, authenticity, supported vulnerability, mutuality could manifest (e.g., the gay community). Thus we are dealing with imposed disconnection in the former situation and elected, strategic and protective disconnection in the latter.

Movement from harmful and chronic disconnection requires removal of emotional investment from relational sources that exclude and isolate (Miller & Striver, 1994, 1997). When discussing disconnection, participants echoed the subtheme of *shaming*. *Shaming is* [emphasis mine] to disconnect-it acts to control, to silence, and disempower people. As noted by Jordan (2008), shaming creates "doubts about their construction of reality and to elevate the dominant set of values and thus devalues one's selfhood and engenders culpability for what one may perceive as wrong (e.g., being gay). At worse shaming can lead to the internalization of disempowering socio-cultural message, or at least to inauthentic presentation of self. Chronic disconnection from ourselves and others, as might be the case when we relate inauthentically, is one likely outcome of social isolation and marginalization. Creating self-hatred, shame, depressed self-work and trauma is in many ways what marginalization is all about.

The study suggested that *shaming* may have been particularly problematic for gay and bisexual youth of color, who had additional sources of cultural and familial interests that at times took precedent over personal and sexual identity issues. At least two study participants within this group underscored the fact that while shaming may involve extreme self-consciousness, it may also signal powerful relational longing. There is a loss of the sense of empathic possibility, others are not experienced as empathic, and the capacity for self-empathy is lost. One feels unworthy of love, not because of some discrete action which would be the cause for guilt, but because one is defective or flawed in some essential way.

While *shaming* was discussed by study participants, particularly by Latino and African American participants, these young men also spoke of resistance to this shaming mechanism. The resistance suggested by this young men involved several pieces; 1) awareness of the process of disempowerment; 2) calling it out or naming it; 3) connecting with similar others to create a growth-fostering community; 4) critical consciousness and strategies for confronting stereotypes and internalized forms of oppression; and purposeful inauthenticity.

The questions of *authenticity* and *inauthenticity* are complicated. According RCT, *relational authenticity* is an integral building block of growth-prompting relationships and *relational resilience* (Jordan, 2008). Findings from the present effort suggest that the question of *authenticity* is best addressed with a consideration of the contextual factors in which it may or may not manifest. For young men growing up in a cultural climate that continues to devalue a same-sex sexual orientation, expression, and identity, *relational inauthenticity* is not necessarily a knee-jerk reactivation. Data from the present effort suggested that for some study participants *authenticity* may be measured and purposeful-a means to an end (developmental survival). For some study participants survival involved "passing."

Passing is a phenomenon some members of minority groups may use to lessen the consequences of showing one's true identity. *Passing* can take different forms from the policing of performed gender to conform to the dominant heteronormative ideal of how a man should behave, to editing ones voice or opinion. Goffman (1963) originally defined passing as the effort to conceal the visibility of nonnormative, socially different, sets of traits that are sometimes attributed o persons who may not comply with the narrowly defined ideology of normative or, for the purposes of this article, heteronormative.

Far from inauthenticity, *passing* allowed some study participants to avoid potential oppression and discrimination in some contexts. It is noteworthy that passing behavior did not negate identity but was essential to survival in a homophobic and heterosexist culture. In addition, study participants discussed passing in some cultural contexts but not in others and thus demonstrating marked flexibility and adaptability with keen social observation.

The question of *authenticity* was linked to the idea of courage. As typically understood courage is a characteristic of the lone and separated individual who is invulnerable and fearless. RCT posits that there is not real courage without vulnerability and fear. For study participants courage with owned vulnerability and fear was illustrated when they articulated their need for help, for support, for comfort-when they defied the heteronormative standard of what it means to be a man.

Additional Findings

Gender Socialization

While this study did not set out to examine *gender socialization* in the lives of study participants, time and time again heteronormative standards regarding the performance of masculinity emerged as a salient theme in the data. All study participants referenced a socially constructed and socially sanctioned code of masculinity that privileges and rewards the development of autonomy, separation, and individualism. Time and time again, study participant linked this message to difficulty knowing how to connect with others, including romantic and sexual partners.

"Be a man" is arguably one of the most powerful, silencing, and socially disconnecting exhortations in contemporary society. The idea of being a man carries connotations of strength, courage, and self-reliance. As noted by Pollack (1998, 2000), this "boy code" shames young

males toward separation and away from their emotional vulnerability and basic need for human connection. In essence young males are shamed away from developing growth-promoting relationships, as their normative emotional range is placed in a "gender straightjacket" (Pollack, 1998,, 2000). As such, any effort to understand the development of connection must contend with messages of masculinity that disconnect. Pollack (2005) suggests that there is an urgent need for interconnectedness to promote the development of resiliency in young males. To foster this development, Pollack (2005) underscores four key contributing factors: 1) the development of close friendships based on trust; 2) platonic relationships; 4) the development of empathy; and 4) trusted adults who help young men feel protected and love (e.g., mentors).

Because of society's unique set of gender expectation for young males, young males find it especially difficult to acknowledge and own their vulnerability and/or allow themselves to be influenced by others. Thus when young males are in emotional pain, their pain may go unexpressed. While this outcome is arguably devastating to the optimal development of all young males, being shamed into "emotional mutism" poses an arguably greater threat for young men who are already shamed because of their nonconformity to a heteronormative norm regarding sexuality leaving them to struggle with unique development hurdles and challenges.

While popular culture would have us believe that men as a group are emotionally and relationally inept and inarticulate, the lives examined for the present effort argue the contrary. The young men in this study expressed rich and profound feelings, articulated with honesty and ownership. These young men were concerned about the nature and quality of the relationships they had with other people and other communities. They were relationally attuned to the importance of relationships. Learning that young males are able to express their feelings or are

interested in relationships is not a new finding, as it is noted elsewhere by Levant (2001) and

Pollack (1998, 2000)

      The findings from the study suggested the having similar gender-role development can

complicate relationships between SSA male youth. Without prescribed positive gender

expectations, constant decision-making regarding the movement of both platonic and romantic

relationships must be exercised by relational partners in a same-gender, SSA male dyad.

Without a clear template to follow, participants discussed reported a lack of clarity and direction

regarding how same-sex platonic relationship should look. Same-sex friendships among SSA

males are an area that calls for investigative attention.

Culture and context.

      The present effort suggested that there are cultural and contextual specific aspects to the

relationships of SSA young men that contribute to their experiences of *relational disconnection*

and *connection* (i.e., *relational resilience*). Moreover, the data suggested that aspects of

resilience exert differing amounts of influence on a youth's life depending on the specific culture

and context in which resilience is realized.

      Findings from the present effort supports an argument that *resilience* is more usefully

conceptualized as relational and contextual phenomena, that is, as a quality that derives from a

process of repeated interaction between individual players, including interaction between

individuals and communities. The findings further suggest that the degree of *relational resilience*

manifested may be related to the extent to which context has elements that nurture *resilience*.

The idea here is that *resilient SSA male youth*, need *resilient relationships*, which in turn need

resilient cultural contexts. This raises at least one important point, gay male youth who develop

favorably under adverse conditions, may not benefit from that development outcome if key relationships in his life are under stress. This is akin to the idea of "goodness-of-fit."

There is a need to explore what *resilience,* in general, *and relational resilience*, across different cultures and contexts. As Cowen (1994) noted, "Pathways (to wellness) are differentially important . . . in different situation and at different points in the life span" (p.158). As the data from this study suggest, *relational resilience* reflects idiosyncratic processes.

Relational Cultural Theory

Relational-Cultural Theory represents a different paradigm of development altogether, one that appreciates and investigates not just connection, but interconnection. It sees the "basic human motive" as that of participating "in

connection with others, rather than the need to be gratified by others" (Miller & Stiver, 1997). RCT is not simply interested in identify growth-promoting relationships, but in understanding what happens within these relationships (i.e., the process of relationships.

The essential elements of good, growth-promoting relationships identified by the youth in these groups were in alignment with those delineated by relational–cultural theorists (Jordan, 1986; Jordan et al., 1991; Miller & Striver, 1997). Bringing a relational perspective to bear on the analysis of the selected interview data highlighted the central role that active participation, authentic engagement, and responsiveness of both partners play in growth-fostering relationships—even among those in which there is a power differential, such as a relationship between a young person and an adult.

Prevailing theory suggests that people grow and reach higher states of development through separation and the attainment of autonomy. RCT, in contrast, posits that individuals grow through and by relationships. I believe that the findings from the present effort provide

additional support for this perspective shift and for RCT. These findings indicate that further

examination of the potential that RCT holds for delineating the specific processes at work in

growth-promoting relationships between youth and adults is warranted.

RCT appears to be a powerful tool to inform practice, but researchers must be mindful of

the interpretation of connection; SSA male youth are a diverse group within the larger SSA

community and may follow different paths toward supported vulnerability, mutual empathic

involvement, relational awareness and confidence and mutual empowerment. Although RCT

affords a useful theoretical model for understanding relation connection among SSA male youth,

care in its application is warranted. Every strategy that does not create connection is not

necessarily a strategy of disconnection. SSA male youth may create strategies of disconnection

to survive heteronormative culture complete and uncritical acceptance of some persons,

institutions, and practices may be detrimental.

Strategies of disconnection and separation, perhaps the foundation of a stronger

connection with and within different gay communities for young SSA men, including connection

with an online gay community. RCT theorists have taught us to understand connection in a new

context; therefore, researchers must be mindful that separation has value in specific SSA

relational contexts and avoid the possible pathologizing of some strategies of disconnection.

Comparison With The literature

In consideration of where the present effort builds and contributes to the extant body of

knowledge regarding growth-promoting relationships and *relational resilience*, the obvious

initial statement is that it builds upon the hypothesis that relationships *are* [emphasis mine] at

heart of growth, healthy resistance, and resilience (Miller & Striver, 1998). It serves to

underscore the core belief of RCT that psychological well-being occurs through and by

relationships, and that movement out of connection (e.g., chronic disconnection) is at the source

of much psychological suffering (Jordan, 2004). However, more important still is the fact that

this study extends investigations framed by RCT to a heretofore ignored population, specifically

SSA male youth. As such, this study makes an important and unique contribution to our body of

knowledge by answering the call for research on *resilience* that illuminates how protective

factors operate in the lives of younger people (Luthar at al., 2000), rather than simply identifying

risk and protective factors, and does so while working with a heretofore overlooked population.

The impact of *relational disconnection* is clearly present in the existing literature on SSA

youth. Radkowsky and Siegel (1997), for example, report that as a result of social

marginalization, SSA youth often experience feelings of loneliness and isolation, while Rivers

and D'Augelli (2001) frame experiences of "otherness" and isolation as systemic, stating that

"feeling different SSA youth withdraw from others" (p. 200). In addition, actual and anticipated

prejudicial and discriminatory treatment from family, peers, and others in communities in the

lives of SSA youth may serve to further exacerbate this move from connection. (Bauermeister et

al., 2008). While findings from the present study attest to the *relational disconnection*

experienced by SSA youth, in general, and SSA male youth, findings regarding *relational*

connection in the lives of study participants argue for an alternative perspective on this same

population-one that sees this populations as resilient or in the words of Rich Savin-Williams as

"distinctly good" (2005, p. 183).

This study lends evidence that growth-promoting relationships characterized by

mutuality, *authenticity*, *supported vulnerability*, *relational confidence* and *awareness*, and a

sense of empowerment may serve to diminish feelings of isolations and related psychological

distress among SSA male youth, a finding that is in keeping with research on social support

(Peplau & Fingerhut 2007). As such, the present effort joins recent discourse in the literature emphasizing the role of supportive relationships in helping SSA youth cope with sexuality related stressors (Savin-Williams, 1994, 2004). While many SSA youth continue to struggle with the effects of *relational disconnection*, the voices of young SSA males from this study remind us that SSA male youth are also successfully developing *relational connection* and that they are growing through and by them.

As suggested above, the present effort builds upon much of the literature on social connection, social support, and mentoring, and, of course, the literature on SSA youth. Far from being socially isolated and relationally disconnected, findings from the present effort suggest the SSA male youth from this study were successful at both identifying and nurturing *growth-promoting relationships* in their lives, and that they established these relationships with a variety of individuals, including same-age peers. This finding echoes findings elsewhere in the literature indicating that many SSA youth are healthy, life-affirming individuals capable of effectively coping with the varies stressors in life, including those specific to their sexual identity (Savin-Williams, 2003; 2001c).

In keeping with findings reported elsewhere in the literature (Everall et al., 2006). This study indicated that relationships considered most beneficial to study participants as they grew into their SSA male status, were those involving peers, parents, and extra-familial adults; authentic and reciprocal awareness and expression of feelings; a shift in perspective and recognition of personal control to one of mutual control; and purposeful and goal-directed action whereby participants experimented with new behaviors, and created hopeful futures and positive identities for themselves. Moreover, it was found that the processes in each of these areas were closely connected such that changes in one area were typically related to changes in the others.

Relational connections characterized by core RCT conceptual pieces; specifically *supported vulnerability*, *mutual empathic involvement*, and *mutual empowerment* appeared to serve to facilitate important corrective processes in the consolidation of identity for many study participants. Erikson's (1968) conception of identity suggests a balance between the way individuals see themselves and the way others see them, marrying intrapersonal and interpersonal processes.   Successful or healthy identity consolidation would thus appear to involve the synthesis of these two processes. However, due in great part to the pervasive heterosexual social framework and intransigent homophobia, many SSA male youth may experience tension or conflict between these processes. That is, their intrapersonal identity and interpersonal identity may be divergent (e.g., they are gay and don't feel bad about it but are told by society that being gay is bad).

Data from the present study suggest that identified growth-promoting relationships served to offset the identity imbalance through the provision of self-appraisal support (i.e., they were told, directly and indirectly, that being gay was okay). This finding is in keeping with research on mentoring, indicating that the provision of this corrective feedback within growth-promoting relationships serves to build self-esteem and a sense of self-worth in younger people (Dubois & Silverthorn, 2005). Doty, Willoughby, Lindahl, and Malik (2010) suggest that higher levels of sexuality support relate to decreased emotional distress (i.e., main effects model), and may also play a role in protecting against the negative effects of sexuality stress on emotional distress (i.e., stress buffering model) (Glicken, 2006; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2005; Wright & Perry, 2006).

Most often found within the framework of a mentoring relationship with someone older or more experience, the impact of self-appraisal support appeared to represent a youth's

internalization of his relational partner's positive regard and appraisals of him. Relational

partners in this case served as "mirrors" for developing youth. If a relational partner views a

youth's sexual identity positively and normatively, that can start to change the youth's view of

himself, become incorporated into a more stable and integrated sense of self (Rhodes, 2003).

This process can be conceptualized, to some degree, as the integration of other-person

perspective. In this sense, youth identify who they would like to be through the eyes of their

relational partner. For this to take place, however, study participants suggested that mutual

empathy, trust, and "unconditional support" needed to be present in the relationships and that

mutual acceptance and respect has to be nurtured continually. Sheets and Mohr (2009) suggest

that youth who rated key relational partners as more accepting of their sexual orientation showed

less internalized negativity toward their sexuality and more favorable overall adaptation.

The results of the present effort suggest that "being out to one's support network seems to

reduce the distress that many SSA male youth may feel regarding their sexual identity, probably

because this type of support relieves the internal and external stress associated with maintaining

a concealed identity (DiPlacido, 1998). Virtually all of the theoretical models of SSA sexual

identity development postulate or implicitly hypothesize that negative self-related feelings about

being SSA will diminish–to varying degrees–over the course of the coming out process (Cass,

1996; Savin-Williams, 1990; Troiden, 1979). According to these theories, there are two

developmental challenges to the coming out process; (1) to define, clarify, and adapt emotionally

to self as SSA; and, (2) to establish and develop a social network which includes individuals who

are supportive of their sexual identity (Cass, 1996; Hetrick & Martin, 1987; Ryan& Futterman,

1998; Troiden, 1988). Findings from this study suggest that relationships characterized by

mutuality, empathy, supported vulnerability, and trust served some SSA male youth in meeting

these two fundamental challenges to movement toward authenticity of self. This present study

suggests that these critical developmental processes are in dynamic relationship with the nature

of relational connections in the lives of SSA male youth.

SSA male youth are relationally vulnerable due to feared sequelae to their disclosing their

SSA orientation and identity to family and friends. Fear of invalidation, discrimination, or

rejection lead many of these youth to conceal their developing sexuality from relationships they

need in the immediate and long-run. Does this reflect "internalized homophobia?" Not

necessarily and care must be exercised from rushing to this conclusion.   The fear of man SSA

youth is that disclosure will result in losing the people they love, in betrayal of one kind or

another, in emotional injury, and in the perception that they are worthy of contempt. And this

fear is real. Findings from this study suggest that what may be considered maladaptive or a risk

factor for one SSA young male might be best understood as adaptive or a protective factor in the

life of another SSA young male. Timing and context, including relational context, are important

variables to consider when making the judgment regarding adaptiveness vs. maladaptiveness.

Russell (2005) suggests, "timing (developmental and chronological age) and context (supportive

versus hostile family, peer, and school environments)" can significantly influence whether

coming out should be perceived as a risky or protective factor (p. 11).

In concert with findings elsewhere in the literature (Doty, Willlougsby, Lindahl, and

Malik, 2010), this study found that supportive relationships with other SSA peers was

particularly important to the adaptive development of study participants. Several factors may

help to explain the high levels of sexuality support available in these friendships. First, in

comparison to heterosexual family members and friends, sexual minority friends are more likely

to know about and accept youth's same-sex attractions (Savin-Williams 2005). This is consistent

with most theories of SSA identity development that note contact with other SSA individuals as an important step to establishing a positive SSA sexual identity (Elias, 1996). Social identity theory stresses the importance of memberships in groups of similar individuals. The research further indicates that for members of marginalize social identity groups; in-group connection is a powerful source of solidarity in confronting institutionalized oppression (Frable et al, 1998).

Connection to supportive peers, including SSA peers, siblings as well as adult mentors echoed findings elsewhere in the literature underscoring the importance of social support to the positive development of SSA youth (Anderson, 1998). Youths in this study demonstrated their social skills by seeking out supportive individuals and groups. Within these relationships, participants processed issues related to their sexual orientation and made calculated decisions concerning the management of their identities. These supportive alliances enabled them to risk revealing their sexual orientation and identity to parents and non-gay peers in an attempt to improve these relationships. By taking these risks, many of these youths experienced unanticipated levels of support from parents and non-gay friends that they might not otherwise have known was available.

Research with sexual minority groups where *resilience* to discrimination and prejudice was the focus of investigation suggests that connection, especially connection to a group, can help these youth reconceptualize personal difficulty as a collective struggle and thus feel empowered by the collective toward a more positive outcome (Wexler, DiFulvio, & Burke, 2009). Belonging is thus adaptive and individuals who experience deprivation in this area are arguably more vulnerable (Fiske, 2004). For an individual who has adopted or is in the process of adopting a SSA sexual identity, an interaction or connection with a similarly identified community (e.g., the larger gay community) is important. Theories regarding sexual identity

development strongly underscore the importance of this connection (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989).

Troiden (1989), for example, saw positive contacts with the *gay* community as a facilitator to

developing a positive sexual identity in stage three of this sexual identity model (i.e., *identity*

assumption).   Whether this is actually the case for all SSA male youth is an empirical question.

However, findings from the present effort do indicate that community or belonging to a similarly

sexually identified community remains important to many SSA male youth. Community, as

discussed in the data, promotes as sense of safety, provide culturally-specific social norms,

provide opportunities for relational skill building, and communicate acceptance, validation,

affection, and warm.

However, from a developmental perspective, findings from the present effort suggest that

there are both opportunities and challenges to adaptive development associated with connection

with SSA communities. Developmentally, having connections to other SSA people are critical for

challenging stereotypes and learning about the ones SSA role (Troiden, 1988). At the same time the

types of relationships one establishes with community members with influence the nature of ongoing

community connection. When these relationships are with individuals who model maladaptive

behavior, it may encourage relational distrust and or adoption of maladaptive growth-compromising

behaviors by younger SSA individuals (Fisher, Misovich, & Fisher, 1992). On the other hand, if these

contacts are with youth or adults who promote adaptive behavior, the impact these networks have will

likely be more positive. The data suggest, with few exceptions, that most study participants were able

to identify positive connection with other SSA individuals.

Limitations & Strengths

Limitations

While the present effort addressed a noteworthy gap in the current body of scholarship

and knowledge on *SSA youth* and r*esilience*, there were noteworthy limitations to this work. The

first limitation was in regard to the sampling pool for the larger Mosaic study from which case

interviews for the present effort were drawn. Because youth had to identify as gay, bisexual or

questioning in order to participate in the larger Mosaic study, it is unlikely that the data and

related findings reflect the thoughts, feelings, and/or experiences of SSA male youth who self-

identify differently (e.g., SSA male youth who do not identify as gay, bisexual, or questioning).

The youth engaged in the present effort may very well represent a characteristically distinct sub-

set of SSA male youth-one who: 1) more readily and comfortably identifies with the more

traditional labels of SSA sexual identity; 2) are more "formally" engaged with the historic gay

community via established CBOs or community and agency sponsored events (e.g., Pride parade,

youth dance parties); and 3) are more socially facile, extraverted, and/or informed and educated

on issues related to and affecting SSA male youth. Nonetheless, the lack of representativeness of

samples of sexual minority youth is a methodological concern in most studies with this

population (Binson et al. 2007).

A second limitation was that although this study included in-depth interviews with SSA

male youth, it failed to gather similar data from identified relational partners. Granted this

limitation was imposed by electing to work with pre-collected data and engaging in secondary

analysis of the same. Nevertheless, lacking the voice of relational partners handicaps the present

studies ability to truly understand relational processes.

A third limitation was working with previously collected from a study where only partial

attention was given to examining helpful relationships. The Mosaic Study aimed to examine

integration of multiple identities among a sub-set of SSA male youth as this relates to higher risk

sexual behavior and HIV, as such the data focused on relationships was limited. Arguably

speaking greater relational richness would have been collected had this study set out to

independently examine relationships from within a RCT framework. Nevertheless, given the exploratory nature of this project working from strong previously collected data was a sound point of departure.

Finally, the present effort was cross-sectional in design and, as such, it represents a somewhat thin slice of the *relational resilience* in the lives of study participants. Although this methodology represents an appropriate starting point given the absence of an empirical base for the study of *relational resilience* in the lives of SSA male youth, it is limiting in terms of what we can say about these relationships.

Strengths

Despite the aforementioned limitations, the present study contributes an important foundation piece to our growing understanding of *relational resilience* in the lives of youth, in general, and in lives of SSA youth, in particular. First, along with most contemporary resiliency-based research, the present effort has undertaken a conceptual shift away from simply identifying the individual attributes of resilient youth (a check list style approach) to a more complex understanding that emphasizes the processes of *resilience* (Glicken, 2006). Moreover, by adopting RCT as a theoretical lens, my work extended this lens beyond populations historically addressed with this theoretical tool (i.e., women, including marginalized ethnic and low SES women) (Covington, 1998; Finkelstein, 1996; Jordan, 2005; Nelson, 1996; Riggs & Bright, 1997).

Second, qualitative techniques are not necessarily the most popular approach in psychosocial research, in part because research traditions discount this method in favor of quantitative techniques that give us data more amenable to sophisticated modeling procedures. However, qualitative data can make a substantive contribution to our understanding by

examining this phenomenon in its specific population context (Ungar, 2003). Qualitative

methods can also give a voice and meaning to the phenomena. This study shows this to be true

and this represents its second strength.

Third, by adopting a resilience framework, this effort represents a significant departure

from former research efforts that consider the lived experience of this population from a deficit-

perspective. Instead of centering research focus upon where and how this population is

struggling, this present effort was vested in examining the processes the serve to promote their

optimal development. This re-address of SSA youth reflects Savin-Williams' (2005) admonition

that in order to arrive at understanding of contemporary gay youth we must discard "our previous

ideas about what it means to be gay"(p. 14), shifting from seeing them as troubles and victimized

to social pioneers and agents of change.

A fourth strength was the diversity of study participants. The sampling frame from

which study participants were selected for the present effort represented varied demographics

and cultural backgrounds. In contrast to efforts that focused on the lived experiences of one

specific ethnicity the present sample included African American, European American, and

Latino male youth from varying socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Despite their

differences, results indicated important thematic commonalities regarding the relational

mechanism undergirding growth-promoting relationships in the lives of study participants

The methodology adopted for this study represented a fifth strength. By adopting a

qualitative research design that employed a phenomenological approach, this effort attempted to

make the lived relational experiences of study participants known to the reader. As such, the

limitation inherent in retrospective studies with adult study participants is greatly reduced in the

present effort. In addition, the multiple levels of analysis allowed me to better understand and

subsequently illuminate various themes related to *relational resilience* in the lives of SSA male youth.

Finally, as suggested by the title of this dissertation this study provided a forum for the voices of SSA male youth to be heard. As such, the stories of formerly silenced or marginalized youth was brought front and centered to be heard with as little adulteration as possible and with interpretation added only to emphasis critical points. Giving voice to those who are otherwise silenced in the production of knowledge contributes to a deeper understanding of localized discourses that permeate disadvantaged communities. It forces readers to consider the truth claims of "others," to consider that there are multiple truths beside that which is privileged and rewarded.

Recommendations for Future Research

The future of *relational resilience* research is wide open to investigators who are willing to devote a considerable amount of time to understanding such a complex phenomena. Perhaps the most obvious extension of the current study is to include more and more diverse SSA youth populations as an extension or replication-such a replication would serve to fortify and amplify the voices that have contributed to our growing understanding of resilience thus far.

Results from the present effort argue that work in this area would benefit greatly from conceptualizing *resilience* as a relational phenomenon, particularly when working with historically marginalized population (e.g., SSA youth). A relational conceptualization of *resilience* embeds our understanding of this seemingly elusive, but much desired, construct within relationships and relational environments, including community settings. The traditional view that *resilience* reflects individual, familial, or community traits appears insufficient to understanding what serves to promote adaptive and healthy functioning among SSA youth. By

and large factors associated with *resilience* rest on Western, male-centric, heteronormative notions of what constitutes adaptive functioning and healthy development (e.g., Eriksonian Theory). These notions may poorly serve our developing understanding of *resilience* vis-à-vis minority or marginalized populations, such as SSA male youth. Moreover the interplay of resilient-related factors (e.g., supportive, nurturing, and growth-fostering relationships) may exert variable influence depending on the cultural contexts in which this young people are embedded (Ungar, 2004).

The findings also support the use of RCT, a relational perspective on psychological health, for examining the interpersonal relationships of SSA youth and the effects of their relationships on overall functioning. The results illustrated the potential benefits of utilizing a feminist perspective within the research process. Specifically, this research was designed from a feminist perspective, taking into account gender and power issues in the lives of SSA male youth. The findings support the feminist notion that relationships have a powerful influence on all aspects of SSA male lives.

The influence of socio-cultural factors identified by many study participants in this study suggests that exploring the cultural context in which connection and disconnection take place is important to our understanding of relational resilience in the lives of SSA male youth. Gilligan (2004) writes, "While resilience may previously have been seen as residing in the person as a fixed trait, it is now more usefully considered as a variable quality that derives from a process of repeated *interactions* between a person and favorable features of the surrounding context in a person's life" (p.94). For ethnic and racial minority SSA youth, it may be particularly important to investigate the ways in which racial, class, and economic factors interplay with their unique socio-cultural fabric to either inhibit or promote acceptance, belonging, and the development of

growth-promoting relationships. For example, how might under- or lack of employment

influence interpersonal functioning between an immigrant father and his gay son to make

rejection of this son a more probable outcome.

While qualitative inquiry should continue to play a prominent role in future investigation

of relational resilience with SSA youth populations, as this will continue to increase the scope

and richness of our knowledge regarding the lived experiences of this population and the

mutually supportive relationship they help to build, quantitative research would strengthen these

efforts. The mixed-method research framework of the Mosaic Study referenced in this

dissertation can serve as a useful model for mixed-methodological efforts. The use of

measurement instruments such as the Global Assessment of Relational Functioning (GARF)

(Yingling, Miller, McDonald, & Galewaler, 1998), instrumentation that is valid and reliable

could refine our understanding or *relational resilience* gathered through ongoing qualitative-

quantitative efforts.

Similarly, additional measures to explore the impact of coexisting phenomena and

identities are in order. Time and time again, study participants underscores their status as males

as an intimately interwoven thread to their making of identity as SSA individuals and their

ability to connect authentically and with owned vulnerability with someone else. Measures of

gender identity and development could also refine our growing knowledge of the ways that

gender and sexual identity interplay vis-à-vis relational resilience processes. These types of

research would not only supplement scholarship regarding SSA youth, but would also address

issues of accountability of research.

Finally, greater efforts need to be devoted to bringing in the voices and lived relational

experience of SSA youth to developing a powerful and nuanced understanding of growth-

promoting connections. To bring men's voices into a conceptual process that has at its base a

calling into question of a male-centric perspective-shall I say voice-on the processes involved in

the development of health and well-being for women might appear presumptuous at the very

least, and a back-handed effort to rest away from women what they have carved so powerfully.

Yet this experience has led me to believe that not only would the inclusion of male voices in the

shaping of relational psychology grow this work into an even more revolutionary and powerful

model, it would also push this work into a more political context as SSA male youth might serve

as representative of all SSA youth within the context of a heteronormative patriarchy.

Clinical Implications

The findings of this study have implications for clinical and counseling practice. Before

proceeding to these implications, I want to note that the mere positing of these implications

based on the findings drawn from the lives examined for this dissertation does in no way suggest

that the young men from whom so much was learned are in need of or require therapeutic

intervention.

The heart of the therapeutic process is the relationship between the patient and therapist.

The present effort suggests that authenticity, mutuality, trust, and empathy should be nurtured

within the therapeutic process. Both the therapist and patient must develop trust for one another

and for their relationship.

At times, patients typically approach therapy with fear and trepidation, sometimes

engendered by past clinical relationship characterized by hurt, invalidation, and even pain. To

help nurture trust from the patient, it is important for that the therapist to learn to trust the patient.

To do this the therapist must forego any semblance of the all knowing, all-powerful therapist.

Mutuality does not mean equality-it means equity and openness to change and healing on both

sides. While the therapist certainly must exercise certain authority within the therapeutic setting and the patient moves into a place of vulnerability, the attitude should be one of empowerment and not what of power over. Therapist and patient alike must risk change and uncertainty.

Based on the previous discussion, the following implication for clinical and counseling practice can be derived from the findings of the current study:

1. Adopt a less deficit-based framework when working with SSA youth in general. The present study suggests that these youth are not inherently vulnerable or socially isolated. This perspectival shift may then allow clinicians and therapists to better and more completely appreciate the potential relational network that can serve to facilitate and promote the health and well-being of these youth.

2. Prevention, treatment, and care interventions for SSA male youth should ideally incorporate awareness of the relational determinants of health as well as individual behaviors to reduce disease, illness, injury, and disability across contexts.

3. Understand the importance of creating and maintaining growth-fostering relationships as a powerful influence on personal development of SSA male youth, as well as a mediator of perceived stress related to a non-heteronormative sexual identity.

4. Suspend heterosexist ideals and other normative truisms present in dominant social discourse and in turn in traditional family systems theory.

This study also has implication for training and ongoing education. It is critical for therapists and counselors to develop the knowledge and skills necessary for working with SSA populations, in general (American Psychological Association [APA}, 2003). The ethical codes and standards of practice for the American Psychological Association (APA) (2002) address the issue of therapists practicing within their area of expertise and competency. This project

underscores the unique challenges and strengths of SSA male youth, as such it is essential for

therapists working with this particular SSA population to develop competence in working with

them. Finally, in addition to educating oneself about the lives of SSA populations, it is also

important for therapists and counselors to examine their own biases, perspective, and

prejudices, including the belief that SSA youth represent, as a hole, an inherently vulnerable,

socially isolated and relationally challenged lot. This study argues for the contrary.

Conclusion

This dissertation project attempted to filter the lived experiences of self-identified gay,

bisexual, and questioning (GBQ) male through the lens of Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT),

which posits that human development occurs through and toward connection (Jordan et al.,

1991). More specifically, this efforts attempted to apply the theoretical template of RCT to learn

where and how it may prove reflected in the lives of study participants and thus speak to its value

as theoretical framework for exploring relational resilience in this and similar populations.

Undergirding this effort is the argument that it is time to question the Eurocentric and male-

centric separation individuation model of human development.

Findings from the present effort suggest that *resilience* is best conceived a relational and

multidimensional phenomenon. This work underscores the fact that individuals are distinctly

connected beings and thus to perpetuate-if not insist upon-separation and individuation as

markers of healthy human development is grossly inaccurate, in the very least. The conclusions

from this study serve to shed light upon the relational mechanisms that undergird growth-

promoting relationships in the live of same-sex attracted male (SSA) youth.

This study highlights how central relational paradoxes are triggered by disconnection in

the lived relational experiences of SSA young men. Based on findings from the present study,

these paradoxes function as a protective resistance to preserve important relationships by

concealing integral parts of self from the relationship (Gilligan, 1990). The analyses presented in

this work suggest that when key relationships are characterized by disconnection of a central

relational paradox, it is much more difficult to achieve authenticity and healing movement

toward connection. Resistance and movement from hurtful relationships occur in the relational

context in the lives of study participants. Demonstrating that the power for change is not an

individual act but a relational one. *Relational resilience* can be transformative beyond the

individual to create real change in the community.

        The conclusions from this study further suggest that RCT provides a useful theoretical

framework for exploring and understanding these relationships.

Few studies have utilized RCT as a framework to examine relationships in the lives males, in

general, and SSA male youth, in particular. The empirical evidence from this study demonstrated

the importance of using a feminist framework, such as the RCT, which values the role of healthy,

supportive relationships and the subsequent impact of these relationships on all levels of

functioning. As such, RCT should be considered as a primary theoretical framework by

researchers who aim to examine and understand growth-promoting relationships in the lives of

SSA male youth.

        Human connection is vital and in the developing years it plays a significant role in

creating neural connections and reinforcing positive patterns of behaviors. All youth need to be

encouraged to seek out supportive relationships that do not pose further danger or risk in their

lives. This *relational resilience* focuses on strengthening "relationships rather than increasing an

individual's strength." Clearly, strengthening important relationships in a young person's life

helps to build and strengthen their personal resiliency and, in turn, their ability to positively face life's challenges and adversities.

Researcher Reflection

As I complete this research project and reflect on the past two years since it was first proposed, I come away feeling not only a sense of accomplishment but also pride and hope. This has not been an easy project for me for a number of reasons and I must admit that to numerous moments of self-doubt regarding my ability to finish this project. I have vacillated from loving this project, to resenting it, and to even hating it. On at least two occasions, I gave serious though to not completing this project. Yet I came back to it-in great part because of the repeated encouragement from my husband. But also came back for another reason. I came back because I believed that that relationships are key to health and well-being and because I was have never "bought" the idea of the inherently vulnerable, socially isolated, and relationally disconnected gay male youth. With no undue modesty, I was right on both counts.

As I explored *relational resilience* in the lives of SSA male youth, I discovered a rich, dynamic process that contributes to the adaptive and optimal development of these youths. I was not surprised by the relational successes of these young men-as I was never convinced by research stressing the idea of inherent vulnerability, isolation, and relational dysfunction. After all, that was not reflective of my own history. Each young man's uniqueness seemed to combine and create an interwoven protective strength and tenacious resilience. It is noteworthy that the men in the current study seemed to focus their energies on connection rather than fighting to prevent disconnection. In other words, they appeared to function from a strengths-based position rather than exerting their energies to fight the deficits. This finding suggested to me that male gay youth are doing and growing well. Moreover, this finding suggested that if I am to learn

what accounts for relational resilience in this population, I need to continue to work from the population I intend to understand and ultimately serve.

This project has not only refined my knowledge and skill as a qualitative researcher, but has given me deeper insight into the meaning of scholarship and its relationship to educational and clinical practice. I am not convinced that that I am best suited for role of social science researcher. However, this project has served to reinforce my commitment to qualitative research, to participant-and community-partnered research, and to the power of stories. I continue to be intrigued by relationships, in general, and relationships that promote optimal development and curious to discover how I can extend my work on this project to the population that has become my area of clinical interest-children and youth on the autism spectrum. My hope is that the findings and discussion reported from this study will inspire others to explore the complexities of relationships across different populations.

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Appendix A
Screening Interview Guide-Mosaic Study

My name is *(interviewer's name)* **and I'm one of the staff members working on a research project that is being conducted in Chicago and Miami. In this city, the project is being conducted by** (*Name of ATN study site*). **I'd like to tell you more about the study we are doing. It is designed to explore issues of identity and sexuality among gay, bisexual, and questioning young men. Are you interested in hearing more about it?**

Response: If yes, continue. If no, thank them for their time and discontinue screening.

Thanks for your interest in our research project. The purpose of this research is to examine identity development among gay, bisexual, and questioning (GBQ) male adolescents and its relationship to HIV risk and protective behaviors. When we talk about identity development we are referring to the process that young people go through as they discover who they are, what they like or dislike, and what they eventually want to do with their lives. We will use the information that we gather from the young men who participate in this study to help develop a comprehensive HIV prevention intervention for HIV negative GBQ adolescent males.

Information will be collected by having the young men who participate in the study complete a confidential paper-and-pencil questionnaire. In addition, some young men may also participate in either an individual interview or a discussion group (also called a focus group). If you decide to participate we will keep all information we collect from you strictly confidential, and only the researchers will have access to this information. We will need to ask you for contact information so that we can invite you back for the interview or focus group. Your name and contact information will not be given to anyone other than our researchers who need to get in touch with you to set up that next appointment. No one else will be told about your participation in this study.

Please remember that participation in this research study, including answering any of the following questions, is completely voluntary. You can refuse to answer any of the questions or decide that you do not want to participate at any time. If you have questions about this research project, you can contact (*name and contact information for site PI and co-PI and identification and contact information for IRB*). **I have this information here on a card, in case you have any questions.**

First, I'll need to take less than 5 minutes to ask you some questions to find out if you are eligible to participate in this research study. Your answers to these questions will be kept confidential and anonymous. That is, at this point, I will not be asking any identifying information: I won't ask for your name, address, phone number or birthday. One of the reasons we stress confidentiality is that we <u>do</u> ask some very personal questions in the study, and it is very important that you be as honest and as accurate as you can be with your answers. Are you willing to answer some questions to determine if you are eligible for the study?

Response: If yes, continue with Screening Questions. If no, ask for reasons why:

☐ No interest   01
☐ Worried about anonymity   02
☐ Study takes too long   03
☐ Afraid of research/guinea-pig   04

☐ Rather not say   05
☐ Other   06

If other, specify _____

Thank the participant for his time.

INSTRUCTIONS: This screening interview may be conducted in person or by phone. If eligibility is determined by phone, participants must make an appointment to reconfirm their answers to the screening questions in person before signing consent. File with source documents in the individual research record. SID will only be assigned <u>after</u> the screening questions determine the volunteer to be eligible for this study and the participant signs the consent. Regardless of whether or not the participant is eligible, record the participant's responses to <u>all</u> questions.

---

1.   First, how old are you?

       |_____|_____| years (*If participant is not 14-22, check ineligible and continue*)
                                        ☐ Ineligible

2.   Do you live in the (Chicago/Miami) metropolitan area?

       ☐ Yes

       ☐ No (***Check <u>ineligible</u> and continue***)   ☐ Ineligible

3.   Were you born as a male?

       ☐ Yes

       ☐ No (***Check <u>ineligible</u> and continue***)   ☐ Ineligible

4.   Do you currently identify as male?

       ☐ Yes

       ☐ No (***Check <u>ineligible</u> and continue***)   ☐ Ineligible

5.   In terms of your ethnicity, what is your primary identification?

       a.   Hispanic or Latino?

            ☐ Yes (***Skip to Question 6***)

            ☐ No

       b. Black or African-American?

            ☐ Yes (***Skip to Question 6***)

            ☐ No

       c. White or European-American?

☐ Yes *(Skip to Question 6)*

☐ No

d. Biracial or Multi-Racial?

    ☐ Yes *(Check <u>ineligible</u> and skip to Question 6)*   ☐ Ineligible

    ☐ No

e. Haitian or other Caribbean Black that is not Hispanic?

    ☐ Yes *(Check <u>ineligible</u> and skip to Question 6)*   ☐ Ineligible

    ☐ No

f.   A member of another ethnic group?

    ☐ Yes *(Go to f-a)*

    ☐ No *(Check ineligible and skip to Question 6)*   ☐ Ineligible

       f-a: Ask for the name of the ethnic group.

       (*Please specify*): _____

       (If the identified ethnic group is a slang term for African-American, Latino, or European-American, then query regarding classification as one of these groups using f-b, otherwise continue with Question 6)

       f-b: You said that you identify as _____. Would others consider that to be the same thing as African-American/Black or Latino/Hispanic, or European-American/White?

          ☐ Yes *(Circle the ethnicity above)*

          ☐ No *(Check <u>ineligible</u> and continue)*   ☐ Ineligible

6.   Do you consider yourself to be gay or bisexual or questioning (any of the three)?

    ☐ Yes

    ☐ No *(Check <u>ineligible</u> and continue)*   ☐ Ineligible

7.   Are you able to understand both written and spoken English?

    ☐ Yes

    ☐ No *(Check <u>ineligible</u> and continue)*   ☐ Ineligible

8.   Have you tested positive for HIV?

    ☐ Yes *(Check <u>ineligible</u>)*   ☐ Ineligible

    ☐ No

The following two questions are for the interviewer only.

DO <u>NOT</u> ASK THESE QUESTIONS OF THE VOLUNTEERS.

9. Does the volunteer appear visibly distraught or emotionally unstable (i.e. suicidal, manic, exhibiting violent behavior)?

☐ Yes (*Check __ineligible__ and continue*) ☐ Ineligible

☐ No

10. Does the volunteer appear intoxicated or under the influence of psychoactive agents?

☐ Yes (*Check __ineligible__*) ☐ Ineligible

☐ No

INSTRUCTIONS: If any of the above ineligible boxes are checked, read the __INELIGIBLE__ section. If none of the boxes are checked, read the __ELIGIBLE__ section below.

FOR __INELIGIBLE__ VOLUNTEERS:
Participants for this research project are selected based on the questions you were just asked. Based on your answers, it turns out you're not eligible to participate. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about our study.

FOR __ELIGIBLE__ VOLUNTEERS:

Thank you very much for the information you provided. Based on your answers to these questions, you are eligible to participate in this research study. That means that if you want to participate in the research, you may. Do you think you might be interested in taking part in this project?

Response: If no, thank them for their time. If yes:

For screenings conducted by telephone, give information about when and where to come to complete a questionnaire. Tell them that they will need to reconfirm their answers to the questions you just asked and complete a consent document.

For those screened in person say, **Before we go any further, I need to review a consent document with you.**

CONDUCT THE INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS

Investigator/Designee:

_____ _____ _____
Signature   Print Name   Date

If participant enrolls:

Participant Name: _____

Date of Birth**:** |_____|_____|--|_____|_____|--|_____|_____|_____|_____|
                   Month   Day   Year

*Place this form in the participant's individual research file***.**

Appendix B
Consent/Assent Form-Mosaic Study

<u>(READ BOLD PARTS BELOW AND POINT TO SECTIONS TO WHICH YOU ARE REFERRING)</u>

1. My name is [PI Mosaic Study-Chicago, IL], and I am from XX University.
AGAIN, THIS STUDY IS FOCUSED ON IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND RISKS TO GETTING HIV. WE ARE ASKING YOU TO PARTICIPATE BECAUSE YOU ARE WHITE, BLACK, OR LATINO, BETWEEN THE AGES OF 14-22, IDENTIFY AS G,B,OR Q, AND HAVE NOT TESTED POSITIVE FOR HIV.

2. We are asking you to take part in a research study because we are trying to learn more about identity development and HIV-related sexual and drug use behaviors among young gay, bisexual and questioning (GBQ) males. The information you provide us will help us understand the process that young men go through as they discover who they are, their likes and dislikes and what they want to do with their lives. After gathering this information, we plan to use it to develop HIV prevention interventions especially designed for GBQ adolescent males. We expect approximately 90 young men to participate. We are asking you to participate in this study because you are White/European-American, African-American, or Latino; between the ages of 14 and 22 years old; identify as either gay, bisexual, or questioning; and have not tested positive for HIV.

TODAY WE ARE ASKING YOU TO DO A SURVEY THAT WILL TAKE UP TO 45 MINUTES. THE SURVEY WILL ASK YOU ABOUT SOME PERSONAL INFORMATION AND YOU WILL TAKE THE SURVEY PRIVATELY.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will first be asked to answer a paper and pencil survey that may take you about 30 to 45 minutes to complete. The survey will ask you to give some information about yourself, such as your age, gender, and personal behaviors, including sexual activity and drug use. We will also ask you for some information so that we may contact you for the next two phases of the study.

ALTHOUGH TODAY YOU ARE JUST GOING TO DO THE SURVEY, I NEED TO TELL YOU ABOUT 2 OTHER PHASES OF THE STUDY THAT WE MAY INVITE YOU BACK FOR. THE NEXT PHASE INCLUDES INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS ABOUT YOUR LIFE EXPERIENCES AS WELL AS GROUP INTERVIEWS TO GET FEEDBACK ON WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED SO FAR IN THE STUDY. THEN THE FINAL PHASE OF THE PROJECT INCLUDES GROUP INTERVIEWS ABOUT HOW BEST TO DESIGN HIV PREVENTION PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG GBQ GUYS.

AFTER YOU COMPLETE TODAY'S SURVEY, I WILL ASK YOU FOR SOME CONTACT INFORMATION SO THAT WE CAN LET YOU KNOW WHETHER OR NOT WE WOULD LIKE YOU TO COME BACK FOR THE NEXT PHASES.
In the second phase of this study, we will be doing interviews and discussion groups with some of the young men who completed the survey. There will be two different types of interviews. One type of interview (an in-depth interview) will explore several issues that young GBQ males experiences, such as challenges to developing an identity, exploration with sexual behaviors and drug use, and community involvement. This interview will take approximately one and a half to two hours. The other type of interview (a feedback interview) and the discussion group will be shorter and will help us confirm or disconfirm what we have learned from the interviews. These

interviews and discussion groups will take approximately one hour each. Since we want a wide range of different types of young men to participate in this phase of the study, we will be inviting youth to participate in the second and third phases based on their age, ethnicity, and level of gay identity.

In the third phase of the study, we will be doing a different type of discussion group than in the second phase with some of the young men who completed the survey. In these groups we will be asking for assistance in identifying different types of information and activities that could be included in an HIV prevention intervention for GBQ adolescent males.

3. If you agree to be a part of this study, you will be asked to answer a paper and pencil survey which will ask you to give some information about yourself, such as your age, sex, and personal behaviors. We will also ask you for your contact information (such as your phone number) and for contact information for trusted friends and/or family members that may be able to help us locate you for the next two phases of the study. The reason why we will ask you for this information about your friends and family is so we can contact them to help us locate you in case your personal contact information has changed and we cannot reach you personally. We will contact you within two to six weeks after you have completed the survey to let you know if we would like for you to participate in an interview or a discussion group for phase two. After the interviews and discussion groups in phase two are completed, you may be contacted to participate in discussion groups for phase three.

ONE RISK OF PARTICIPATING IS THAT YOU MAY FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE OR GET UPSET WHEN ANSWERING SOME OF THE QUESTIONS. BUT PLEASE KNOW THAT WE KEEP EVERYTHING YOU TELL US DURING THE SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS CONFIDENTIAL AND YOUR NAME IS NOT ATTACHED TO ANY OF THIS INFORMATION.

4. There are minimal risks associated with your participation in this study, including discomfort due to the personal and possibly embarrassing nature of some of the questions. You might get upset if sensitive topics come up on the questionnaire or in the interviews and discussion groups. However, we will ensure that all information collected in this study will be held confidential. Your name, address, social security number, date of birth, or anything else that could identify you as a participant will NOT be collected on the survey you complete. You will be assigned a unique code number and only that number will be on the survey or interview transcripts. Further, only research coordinators will have the key to the locked cabinet where we will keep the list that connects your unique code number with your name and contact information.

We will be combining data gathered in Chicago with data gathered in a similar study conducted in Miami, and we will use this combined data to develop future HIV prevention interventions. Nothing that is ever reported or written about this study will in any way identify you or any other individual person as a participant. Only the research staff members administering this study and whomever else you decide to tell will know you participated.

The research staff will need to know your name and contact information because they will be contacting you for the follow-up interview or discussion group. We will not contact you to discuss anything related to your answers on the survey and the staff who contact you will not know your answers to any of the questions. If we try to contact you and you are unavailable at the time, we will only leave a message if you have indicated that it is okay to do so. If we leave a message,

we will only give the name of the research project (i.e., MOSAIC) and our telephone number. In the event that we cannot reach you through your personal contact information, we will contact the people you listed in the contact information form. We will only ask these people for information on how to contact you and will not offer information about your participation in the study or your responses.

If you take part in one of the interviews or focus groups, those sessions will be tape recorded. Your name or any identifying information will not be used during the interview or focus group. And your name will not be on the audiotape. The audiotape of your interview will be accessible only to the principal investigator, the staff member who interviewed you, and the transcriber who will put the interview into a written format. The tapes are being transcribed because the researchers doing this study may need to see the written form of the interview. There will be no personal identifiers in the transcribed documents, either. After the tapes are transcribed they will be erased.

State law requires us to report any information you tell us that suggests that you might be in danger. If you tell us that you plan to hurt yourself or kill yourself, or hurt or kill someone else, we may be required to report that information to the appropriate authorities. If you tell us that someone is abusing or neglecting you, or even if abuse or neglect is suspected, we may also be required to report that information to the appropriate authorities. Further, if you tell us about circumstances that might reasonably lead to abuse or neglect, we may be required to report that as well. Also, if you tell us that you are abusing or neglecting a child, we would need to report that.
ALSO, IF YOU FEEL UPSET DURING OR AFTER THE SURVEY WE WILL HELP YOU MAKE ARRANGEMENTS TO SEE A COUNSELOR.
If you become very upset or issues come up that you want to discuss during or after the interview, we will assist you in making arrangements to see a counselor. If you become so upset that you say or act like you want to hurt yourself or anyone else, you will be taken for an evaluation to the mental health emergency room for your safety.   These precautions and procedures are in place to minimize these risks.
THERE ARE NO DIRECT BENFITS TO YOU BEING IN THE STUDY, BUT THE STUDY WILL HELP US DESIGN HIV PREVENTION SERVICES FOR YOUNG GBQ MEN.

5. Although there are no direct benefits associated with your participation in this study, we hope the results of this study will contribute to general knowledge about the lives of young GBQ males. By participating in this study you will be helping us design prevention services to protect young GBQ males in your area from getting HIV. The hope is that you and others may eventually benefit from the HIV prevention programs that this study will help us to develop.
WE WILL COMPENSATE YOU WITH A GIFT CARD WORTH 25$ FOR FILLING OUT THE SURVEY TODAY. IF YOU ARE INVITED BACK FOR THE OTHER PHASES, WE WILL COMPENSATE YOU FOR THOSE ALSO.

6. As a way of thanking you and showing appreciation for your participation in this study, you will be given movie passes and food coupons worth $25 for completion of the questionnaire. If you come back for an individual in-depth interview you will be given $35 cash at the conclusion of the

interview, and if you participate in any of the discussion groups or the feedback interview, you will be given $25 cash.

PLEASE REMEMBER THAT YOU CAN STOP PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY AT ANY TIME.

7. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Remember, being in this study is entirely up to you and no one will be upset if you do not want to participate. Even if you change your mind later and want to stop, you may withdraw your agreement to participate without any consequences.

8. All information that you provide in this research study will be kept strictly confidential and any report of this research will not identify you personally in any way.

9. Please remember that possessing this consent form may suggest to people that you are involved with this project. Therefore, you may want to ensure that no one sees this document unless you are comfortable with them knowing that you are participating.
 YOU CAN ASK ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, NOW OR LATER. USE THE CARD I GAVE YOU FOR NUMBERS TO REACH MYSELF OR MY BOSS.

10. You can ask any questions that you have about the study. If you have a question later that you did not think of now, you can call me (555) 555-5555, ask me next time, or you may speak to the Coordinator of the XX University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Research Participants by calling (444) 444-4444.

11. Signing your name at the bottom means that you agree to be in this study. You will be given a copy of this form after you have signed it.

12.

      Investigator's Responsibility: I have fully explained to (participant's name) _____
      the nature and the purpose of the above described research procedures and the risks and
      benefits involved in its performance. I have answered all (and will continue to answer all)
      questions to the best of my ability. I will inform the participant of any changes in the
      procedures or risks and benefits if they should occur during or after the course of this
      study. I have provided a copy of the consent form for the participant.
      Investigator's signature _____ Date_____

      Participant's Consent: I have been satisfactorily informed of the above described
      procedure with its possible risks and benefits. I agree to participate in this research study.
      If I have any questions regarding my rights as a participant in this research study, I may
      request to speak to the Coordinator of the XX University Institutional Review Board for
      the Protection of Research Participants by calling (444) 444-444. I understand that my
      participation in this research study is voluntary and that I am free to stop participating at
      any time, without any consequences, even after signing this form. I have been offered a
      copy of this form.

      Name of Participant_____Date_____

Signature_____

DPU-IRB approval number _____

Appendix C
Qualitative Interview Guide-Mosaic Study

Interview Font key

Element	Font
Main Script and Questions	**these are things we always say**
Alternative Scripts or questions	[these are things we use to paraphrase the main script] or probe:
Interviewer notes, skips, & instructions	*Note: things that aren't necessarily said out loud, but ought to be covered or considered*
	If: text that guides to skip certain questions or to read certain questions, depending upon participant answers
Interview Concept Notes	Descriptions of the goals and intent of sections and items

INTRODUCTION

I would like to tell you a little bit more about why we are conducting this interview with you today. In general, we are interested in learning more about how we can help to promote good health and wellness among gay, bisexual, and questioning adolescent males like you, especially around issues related to sexuality. In order to do this, we want to learn more how you view yourself, not just as a gay/bisexual/questioning male, but also how you view yourself in other aspects and in different settings. Since you are a young person who is part of various different communities, we're hoping that you can help us to better understand how trying to achieve balance between the various communities may impact you and other young people.

As I ask you to describe your opinions and experiences, please keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these questions, since people have a lot of different views on these topics. I'm simply interested in what you think about these different issues. I don't know exactly what it's like to "be in your shoes" or to deal with the pressures and influences that young people like yourself are confronted with every day related to tough issues, so I am looking forward to learning more about these experiences from you. Thank you for giving me your time.

This interview should take around 2 hours to complete. Any questions? If at any time you have questions or something I say is not clear, please let me know and I'll try to clarify. Are you ready to get started?

WARM-UP/BUILDING RAPPORT

Before we start talking in detail about the different factors that influence young people's behavior, I would like to first know a little about you. Pretend that you are your best friend talking to someone that has never met you before, and then describe to that person who you are.

Start off with simple characteristics like age and year in school, and then talk more about who you are as a person. Give as much or as little detail as you feel comfortable telling me—this is just a way for me to get to know you better so that I will know how to best ask you the other questions in the interview.

Probes:

What would you like me to call you during the interview?
          Please note name:_____

How old are you? Please note age:_____

How do you identify yourself in terms of your ethnic/racial identity? [EI]

> We are aiming to identify one term that best captures how they see themselves. The participant can name himself in terms of race, broad ethnicity (e.g., Latino), or specific ethnicity (e.g. Italian).

          Please note participant's [EI]:_____
How do you identify yourself in terms of your sexual orientation/identity? [SI]

> We are aiming to identify one term that best captures how they see themselves. The participant can name himself in terms any sexual identity or non-identity (e.g., "no labels")

          Please note participant's [SI]:_____

Are you in school?
(*if "yes"*) **What year are you in?**
(*if "no"*) **Are you on break, have finished school, or intend on going back?**
Other possible questions:
          a. What are some of the activities that you participate in? For example, extracurricular activities, sports, church involvement, youth groups.
          b. What do you do for fun?
          c. Describe your friends.
          d. Describe your family.

What have you been up to lately?
          Probe:
          a. Is there anything exciting happening in your life right now?

> GENERAL IDENTITY NARRATIVE
> This section is designed to:
> ♠ Get a general sense of how participant's multiple identities (as shared above) contribute to his unique experience

Thanks for sharing a little bit about what's going in your life right now. Now, I'd like for us to begin talking about the different aspects of yourself that make you unique.

1. **In general, what is it like being a [participant age], [ethnic identity], [sexual orientation] male?** →[*from hereon referred to as IDENTITY COMBINATION in interviewer notes*]
   For example, *What is it like to be a 15 year old, African-American bisexual male?*

   Probes:
   1. What are the benefits or positive things about being you?

MASCULINE IDENTITY
This section is designed to:
♠ define masculinity from the participant's perspective
♠ explore the relationship between participant's conceptualization of masculinity and how it relates to sex and condoms

---

Now we are going to talk about how you think and feel about what it means to be a man. Growing up we often get different messages about what boys and men should and should not do, and each person will accept some of those ideas and reject others. When I ask you the following questions I want you to think about your own thoughts and feelings about being a man.

Meaning
1. **What messages do you get about being a man or what it takes to be a man?**
   Probe:
   a. How should a man act?
   b. What should men do?
   c. How should a man walk?
   d. How should a man talk?

2. **What do you think about these messages about being a man?**
   Probe:
   a. What things do you agree with?
   b. What things do you disagree with?

3. **You have just told me about messages you get about what it means to be a man and how men are supposed to act. How do you fit into this? What is that like for you?**
Probe: [How do you see yourself compared to the things you told me?]

4. *If they mention ways that they "fit", then ask:* **In what ways don't you fit into what we have just talked about?** What is that like for you?

5. **We're going to switch topics now and talk about sex. How do you think men are supposed to think or feel about sex?**

Probe:
      a. What messages do you get from other people about how men are expected to think, feel, or act around sex?
      b. What do people say about being a man and sex?
      c. Who is saying these things?
      d. What do you think about these messages?

6. **How about condoms? How do you think men are supposed to think and feel about condoms?**
      a. What messages do you get from other people about how men are expected to think or feel about condoms?
      b. What do people say about being a man and using condoms?
      c. Who is saying these things?
      d. What do you think about these messages?

ETHNIC/RACIAL IDENTITY
This section aims to:
♠ understand how the participant conceptualizes their ethnic/racial identity
♠ explore the process of developing that identity- not just as someone who was born into a group, but as someone who came to see themselves as part of that group
♠ identify resources that have supported the process of developing an ethnic

---

Now we are going to talk a bit about your ethnic/racial identity. Some people may feel they belong to a particular ethnic/racial group but they may vary in terms of how they connect to that group. Remember, your answers will remain confidential. Let's begin.

Meaning
7. **Earlier you mentioned that you identify as [EI] in terms of your racial/ethnic identity. What messages do you get about being [EI]?**

8. **Tell me some of the negative things about being a/n [EI].**

9. **Tell me some of the positive things about being a/n [EI].**

10. **What are the specific roles and responsibilities of a/n [EI]?**

Probe:

a. How should or does a/n [EI] act?
b. What should or does a/n [EI] do?
c. How should or does a/n [EI] talk?

Self-Identification

11. You have just told me a little bit about what it means to be [EI]. How do you fit into this? What is that like for you?
Probe: How do you see yourself compared to the things you told me?

12. *If they mention ways that they "fit", then ask:* **In what ways don't you fit into what we have just talked about? What is that like for you?**
Probe: How are you different than the things you told me about being [EI]?

13. For some people, there is a time when they first realize that they are identified with a certain ethnic/racial community. Describe for me when you first realized that you were a [EI]? That is, when was the first time that you felt different because of your ethnicity?
Probe:
a. What were the circumstances around this?

Community

14. We've been focusing on you and how you think about and define your [EI]ness. For the next couple of questions I would like for you to think about other people who may identify as [EI]. First, do you feel that there is a/n [EI] community [a group that shares some things in common]**?**

If "yes": **Describe this community to me. How do you fit in to this?**
If "no": **Why?** (*then, skip questions 14 and 15*)

15. In what ways are you connected with a [EI] community?
a. What's that like for you?

16. How did you develop this connection? Describe from as early as you can remember.

17. Are there other ethnic/racial communities that you feel a part of or connected to? *[If so,]* **Tell me about them**.

Facilitators/Supports
18. Now we are going to talk about the various things which have helped you see yourself as a/n [EI]. People use resources, organizations, and other people all the time to help them in hard times or to help "learn the ropes" in terms of seeing themselves as a/n [EI]. What has helped you in the process of seeing yourself as a/n [EI]?

Probe:
a. Which people have helped you? [*Clarify the relationships of these people to the participant*]
b. What events have helped you?

    c. Which institutions have helped you?
    d. What resources have helped you?

19. We're going to switch topics now and talk about sex. How do you think [EI] are supposed to think or feel about sex?
Probe:
    e. What messages do you get from other people about how [EI] are expected to think, feel, or act around sex? What do people say about being [EI] and sex?
    f. Who is saying these things?
    g. What do you think about these messages?

20. How about condoms? How do you think [EI] are supposed to think and feel about condoms?
    e. What messages do you get from other people about how [EI] are expected to think or feel about condoms? What do people say about being [EI] and condom use?
    f. Who is saying these things?

SEXUAL IDENTITY
This section aims to:
♠ understand how the participant conceptualizes their sexual identity
♠ explore the process of developing that identity
♠ identify resources that have supported the process of developing a sexual
   identity

Now we are going to talk a bit about your sexual identity. Many of these questions may sound familiar, but I will be asking them with regard to your sexuality rather than to being a man or a/n [EI]. Remember, your answers will remain confidential. Let's begin.

<u>Meaning</u>

21. Earlier you told me that you identify as [SI]. What messages do you get about being [SI[?

22. Tell me some of the negative things about being a/n [SI].

23. Tell me some of the positive things about being a/n [SI].

24. What are the specific roles and responsibilities of being [SI]?

    Probe:
    a. Are there certain things you have to do be [SI]?
    b. When do they happen or when do you have to do these things?
    c. How do they happen?
    a. How should [SI] act?
    b. What should [SI] do?
    c. How should [SI] walk?

      d.   How should [SI] talk?

Self-Identification

25. You have just told me a little bit about what it means to be [SI]. How do you fit into this? What is that like for you?
Probe: How do you see yourself compared to the things you told me?

26. *If they mention ways that they "fit", then ask:* **In what ways don't you fit into what we have just talked about? What is that like for you?**
Probe: How are you different than the things you told me?

27. For some people, there is a time when they first realize that they are [SI]. Describe for me when you first realized that you were [SI].
      Probe:
           a.   What were the circumstances around this?

Community

28. We've been focusing on how you think about and define your [SI]ness. For the next couple of questions I would like for you to think about other people who may identify as [SI]. First, do you feel that there is a/n [SI] community

If "yes": **Describe this community to me. How do you fit in to this? Are there any other [SI] communities, such as an internet [SI] community?**

If "no": **Why not?**

If they say there is no community because there is no [SI] neighborhood or area, then say: **A community can be any group that shares some things in common, even if they do not live close to each other, such as an internet community. Do you think there are some of these other kinds of [SI] communities?**

If they do not feel there is any kind of [SI] community, skip questions 29 and 30)]?

29. In what ways are you connected with a [SI] community?
      a.   What's that like for you?

30. How did you develop this connection? Describe your how you came to develop this connection, starting as early as you can remember.

31. Are there other sexual communities that you feel a part of or connected to? *[If so,]* **Tell me about them.**

Facilitators/Supporters/Mentors: People

32. Now we are going to talk about the various people, places, and things which have helped you see yourself as [SI]. People use other people, resources, organizations, and other things to help them in hard times or to help "learn the ropes" in terms of seeing themselves as [SI].

> *You will be asking the following questions in order to <u>all participants</u> <u>before proceeding to the probes.</u>*

a. **When you first started to identify as [SI], who was helpful and supportive in this process?**

b. **Other than your parent, has there been an important person in your life, who is older and more experienced than you and has provided you with guidance and support as a [SI] individual?**

Question b is the mentoring

> • *If the participant identifies someone in a, proceed to Probes I*
>
> *(No Mentor)*
>
> • *If the participant identifies someone in b, proceed to Probes II*
>
> *(Mentor). Probes II (Mentor) are the default probes.*

1. Describe this person to me. (*If the following is not provided spontaneously, then query*)
a. Do your trust them?
b. Is this someone who cares about you?
c. Is this someone you look up to?
d. How old are they? What is their ethnicity? What is their sexuality?
e. How do you know him/her?

Probes I (No Mentor)

1. **Describe this person to me** (*e.g., age, ethnicity, and sexuality*)**.**
2. **Describe this relationship to me.**
    a. **How was this person supportive and/or helpful?**
     b. **What did they do for you?**

You want to find out what participant's relationship is to this person (e.g., sibling, friend, program leader).

Probes II (Mentor)

a. How long have you known him/her?
b. How often do you see or talk to him/her?
c. How has this person been there for you?

> You want to know the kind of support that has been provide (e.g., emotional, instructional, informational)

d. What types of things did this person do for you?
e. Why has this person been so important to you?

f. What do you call him/her?

> You want to know what term participant used to describe this person (e.g., mentor, guardian, or angel).

2. Describe your relationship with him/her. (*If the following is not provided spontaneously, then query*)

Facilitators/Supporters: Other

32. We've just talked about people who have been helpful to you as you came to see yourself as [SI], now I'd like to talk to you about those places and activities that may have also been helpful. That is, are there places, like a town, or events, that have played a positive role as you started to identify as [SI]?

    a.   What events have helped you?
    b.   Which institutions have helped you?
    c.   What resources have helped you?

33. We're going to switch topics again and talk about sex. How do you think [SI] are supposed to think or feel about sex?

Probes:
    a.   What messages do you get from other people about how [SI] are expected to think, feel, or act around sex? What do people say about being [SI] and sex?
    b.   Who is saying these things?
    c.   What do you think about these messages?

34. How about condoms? How do you think [SI] are supposed to think and feel about condoms?

Probes:
    a.   What messages do you get from other people about how [SI] are expected to think and feel about condoms? What do people say about being [SI] and using condoms?
    b.   Who is saying these things?
    c.   What do you think about these messages?

NARRATIVE OF SEXUAL SITUATIONS

This section is designed to:

♠ Get detailed descriptions of 2 separate sexual situations in which participant
   o   engaged in a sexual situation participant considered risky
   o   engaged in a sexual activity where condoms were used

♠ provide description of participant's concept of sexual risk

♠ provide contexts of risk and condom-use

♠ explore what role drugs/alcohol use played in each sexual episode

---

Up until now we've talked about the experiences you have being [identity combination]. We're going to keep thinking about those different aspects of your identity, but now we're going to begin thinking about how they relate to sex.

I realize that it's not always easy to talk about something so private, but remember that everything you tell me is totally confidential. Keep in mind that this is a safe place to discuss private things without feeling judged in any way. Let's begin.

35. As a [identity combination], what is sex like for you?

Probe:
   a.   Who do you typically have sex with?
   b.   What kinds of sex do you have?
   c.   Why do you have sex?
   d.   Where do you typically have sex?

RISKY SITUATION
36. Tell me about a time when you did something sexual that put you at risk for getting a disease? [*If participant does not have an example, ask about their last sexual experience. Explore condom use*.]
Probes:

   a**.** What was happening before the situation? How were you doing, feeling that day? [antecedent]

   b. Who were you with? Where were you? When was this? Why were you there? [context of situation]

   c. Tell me about what happened in this situation? [event description]

   d. What did you do during the situation? How did you feel during it all? [management strategies]

   e. What happened afterwards? What were you thinking about? How were you feeling? [consequential motives/feelings]

   f. What role, if any, did drugs or alcohol play in this situation?

37. What about this situation made it risky?
[Note: Be sure to get the participant to discuss health risk involved with the situation.]

> If unprotected anal intercourse was not mentioned in the previous sexual risk narrative, please ask the appropriate questions below before proceeding to the SAFER SITUATION.

Unprotected Anal Intercourse
39.   Tell me about a time when you had unprotected anal sex.

   What was happening before the situation? How were you doing, feeling that day? [antecedent]

   b. Who were you with? Where were you? When was this? Why were you there? [context of situation]

c.   Tell me about what happened in this situation?   Did you ever talk about using condoms during this situation? [event description]

d. What did you do during the situation? How did you feel during it all? [management strategies]

e. What happened afterwards? What were you thinking about? How were you feeling? [consequential motives/feelings]

f.   What role, if any, did drugs or alcohol play in this situation?

Thank you for sharing that experience with me. I would to stay on the topic of sex, but now I would like to ask you some questions about a time you did something sexual where condoms were involved at all times during the encounter. Let's begin.

SAFER SITUATION
40. Tell me about a time when you did something sexual using a condom? [*If participant does not have an example, proceed to IDENTITY INTEGRATION ACTIVITY.*]

a. What was happening before the situation? How were you doing, feeling that day? [antecedent]

b.   Who were you with?   Where were you? When was this?   Why were you there? [context of situation]

c. Tell me about what happened in this situation? How were condoms introduced into the situation? [event description]

d. What did you do during the situation? How did you feel during it all? [management strategies]

e. What happened afterwards? What were you thinking about? How were you feeling? [consequential motives/feelings]

41.   What about these two situations was different?

42.   Thank you for talking to me about some of your sexual experiences. I'd like to ask you about a different topic that we are interested in understanding.   Some guys do sexual things or hustle for money and other things of value. If you have done this before, what was that like?

Probe:
a.   Was it with a man or woman?
b.   Where did you meet them?
c.   How did you feel about the sexual experience?
d.   What did you use the money for?

IDENTITY INTEGRATION ACTIVITY

We've been talking about your sexual experiences, as well as how you feel about being a man, a/n [EI], and [SI]. Now I'd like for you to show me how these identities come together-we're going to do this last part of the interview a little differently. Here's an outline of a man and here are six pencils. I want you to look at this drawing and use it to show me how you see yourself and your identities coming together. To do this, we will be using these pencils to represent your various identities or parts of yourself. First I'd like for you to select a color to represent your identity as a man, a second for your identity as an [EI], and the third as your identity as [SI].

Now using these pencils and this figure, I'd like for you to show me how these identities come together, filling the inside space of the figure with the different colors that represent the important parts of yourself.

Because these three identities may not be your only identities, I have three other colors that you may use to show other identities that you may have. You don't have to use these colors, only use them if you feel that they would help describe who you are, and if they are an important part of who you are. Do you think you may want to use one or more of these other colors?

If "yes": Make sure they assign each color to each identity and fill in the color code ke sheet.

Do you have any questions before we get started? [*After answering all questions, if applicable, say,*] **Then go ahead and start coloring the figure. You'll have about five minutes to complete this drawing.**

[*Have them first draw the picture*]

Now tell me about your picture.

[*Have them explain the picture*]

[*Once picture is explained in detail, say,*] **Some people think that they have to combine or integrate all the parts of themselves differently around different people or in different situations. Do you feel that your multiple identities come together differently in various situations?**

[*If yes,*] **Please tell me about each of these places or situations.**
        Who's in them? Where are the places located?

With the picture that you just drew, what setting would that fit into?
[*Indicate name of setting on color code key and number drawing to correspond to code sheet. Do this for each drawing. There should be as many color code sheets as there are drawings.*]

Okay, now, considering the other settings that you mentioned (list settings previously given), draw a figure for each of these settings that shows how you express your identities in each of them.

[*Have them color in the settings, labeling each one with its appropriate setting(s)*]

So, now tell me why you drew each of these in this way.
 <u>Other probes regarding integration</u>
  a. For example, why is this picture colored in this way in [specific setting], and why is this one colored in this way for this other situation?
  b. What do you do or say to express or represent yourself differently in each situation?
  c. How do you feel about expressing yourself differently in each of these situations?
  d. What is it like?

Well, that's all of my questions. Do you have any questions? [*Address questions and continue on to <u>Debriefing Interview</u>. Following the Debriefing Interview, interviewers will reflect and comment on the interview process in a tape-recorded "interviewer narrative." Participants should not be privy to this activity. Interviewer and participant should be identified at the beginning of the "narrative" in the following manner:*

 "This is XXX XXXXn, and I have just interviewed a 16-year-old, African American, gay male)

The "narrative" is intended to capture the following:

- *Reflections*
- *Notable themes*
- *Visual Material not "tape-recordable" (e.g., body language)*
- *Interview context and descriptors*

<u>*However*</u>*, interviewers are free to capture anything they consider worthwhile about the interview process. For example, this is an opportune time to reflect on what is was like to interview someone for your "community."*]

Appendix D
Case Selection Summary Form

Participant ID#:   Secondary Analysis?
SI: ☐ Yes
EI: ☐ No
Age: ☐ Maybe (re-read)
Education Status:
Residence Status:
Other Demographic Note:

A. What were the main relational themes in the interview?

B. What information did I get or failed to get with regard to the research questions?

C. What other salient, interesting, illuminating, or important relational points were made in the interview?

Appendix E
Debriefing Protocol-Mosaic Study

DEBRIEFING INTERVIEW
"Several questions in the interview asked you about personal and sensitive information. Some of the questions in the interview may have caused you to think about situations or feelings that we would like to check in with you about. I want to check in with you to make sure that when you leave here today you are feeling okay and that you are safe."

IF THE PARTICIPANT DISCUSSED SUICIDAL THOUGHT/IDEATION/ATTEMPTS, ASK:
"At one point in the interview, you mentioned thoughts or feelings of wanting to end your life. I want to ask you now how you are feeling, and if you are having thoughts of hurting yourself."

If answer indicates suicidal thoughts, feelings, or plan, the interviewer should say, "It's my responsibility to make sure you are safe. I need you to meet with a counselor to make sure you are safe. I will stay with you until s/he arrives." Interviewer should follow clinic/agency procedures for acute mental health referrals. Interviewer should contact supervisor immediately and stay with the participant until supervisor or mental health professional arrives.

IF THE PARTICIPANT DISCUSSED EXPERIENCING SOME FORM OF ABUSE, ASK THE FOLLOWING—IF THE ABUSE IS PERPETRATED BY A CUSTODIAL PARENT OR GUARDIAN, THEN FOLLOW PROCEDURES FOR CHILD ABUSE REPORTING

"At one point in the interview, you mentioned someone in your life hurting you or abusing you. I would like to ask you about those experiences, to make sure you are safe and to see if you would like to talk to anyone further about what has happened. Is there anything you would like to say about anyone hurting or abusing you?"

If yes, interviewer should say, "I'm sorry that happened to you. It's my responsibility to make sure you are safe. I would like you to meet with a counselor to make sure you are safe. I will stay with you until s/he arrives." Interviewer should follow clinic procedures for mental health and/or potential abuse referrals. Interviewer should contact supervisor immediately and stay with participant until supervisor or mental health professional arrives. In addition to mental health services/referrals, the supervisor or mental health professional will provide appropriate information regarding legal protections and services related to the abuse.

IF THE PARTICIPANT DISCUSSED HIV RISK BEHAVIORS AND EXHIBITED A LACK OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT HIV PREVENTION:
"At one point in the interview, you mentioned doing some things that might be putting you at risk for STDs and HIV. Do you mind if I give you some information about HIV and condom use?" If they agree, proceed with giving them needed information and resources.

ASK THIS QUESTION OF ALL PARTICIPANTS, REGARDLESS OF THEIR REPORTING OF ABUSE AND/OR SUICIDAL THOUGHTS:
"Is there any (other) part of the interview you would like to discuss further?"

If response indicates the participant is in urgent need of mental health assistance, the interviewer should follow clinic/agency procedures for acute mental health referrals. Interviewer should contact the supervisor immediately and stay with the participant until supervisor or mental health professional arrives. Otherwise, interviewer should say, "If you decide that you would like to speak with a counselor, here is a list of agencies in the community that provide this service."

Appendix F
Researcher Journal

August 21, 2009

State: Extremely tired; having a challenging time learning all the medical ropes of inpatient treatment. Really do not want to be working on this dissertation today.

Analysis Note: Case 0119
- Having a hard time seeing this young man as resilient.
    - Why am I thinking about him this way?
        - Does his being AA and apparently poor factor in my thinking here?
            - Don't think so, but must remain mindful of this possibility-this has influenced me in the past and with other cases.
    - History suggest significant maladaptive thinking and behavior
        - Am I being biased against sex-trade workers?
        - What in his relation context or history could have led him to adopt this behavior/role
            - Is it a role
    - However, it is noteworthy that he still is reaching out for relational connection
        - Appears quite aware that he still needs love."
    - Is he disconnecting to protect himself?
        - Is this a form of relational resilience?
            - Need to re-read RCT work on shame and humiliation-maybe this will shed some light
- Connections he notes are challenging to link to RCT theory-at least at this point
- Will discuss this case with Chair next time I we chat on the phone next.