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The Experience of Affection Expressed between Black Male Friends

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Abstract

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MS, Clinical Mental Health Counseling, Walden University, 2016

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Affectionate communication supports the maintenance and sustenance of longterm relationships for the purposes of survival and procreation. Friendship has been identified as one of the most significant relationships throughout an individual's lifespan, supporting improved mental and physical health. This qualitative study explored the expressions of affection experienced within Black male friend dyads. Two research questions were posed, what is the experience of Black men receiving and giving affection to other Black men within the context of friendships? Also, are the affectionate needs of Black men being met within their Black male friendships? Affectionate exchange theory and social learning theory were adopted as the theoretical framework for this study, aligned with a phenomenological methodology. Semistructured interviews were used with all ten participants. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to analyze the data and identify themes. The identified themes were loyalty, brother/brotherhood, affectionate development, affectionate communication/expression, and affectionate deprivation. Results indicated that though men experience affection deprivation within their friendships with other Black men they are unlikely to verbalize the experience to their Black male friend. Black men were also noted to express affection via socially supportive gestures more often than verbal or nonverbal behaviors. Future research should explore the resistance Black men have to sharing the experience of affection deprivation with their Black male friends. Optimally, this study has the potential to challenge accepted norms of Black male masculinity and affection, while also informing and enhancing wellness for Black men. This research has the potential to benefit Black men by giving voice to their affectionate experience; it builds upon and extends the literature on male friendships.

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Dedication

To Venus who always believed in me, Moon who always pushed me, Angel who I always wanted to be somebody for and to Maliya who makes it all worth it. These women and others have invested in me, challenged me, nurtured me, supported me, encouraged me and have showed me affection in more ways than I can recount. They motivate me to be a better man, father and overall person as they're growth inspires my own.

To Justin, whom I consider every day. I dedicate this study to you. If I had been, and you received more, then maybe. I vow to say what needs to be said to men as I have lost the best of all men I have ever known. I love you.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Affection is an evolutionary trait necessary to sustain long-term relationships and secure procreation. Affectionate communication refers to the diversity of expressive behaviors that contribute to the formation, maintenance, and quality of human relationships (Floyd & Ray, 2016). Furthermore, the ways in which people communicate affection (verbally, nonverbally or through supportive behavior) become paramount to their ability to attain and uphold satisfying relational bonds with others. In fact, affection functions as a form of interpersonal maintenance that produces positive outcomes in a range of relationship styles, including friendships (Bennett et al., 2019). Friendships are defined as close and familiar relationship wherein mutual intimacy and trust abide (Jarvie, 2019). Such the relationships emerge and are maintained by continued mutual experiences and affection. Among friends, affectionate communication has been identified as improving individuals' mental health and self-esteem (Aloia & Brecht, 2017).

Further research on affectionate communication has indicated the benefits of such communication in relation to doctor patient outcomes, grandparent grandchild relationships, and immunocompetence (Hesse et al., 2020, Hesse & Rauscher, 2019; Mansson et al., 2017). However, none of the research in this area has included how Black men express and experience affection within friendships with other Black males. This chapter includes what affection and affectionate communication are, how the construct of affection has been historically researched, the purpose of this study, the theoretical framework for this study, and the nature of the study.

Background

In the past, psychological research suggested that affection was expressed by women and rarely expressed to the same degree by men (Kretchmar, 2019). Men were understood to address

emotions in private to a greater extent than in public due to a number of reasons surrounding the socialization of boys coupled with culturally accepted ideas about masculinity (Click et al., 2015). However, recent insight regarding men indicates that men are not inherently less affectionate than women, allowing for the consideration that men may demonstrate affection in different ways. Research has also pointed to a shift in ideas about masculinity as traditional behaviors such as hugging and kissing among self-identified heterosexual men have increased. For example, Anderson et al., (2019) investigated the prevalence of same-sex kissing among heterosexual men enrolled in college. Their results emphasized the change in gender-accepted heteronormative behavior, as 40% of respondents reported kissing on the cheek and 10% reported kissing on the lips. Though this research was conducted via 442 qualitative surveys and 75 in-depth interviews, the results should not be generalized to represent the conceptualization of expressions of affection for all men; however, the trend of public kissing as a means of affectionate communication amongst heterosexual men does highlight a restructuring of masculine heteronormative behavior. It should also be noted that the sample population was 37% White, 39% Asian, and 4% Black. The evolution of identifying affection as a human trait as opposed to being a feminine-specific expression is expansive, though the lack of research regarding Black men's expressions of affection presents a gap in the literature.

Researchers have long understood the significance of friendships (Reddin & Sonn, 2003). Some reports suggest that within various developmental stages, friendships may become the most impactful relationships. Men, like women, desire close and intimate friendships to be satisfying and meaningful. Furthermore, studies have consistently highlighted the alternate ways in which men communicate affection that may differ from those of women, such as loaning money to a friend or helping a friend move apartments (Floyd, 1997; Floyd, in press; Floyd &

Hesse, 2017). Collectively, men have similar expectations as compared to other gendered individuals regarding intimacy, affection, and friendship. Stamps (2018) research investigated the intricacies of affection and social support within male-centered social networks. Stamps collected data from self-identified college male from 71 focus groups. The findings revealed three themes: influence and impact of fathers and father figures' affectionate communication, importance of time and trust among male centered networks, and the acknowledgement of masculinity as fluid. However, it should also be noted that each research study noted contained a Black male population no greater than 21% of the entire sample population, with figures such as 0% (Kennedy et al, 2020), 21% (Mansson et al., 2017) and 11% (Trask et al., 2020). Again, this places greater emphasis on the need to investigate Black men regarding their affectionate communicative experiences with other Black men.

Although there has been a noticeable absence of Black men's expressions of affection in the research literature, why does it matter? The benefits of affection have been well documented, including improved immunocompetence, self-esteem, stress response, cortisol level, buffers against anxiety and depression, mood, relational satisfaction, commitment and maintenance, as well as other physical and mental wellness outcomes (Denes et al., 2017; Floyd et al, 2018; Floyd & Ray, 2016). Simultaneously, Black men make up 6.5% of the American population and comprise almost 40% of the prison population (Bowleg et al., 2020); have the lowest employment-population ratio of 63.7 (U.S. Bureau of Labor, 2019); make up 4.3% of the total enrollment of 4-year postsecondary institutions, the same percentage as in 1976 (Palmer et al., 2014). Black men have the highest unemployment rate 6.2% and experience longer periods of unemployment (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Black men are the highest percentage of victims related to gun violence as well as gun homicide arrestees (Carswell, 2019). Additionally,

Black men have the lowest life expectancy at age 72.2 (Bond & Herman, 2016) and have the highest percentage of never-married persons (Pew Research Center, 2014). Black boys are committing suicide at an increased rate (Scott & Banks, 2018), and Black men experience the highest number of poor health indicators of all racial groups in the United States (Rick et al., 2020). Until recently, research regarding Black male health outcomes was limited and infrequent (Williams et al., 2003), overlooking the possibility that many of the benefits of affection contend with the very issues that Black men undergo. However, because affection is inherent to the human experience, investigating how Black men express affection could inform later pursuits regarding the wellness of Black men. As affection is defined as necessary for relational creation and sustainability (Floyd, 2017), correlated with additional physical and mental advantages, the experience of Black men should be addressed as the population may benefit in the future from insights garnered.

Problem Statement

The construct of affection, as it is written about in the literature, is an evolutionary trait, evolved in humans for the purposes of increased survival and procreation (Bernhold & Giles, 2019). According to Denes et al. (2017), affection refers to an internal psychological state of positive, often intimate regard for another. Affectionate communication is expressed in a multitude of ways, including verbally, nonverbally, and through supportive behavior (Stamps, 2018). This includes spoken expressions of affection such as "I love you" and "You are cared for," which generate positive feelings of closeness, fondness, and care (Floyd, 2006). Nonverbal expressions of affection include affectionate gestures such as hand holding, kissing, rubbing a loved one's feet, and hugging. Supportive behaviors include giving a friend in need a loan or helping someone move (Floyd, 2006). Affection research has been aimed at understanding both

the "giving" and "receiving" components of affection as they mediate interpersonal relationships (Floyd & Hesse, 2017). Previous researchers have studied the experiences of affection as they pertain to male interpersonal relationships, such as the relationship between grandfather and grandchild, fathers and sons, and males in relationships with women accounting for the affection experienced between a male and his mother (Bernhold & Giles, 2019; Davis & Haynes, 2012; Denes et al., 2017; Floyd, 1997). However, the literature lacks a single study conducted to understand expressions of affection as they exist between Black male friends.

Though the impact and benefits of affection have been well documented including relationship satisfaction, increased commitment, feelings of love, as well as decreased risk of potential physical and mental impairments (Floyd, in press; Floyd & Morman, 1997; Floyd & Ray, 2006), the research has never been aimed at understanding Black men. Expressed affection has been studied to assess its impact on the immune system; it is positively correlated with heightened levels of self-esteem and happiness and negatively correlated with depression and stress level (Floyd, 2006). There is a robust literature examining associations of affection such as cortisol levels, grandparent child interpersonal relationship, communication, male's perception of masculinity, and deceptive affectionate messaging (Floyd et al., 2018; Mansson et al., 2017; Redlick & Vangelisti, 2018). However, the specific affectionate experience of African American men has been neglected. Floyd et al., (2010) postulated that affection is an evolved trait of the human condition in which people seek affectionate communication and relationships, as affection increases survival. If this is indeed true, the expressions of affection among Black male should friends be researched not only due to their multiple mental and physical benefits, but also due to the association that affection has to individuals' fundamental capacity to survive.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to understand the role that affection plays within the experience of Black male friendship. The benefits and lack of affection have been well researched within the field of psychology, as well as in other disciplines (e.g., sociology, political education), though not in the specific context of Black male-to-male friendships (Ledbetter, 2009; Little & La Verne, 2018). Floyd and Hesse (2017) defined *affection deprivation* as the condition of receiving less affection from others than one desires. *Affectionately deprived* populations are more prone to develop anxiety, depression, personality disorders, alexithymia, secondary immune disorders, and other mental and physical ailments (Floyd & Hesse, 2017). On the other hand, highly affectionate persons, those who by trait are highly affectionate communicators, have been noted as likely to have secure attachment, better physical and mental health, and healthier approaches to stress (Floyd, 2002). In this study, I sought to understand the experience of Black male friends as it relates to affection, with an appreciation for affectionate deprivation as defined by previous research.

This study was also intended to address a gap in the research conducted on Black men as it relates to the role that affection has in their lives. Most of the participants in the studies conducted by Floyd and colleagues were of Caucasian or European descent (i.e., White) (;Floyd, 1997, 2014). Not only have studies focused on the ways in which Black men express affection been infrequent, but Black men have often been under-represented when included in research in this area. Through correspondence via email, Dr. Floyd relayed a need for research in the area of Black male relationships and affection, though he also highlighted that environmental and cultural interactions may prove more significant influences on individuals' experience and understanding of affection than demographics of race and ethnicity. Future research should be

conducted to investigate the effects that healthy affective communication and affection deprivation have had on Black men as well as investigate the cultural differences between affectionate experiences. Past research has addressed the impact that lack of affection has on children, females and males, though no research has addressed the biopsychosocial or relational-health experience that affectionate communication or lack thereof has had on Black men (Floyd, 2014; Floyd, in press; Floyd & Morman, 2003).

Research Questions

The research questions were as follows:

1. What is the experience of Black men receiving and giving affection to other Black men within the context of friendships?
2. Are the affectionate needs of Black men being met within their Black male friendships?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study included affection exchange theory (AET) and the social learning theory (SLT). Chapter 2 includes a more in-depth discussion of theories and their influence on current research.

Affection Exchange Theory

AET, developed by Floyd, indicates that affectionate communication encompasses behaviors that encode feelings of fondness and intense positive regard and are similarly decoded by receivers to be such (Floyd, 2002). AET indicates that humans do not have to be aware of the reasons that they use affectionate communication because it works in and of itself to serve a progressive purpose (Floyd et al., 2005). Floyd has taken the theoretical position that affection is a fundamental element necessary for optimal human health (Floyd et al., 2005). Another theory

that lends insight into the role of affection and affectionate communication between men is the SLT or social observational theory crafted by Bandura.

Social Learning Theory

According to SLT, people express socially learned behaviors through a process of internal adoption of external values and behaviors (Watkins, 2019). This theoretical approach goes beyond initial behavioral approaches that framed behavior as a byproduct of conditioning or consequence, as SLT includes a mental process and internalization of viewed behavior (Watkins, 2019). SLT suggests that learning cannot be solely behavioral, as the societal influence works interdependently of the behavioral responses, which places emphasis on the social and mental components of learned behavior.

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Nature of Study

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The nature of this study was qualitative as this approach provided an opportunity for a deep understanding of the respondents' lived experience. Using a qualitative approach, researchers seek to collect narrative data by allowing participants to respond openly and identify themes within said responses (Stamps, 2018). However, even with a qualitative-constructivist approach, there is not a guarantee that the collected data will result in any consistent theme. A phenomenological approach was also suitable. Researchers adopting phenomenological approaches aim to understand people's mental processes related to phenomena, which results in the identification of common themes self-reported by several individuals according to their lived experience of a specific phenomenon (Awosan & Hardy, 2017). This allowed the affected population, in this case men, to define affection for themselves. The constructivist approach provided qualitative data as experienced by the targeted population (Stamps, 2018).

Operationally Defined Terms

Affection: A fundamental human need that is adaptive, contributing to individuals' viability and fertility by promoting pair bonds (Alioa & Brecht, 2017).

Affectionate communication: Methods of relating affectionate messages to others, including verbal, nonverbal and through supportive communicative behaviors (Floyd, in press).

Affection deprivation- An acute and chronic state in which an individual's one fails to receive the level of affection desired from others (Floyd & Hesse, 2016)

Masculinity- An individual's ownership of varying gender performances, which is based on the socio-historical context and information transmitted within a given interaction (Schrock & Scwalbe, 2009)

Black men/male: Self-identified Black men or males including African Americans and others that account for the diaspora of African people.

Relationship- The state of being connected to another person within a specific relational context, including familial relationships, romantic relationships and friendships (Floyd & Morman, 1997).

Friendship- A relationship wherein mutual affection and intimacy are expected to be experienced (Ledbetter, 2009).

Socialization- The process of internalizing the norms and values of the environment that an individual is developed within (Reigeluth, 2016).

Social learning- The process of learning via observation and imitation (Kretchmar, 2019).

Possible Types and Sources of Data

The data were gathered during interviews with Black men based on personal accounts and independent responses to open ended questions in order to gain insight into their personal experience (Stamps, 2018). Other sources of data such as secondary sources were not appropriate due to the nature of phenomenological research the approach was intended to understand current phenomena by the population experiencing said phenomenon (Awosan & Hardy, 2017). The semi structured interviews allowed me to gain details about the nuances of Black men's experiences and expressions of affection, as well as beliefs about affection among Black men as a cohort (Croix et al., 2018).

The researcher interviewed 10 Black male friends (Creswell, 2013). Each participant was interviewed individually and was also a friend to another Black male interviewee. The social media platforms of Facebook and Instagram were used for recruiting purposes to attain Black male respondents older than 18 years who were participating in a friendship with another Black male (Watkins, 2019). Each participant interviewed was a Black male friend of another Black male being interviewed; interviewing friends allowed me to compare the different ways in which two males experience the affection within their relationship, as the two may have differed in their interpretation of appropriate relational affection.

It should also be noted that as a Black man researching the expressions of affection among Black men, I had an inherent personal bias. However, from the development of the research questions to the interpretation of the interviews, each phase included a meeting with a committee member to address biases, along with a journal that denoted my emotional experience as the researcher (Englander, 2016). Applying epoche within the phenomenological approach provided a pathway for suspending and bracketing assumptions and biases (Englander, 2016).

Bracketing was initiated with an in-depth dialogue with fellow colleagues about personal biases, past knowledge, and experiences, after which I logged them (Englander, 2016). Next, a bracketing journal was used to take note of biases that arose throughout the research process, including data collection, analysis, and conclusion (Englander, 2016). Finally, the bracketed information was placed into the final report as to provide the audience with a transparent representation of my biases (Englander, 2016). The qualitative design used not only aligned with the research question, but also provided a reduction in personal input as the interviewees relayed their experiences.

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

Assumptions refer to the beliefs that are necessary to assume in order to carry out a research study, which cannot be proven. Due to the criterion for participant selection, there was an assumption that the self-identified Black men were being honest about their racial orientation. There was also an assumption that the Black male friends interviewed mutually identified their relationship in the context of friendship.

Delimitations refer to the boundaries set forth by the researcher of a study. A delimitation of this study was the noninclusion of women. The scope of this study was aimed at the experience of Black men. Another delimitation of this study was qualitative methodology. Quantitative and mixed methods are alternate research methodologies. A qualitative approach aligned best with this study's research problem, research questions, and purpose.

Limitations refer to influences and conditions that cannot be controlled by the researcher. One limitation of this study was the choice of methodology. Due to the nature of qualitative research, there was an inherent lack of generalizability. However, it is also worth mentioning that

the purpose of the study was to enrich the understanding of Black male friends lived experiences regarding affection. The objective of this study was not to generalize findings.

Significance

The challenges experienced by Black men such as depression, racial discrimination, the criminal justice system, and violence have been well chronicled (Watkins, 2019). Black men have dealt with high levels of stress throughout their tenure in America, into the present day. Black men endure stress related to an intersection of race, gender, developmental age, and limited access to resources unique to their lived experience (Watkins, 2019). Previous research on affection and affectionate communication explored the impact associated with stress levels, depression and other forms of mental illness, and relational health, all of which are challenges faced by Black men (Floyd, 2002, 2006; Floyd et al., 2005). The reported benefits of affection and quality friendships directly address some of the major psychological, physical, and emotional issues facing Black men. Thus, not only was this study intended to lend insight into 10 Black men's point of view on affection as it relates to friendship, the study was intended to contribute to the literature, forwarding the research toward more mixed and quantitative approaches. Focused attention on the experiences of Black males' affectionate engagements between one another addresses a fundamental human need rarely researched with African American men as the target population (Stamps, 2018).

Summary

This chapter introduced the study, presented background context, provided information on the nature of the study, and addressed assumptions and limitations regarding expressions of affection among Black male friends. This study used the AET and ALT to guide analysis and

interpretation of data. A thorough review of the current literature on affection revealed a lack of focus concentrated on how affection is communicated between Black male friends.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction to the Literature Review

This chapter contains a literature review of substantive research related to how affection is expressed between males, particularly Black male friends. This chapter also contains a literature review concerning the scholarly rationale for the study, including the literature that supported the research questions.

The chapter begins with a review of the AET, in order to foster a better understanding of this construct, which was central to the study. Understanding AET entails an exploration of the biology of affection and its physical, mental, and neurological correlates. Literature regarding SLT is presented to appreciate ways in which affection is learned and related behaviors are shaped via observation of others within the context of various relationship dynamics. Next, this chapter highlights how people are socialized and educated regarding the expression of affection. Finally, the chapter concludes with the relatively limited literature devoted to the exploration of the affectionate experience of Black men.

Strategy for Searching the Literature

The literature review consists of studies from previously written dissertations, pertinent books, and peer-reviewed articles and journals dating from 1990 to 2020. Research databases such as PsycBooks, PsycArticles, PsycINFO, EBSCO, and SocIndex were used to gather scholarly resources. The Boolean search contained the keywords of affection, affectionate communication, affectionate expressions, affection deprivation, masculinity, Black men/male, relationship, friendship, social learning and socialization. The search also included literature related to Floyd's AET and Bandura's SLT. The research provided was intended to fully review the available literature pertinent to Black male friendship experience, as it relates to affection.

Affection Exchange Theory

AET was discussed, as it currently functions as the leading theory related to affection. The key constructs related to affection exchange include affectionate communicative expressions and the experience of affection deprivation.

AET was introduced by Floyd in 2001. AET is identified as a neo-Darwinian theory that interprets affectionate communication as an evolved behavior contributing to mankind's fertility and viability, through general social pathways such as the development of camaraderie and romance, as well as through the biological pathways that are the catalyst for neurological reward feedbacks, which boost the immune system (Floyd et al., 2005). Proponents of AET posit that there are benefits of receiving and giving affection that are independent of one another, because people are advantaged by not only receiving affectionate communication from others but by giving it as well (Floyd et al., 2005).

According to AET, which is grounded in Darwin's theory of evolution, affection serves the fundamental objectives of survival and procreation. Darwin purported that procreation and survival are superordinate human goals. According to AET, affectionate expressions and communications are aligned with the needs of the human species from an evolutional and biological perspective (Floyd, 2001; Floyd, in press). Another facet of AET is that affection is characterized as a feeling of fondness, love, and care, which strengthens humans' ability to achieve long-term relationships to meet those superordinate goals. According to AET, giving and to feeling affection are fundamental behaviors that support long-term bonds and increase an individual's access to the essential resources needed for procreation and survival of the species (Floyd, 2001). Moreover, affectionate people benefit in psychosocial, physiological, and relational (e.g., familial and romantic) domains.

Attachment theory, developed by John Bowlby (1969), involves the same assumption as AET in that it indicates that humans contain a biological fondness toward interpersonal relationships with the objective to form close emotional bonds in the interest of survival. Attachment theory, similar to AET, is founded on evolutionary principles with the notion that evolutionary-biological processes play a significant role in interpersonal relationships (Bowlby, 1969; Floyd, 2001). Both theories also provide an outlook of attachment or affection that involves appreciation of relationships throughout the lifetime, including romantic relationships, friendships, caregiver relationships, and others (Bowlby, 1969; Floyd, 2001). However, although AET and attachment theory share a few commonalities (e.g., both are evolutionary theories) and related concepts (e.g., both maintain superordinate goals), they are divergent theories that are directed toward different psychological constructs, affection and attachment, respectively.

AET is a communications theory that addresses verbal behaviors (e.g., saying "I love you"), nonverbal behaviors (e.g., hugging) and socially supportive behaviors (e.g., giving a friend a loan) that people express in effort to develop and maintain intimate relationships. On the other hand, attachment theory is more a developmental theory, in that it indicates that infants associate attachment with their experience of closeness to a caregiver (e.g., mother, father, or loving adult), especially during times of discomfort and stress. For example, Bennett et al., (2019) investigated the relationships between adult attachment styles, trait affection, post sex affectionate communication behavior, and sexual satisfaction using the theoretical framework of attachment theory and AET. The authors posited that in attachment relationships are formed in infancy and that children's personality traits begin to become more influential within relationships as they mature, and trait affectionate communication is a personality trait related to attachment tendencies (Bennett et al., 2019).

Trait affectionate communication reflects an individual's propensity toward and comfort with engaging in affectionate communication. Some individuals may have a higher tendency to give affection as opposed to others with a greater need to receive affection. In other words, attachment represents a natural propensity toward interpersonal relationships with expectations formed from previous relationships, and within those relationships lies an experiential continuum of affectionate communication. According to Floyd and Ray (2016), although affection is a biologically evolved function, some people are still more or less affectionate than others because of their affectionate trait.

AET is comprised of five postulates and multiple sub postulates (Floyd, 2001). According to Postulate 1, an individual's ability to survive increases due to affectionate communication used to maintain and develop pair bonds, which then improves the access of each individual within the dyad to resources such as housing and nutrition (Floyd, 2001). In accordance with Postulate 2, affectionate communication increases the individual's opportunities to reproduce because affectionate communication identifies the individual as a suitable prospective parent and potential mate (Floyd, 2001). Postulate 3 is characterized by parents' affectionate communication with their biological offspring, which increases the child's chances of attracting a mate for reproduction, creating another generation transmitting the parents' genes (Floyd, 2001). According to Postulate 4, affectionate communication is used proportionally to its impact upon the subordinate goals of survival and fertility (Floyd, 2001). Postulate 5 refers to the way in which affection is communicated according to which superordinate goal it serves (Floyd, 2001).

Biological Underpinnings of Affection Exchange Theory

Floyd et al., (2005) proposed that affection influences biological functioning and is such a fundamental human need that it could be represented alongside food and water on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Floyd and colleague Colter Ray (2016) used a biological framework to analyze previous research in which they synthesized the behavioral, physiological, and genetic associations of affectionate communication. The authors argued that all interpersonal acts are biological in nature, a conclusion reached in earlier research by Floyd and Afifi (2011), as well as others (Floyd & Ray, 2016). Affectionate communication, which is characterized by messages of appreciation, commitment, love, and fondness, positively influences stress responses and increases calm and relaxation. Continuing from a biological framework, however, one must appreciate the neurological antecedents that are vital for the expression of affectionate communication. For instance, the oxytocin receptor gene polymorphism rs53576 was found to be positively associated with affectionate communication.

Floyd and Denes (2015) provided further evidence of the biological underpinnings of social and affectionate behavior. The authors investigated the interaction of attachment security and genotype in the oxytocin receptors gene on affectionate communication. Floyd and Denes predicted that individuals' genotype for the single-nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) rs53576 on the oxytocin receptor gene would show a stronger influence in individuals with weak attachment security compared to individuals with strong attachment security. The study involved 164 respondents who all completed affectionate communication and attachment security measures and provided saliva samples for purposes of genetic analysis. Previous research supports that persons with different genotypes on single-nucleotide polymorphisms on the oxytocin receptor, specifically, vary from one another in their expression of prosocial behaviors, namely empathy

(Floyd, 2014; Floyd & Afifi, 2011). The participants were measured in affectionate communication using the Trait Affection Scale-Given (TAS-G). The TAS-G is a 10-item instrument used to assess how generally giving a person is of their affection to others (Floyd, 2014). The Relationship Questionnaire (RQ) was applied to measure the respondent's attachment security (Floyd, 2014). The oxytocin receptor polymorphism rs53576 gene was evaluated by using DNA from saliva samples. According to the findings, individuals with AA and AG nucleotide pairs and lower levels of trait expressed affection were identified as persons low in attachment security. Such findings not only show a biological relationship between humans and affection, but also point to an evolutionary dynamic between human genetics and affectionate communication (Floyd et al., 2005). Their findings suggest at least a partial genetic basis for the tendency to affectionately communicate, principally for persons with insecure attachment.

In an another study, Floyd and colleagues (2018) studied the expressions of support in nondistressed relationships and how they are associated to immunological health. The authors contended that received and expressed support are both positively associated with immunocompetence. The study included 39 healthy adults, comprised of 23 college-aged women and 16 college-aged men. Expressed support was measured via the social support subscale from the Affectionate Communication Index, a five-item measure developed to investigate sharing personal information, praising the relational partner's accomplishments and helping the relational partner with problems (Floyd et al., 2018). The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) was used to measure received support (Floyd et al., 2018). The MSPSS is a 12-item instrument to measure perceived global social support that includes items related to family, friends, and romantic partner support. The authors took blood samples from each participant to test for immunoglobulins, specifically IgA, IgG, and IgM. There are five types of

immunoglobulins, A, D, E, G, and M, also known as antibodies, produced by B cells in response to pathogen invasion (Sergerstrom & Miller, 2004).

Earlier research conducted by Jemmott and Maglorie (1998) explored the effects of school-related stressors and social support on college students' salivary levels of immunoglobulins A (IgA). The authors noticed that during the most stressful periods throughout the school year, IgA levels were lowest; IgA levels significantly decreased as the production of stress was heightened. Floyd and his peers discovered that additionally, students who received high levels of social support had consistently higher levels of IgA than peers whose levels of social support were inadequate, regardless of stress (Floyd et al., 2018). This supports the AET in that social support awards psychophysiological benefits for the recipient, especially when the receiver of the message is in crisis or distress of some sort. Expressions of support (e.g., loaning a friend money or running errands for one's partner) are also one of the three ways to communicate affection, the other two being verbal communication (e.g., saying "I love you" or using terms of endearment) and nonverbal communication (e.g., hand holding or kissing); (Floyd et al., 2010).

Affectionate Communication and Stress

Previous research identified advantageous physiological results from affectionate behavior (Grewen et al., 2003; Grewen et al., 2005). In a study conducted by Grewen and colleagues (2005), each romantic pair took a questionnaire related to perceived partner support and was asked to complete a 10-minute period of warm contact, accompanied with a pre- and post- measure of hormonal reactivity as well as cardiovascular output. Interestingly, the results indicated lowered cortisol levels throughout the post contact period. Grewen and colleagues (2005) attributed the finding to the habituation of the relationship rather than the warm contact.

Habituation, in terms of the study, refers to prolonged exposure to a long-term partner's warm contact. Thus, the lowered cortisol levels are owed more to the routine of being with one's partner as opposed to the warm interaction itself.

However, there is still debate on whether affectionate communication buffers stress due to habituation or the accumulation of affection. Pauley et al., (2015) examined how affectionate communication mitigated stress between dyads, romantic partners, and close friends. The authors investigated whether affectionate communication buffered acute stress due to habituation or accumulation. Pauley et al., (2015) recruited 120 participants (60 romantic partners of the opposite sex, 60 platonic friends of the opposite sex) to participate in the study wherein each completed an online questionnaire followed by a laboratory appointment. The two sets of dyads (romantic partners and platonic friends) were randomly placed in three "manipulation" categories for the laboratory appointment: 10 minutes of affectionate expression to the friend/romantic partner, 10 mintues of quiet rest in the presence of their friend/romantic partner, and remaining separated from the friend/romantic partner. The researchers randomly selected individuals by gender and placed them in a room alone for 6 minutes and hooked them up to a Dinamap 100, a device used to measure diastolic blood pressure, systolic blood pressure, and heart rate every 2 minutes throughout the laboratory session. This was followed by five stress-inducing events with a 10-minute "manipulation" period between each; during the 10-minute period, the participants communicated affectionately, rested in the presence of their friend/romantic partner, or remained alone. Saliva samples were taken at 10-minute intervals after each period of manipulation, before the next stress test. The results indicated that although the stress-inducing events increased blood pressure and heart rate, the participants who were "manipulated" with affectionate communication had lower blood pressure and heart rate levels.

The results also verified Grewen and colleagues' (2005) study. The cortisol levels were higher for participants accompanied by their friend as opposed to those with their romantic partner. Grewen and his peers (2005) suggested that habituation, or the familiarity of a romantic partner, explains the reduced stress response. Cortisol, released by the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, is a hormone secreted diurnally, outside of acute stress. Thus, one's cortisol level is telling, as those with chronic stress display vast variations compared to typical diurnal cortisol patterns. People benefit from affectionate communication as it correlates with the reduction of stress levels, healthier interpersonal relationships (e.g., familial, romantic, friendship), and less mental health issues (Denes, 2017; Floyd & Ray, 2016).

Floyd et al., (2009) evaluated the effect of affectionate communication and the influence it had on cortisol and oxytocin levels. Cortisol and oxytocin levels were measured due to their association with stress-related emotions and cognitions. The authors asked 100 healthy adults to undergo a battery of stress-inducing behaviors, followed by an affectionate hand written letter to a loved one. The writing of affectionate letters seemed to benefit women in ways that it did not for men, as male cortisol levels increased though not at the same rate seen in females (Floyd et al., 2009). Though oxytocin has traditionally been researched as a stress response and generally in the context of physical touch, the results are not as straight forward as one would prefer (Floyd et al., 2009). Oxytocin did not result in a significant patterned response, for women or men when participating in the affectionate letter writing (Floyd et al., 2009). However, the intervention of affectionate letter writing did seem to be beneficial as a moderator for stress, at least for women (Floyd et al., 2009).

AET also identifies affectionate communication as a buffer against traumatic life events (e.g., divorce, death of loved one), physical ailments, and childhood stressors (Mansson et al.,

2017). For example, individuals who created an affectionate letter in which affection was expressed to someone they cared about had a faster cortisol recovery following a stress-inducing moment compared to others who only thought about someone whom they cared about (Denes et al., n.d.). This supports findings from previous research that affectionate communication moderates the interaction between an individual's stressor and the way in which the individual responds to it (Denes et al., n.d.).

Carroll et al., (2013) researched child abuse and the correlation to coronary artery risk development in young adulthood. The authors included 756 participants to measure the lingering impact of childhood stress. The authors utilized a comprehensive 18 biomarker measure to evaluate the level of risk across multiple systems of health in adulthood (Carroll et al., 2013). The authors also assessed the buffer of warmth, love and affection from a parental figure against the lingering results of child abuse. Findings reported that multisystem health risk were lower when higher amounts of parental warmth and affection during childhood were also self-reported. Affectionate engagements, interactions wherein affectionate communication was present, were associated with lower multisystem health risks, while low levels of affection, along with childhood abuse were correlated with high level of multisystem risk in adulthood (Carroll et al., 2013).

According to Floyd & Ray (2016) expressions of affection, which are fundamentally biological in nature, support the maintenance of long-term relationships as they increase the likelihood of reproduction and survival. The authors also submit that a person's trait affection level determines the comfort level for each individual in terms of affection given or received. (Floyd & Ray, 2016). A person may have a high tendency to give affection and a low tendency to receive affection, meaning he or she may find opportunities to give affection to loved ones,

family and friends, while not giving as much attention to receiving affection from others (Floyd, 2002). Affection, in and of itself, is rewarding to some, likely those with a trait high in giving affection. It is also worth mentioning that although some people have low trait affection, humans still need affection, an individual trait-level provides insight into how each person may best experience giving and receiving affection.

Social Learning Theory

SLT, also known as the Social Observational Theory, is characterized by learning social behavior on the basis of observation of others. According to Bandura observation is followed by imitation of behaviors that are modeled, notwithstanding the presence of a direct reinforcement (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Bandura's infamous Bobo Doll research provided groundbreaking insight into the process of learning by way of observation and imitation or mimicking. The experiment involved the physical and verbal aggression toward a bobo doll, an inflatable plastic toys, by adults observed by preschool-aged children. The children later carried out the same behavior of physical and verbal aggression on the bobo dolls when left to play. The study also gave insight into sex-typed behavior, conduct viewed as more appropriate for one gender as oppose to the other. For example, physical aggression was imitated at higher frequency with males than with females; which is consistent with aggression being associated with masculine typed behavior. However, the verbal aggression was expressed similarly in male and female cohorts; also highlighting that verbal aggression as less type-cast.

SLT expands on the principles of previous behavioral theories such as classical conditioning and operant conditioning. Social learning theorists also believe that behavior can be learned via personal consequences such as rewards and punishment (direct reinforcement), observation of consequences received by others (vicarious reinforcement), as well as associations

between two stimuli, one unconditioned and one conditioned. SLT differs from previous behavioral theories due to the emphasis placed on personal factors or cognitive factors, and the environmental factors related to behavioral factors and response. Bandura and Walters (1963) explored the concept of reciprocal determinism to explore the dynamic between all three elements. Reciprocal determinism refers to the interdependent relationship between a person's behavior, personal factors and environment.

According to Bandura, behavioral factors such as potential rewards and punishments, personal factors such as cognitive processes and memory, and situational factors such as social context and setting all working interdependently with one another (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Consider, for example, a middle school student being asked to skip class with his fellow students. The behavior is skipping a class and the related consequences. The personal factors refer to his beliefs and values about skipping class, as well as previous memories of similar actions. The situational factors relate to the value on the friends asking, and the reward structure for the behavior. In fact, Bandura presented a similar example related to his Bandura's Box experiment. A student dislikes school (cognitive), the student misbehaves in school (behavior) and the school administration activates protocols that limit the student's attendance at school (environment) (Kretchmar, 2018). Bandura's example highlights the triadic reciprocal causation of the relationship between one's behaviors, thoughts, and environment.

In a research study involving roughly 2,000 college students, researchers Simons et al., (2012) challenged the intergenerational transmission hypotheses regarding intimate partner violence (IPV) and the notion that growing up in a violent home increased the potential for an individual to later participate in a physically aggressive romantic relationship. In a later study, Powers et al., (2017) examined the applicability of the SLT to explain intimate partner violence

(IPV) victimization, also regarding the intergenerational transmission violence theory. The intergenerational transmission violence theory assumes that being a witness to (vicarious trauma) and/or personal (direct trauma) experiencer of household violence during childhood subsequently leads to intimate partner violence, either victimization or perpetrator. A strict interpretation of the SLT may lead one to conclude that if an individual is raised within a context of parental hostility in which IPV is observed, their risk for later involvement in a violent romantic relationship is heightened. However, after applying a meta-analysis on previous research using the intergenerational transmission hypothesis unveiled insignificant associations between violence of family origin and later IPV (Simons et al., 2012). Powers et al., (2017) results highlighted utility of the SLT to predict IPV, however the results were inconsistent as some measured SLT constructs produced insignificant association with IPV. The results only account for about 15% of the variance in IPV victimization by an individuals' current partner (Powers et al., 2017).

According to Straus and his colleagues, parents model behaviors to their offspring which influences how their offspring will treat the people they love (Straus & Gelles, 1990; Status & Smith, 1990). Thus, within the SLT framework, hostile parenting and interparental violence educates children that violence is a normal element within the context of intimate, loving relationships. Consequently, the child's probability to later be involved in a domestic abusive relationship, as either victim or perpetrator, increases.

Straus' (1990) posits that parental hostility within the context of negligence and rejection does not educate children on how to treat the people they love. More so, it may teach them how to treat the people they dislike allowing behaviors such as hitting and verbal abuse and viewing such behaviors as acceptable. However, if parental hostility is expressed within the relational

context of affection (warmth, love and support), the child is more susceptible to accept that

aggression is a normal element of intimate relationships. Straus (1990) suggests that parents that

consistently express hostility within a relational context of aggression do not model a loving

relationship. This theoretical perspective may suggest why the correlation between family

violence origin and later IPV has a modest relationship.

Karre (2015) examined 125 participants to investigate the correlation between an

emerging adult's romantic relationship quality and the parenting style used by their mother and

father as well as father's involvement based on attachment and the SLT. Her research challenges

the quality of romantic relationships during emerging adulthood as influenced by the quality of

received parenting and father's global involvement. Karre's (2015) research supports Straus's

position that if aggressive behavior is experienced along with affectionate behavior the child runs

the risk of normalizing said behavior within future relational context. Karre's (2015) research

associated warmth, psychological control, praise and affection, time and talking, attentiveness

and school encouragement with the quality of a romantic relationship. This is significant as men

that received more warmth and global father involvement also perceived more relationship

support. Men were more prone to imitate the range of behaviors expressed to them during

childhood from their partners, though it is inconclusive as to the cause (e.g., fondness of model,

attachment) or when the behavior was learned (e.g., observational learning, latent learning)

(Karre, 2015). Effectively, Straus' (1990) and Floyd (2001) both concede that affection

expressed by the parent increases the child's likeness towards the parent, which increases the

likelihood that the child accepts the parent as a model to be imitated. According to AET, parents

communicate affectionately to their offspring because this form of communication increases the

likelihood of the children mimicking affectionate communication as adults, increasing their potential for survival and procreation (Floyd, 2001).

Meuwly & Schoebi (2017) provided a review of the most relevant theories to long-term committed relationships, as well as most relevant in guiding empirical research on relationship development and functioning. The risk regulation model, attachment theory, intimacy process model, interdependence theory, and SLT were used to frame relationships as a construct. Focusing on the SLT, the authors pose, that the evaluative basis on which partners in romantic relationships make behavioral decisions, consciously and often unconsciously, results from the accumulated experience of rewards and costs in the relationship (Meuwly & Schoebi, 2017). However, the authors also reference the individual's earlier relationships with parents or caregivers, and the pervasiveness in which those initial relationships influence future relationships (Meuwly & Schoebi, 2017).

Davis & Haynes's (2012) research speaks to that point as they investigated the relationship between men and the amount of affection they communicate to their romantic partner. The authors believed that the amount of affection men received from their mothers was a predictor of how men would communicate affection to their romantic partners grounded on the SLT. The authors' study also examined the effect of the absent father on the level of affection sons have in their romantic relationships (Davis & Hayes, 2012). American youth under 18 represent 57.7 million children and of those 17.2 million children live in a household led by a single woman, without a father present in the home (Davis & Hayes, 2012). Due to the familial dynamics, the authors evaluated two familial subsystems: the single-mother-son relationship as well as the intact-family-mother-son relationship.

Consequently, the SLT was used to frame the study, built on the belief that people learn from the imitation of others. However, according to the SLT if 'a' boy does not develop a strong identification with his mother, affectionate communicative behavior will not be modeled. This is linked to the findings that fathers tend to react in a strong negative manner when boys show socially perceived "feminine tendencies", and they tend to exert pressure for sex-appropriate behaviors in boys (Davis & Hayes, 2017). Sons that identify affection within the son-mother relationship are more likely to imitate the degree of affection in future relationships if the son-mother relationship was viewed as satisfactory by the child. Thus, it stands to reason that boys raised by mothers solely or boys who spent more socialization time with mothers would tend to be more affectionate than boys who grew up with fathers who applied social pressure upon them to conform with male stereotypic behaviors. Results indicated that the affection experienced within the initial child's relationship (e.g., mother, father or proximal caregiver) is a predictor of the affectionate communicative behavior expressed in future relationships, including romantic relationships (Davis & Hayes, 2012; Mansson et al., 2017).

Socializations of Affection

According to Kågesten et al., (2016) societies create gender stereotypes which guide what is considered masculine or feminine within a given culture. Young boys are socialized to be hardworking, tough, and emotionally restricted, while young women are socialized to be nurturing, warm and affectionate. At the risk of appearing weak or feminine and stay within the arbitrary standards of what it means to be men, young men avoid physical affection with other young men. However, affection is not reserved for a specific gender and should therefore be understood and applied to both genders, notwithstanding the type of relationship in which one is engaged. The capacity to experience affection is not gender specific. Although the primary role

of affection is to ensure behaviors that will continue the species, there is value in affection expressed within male to male interactions. Floyd & Morman (2003) argue that single men or men engaged in non-female relationships, which generally express more affection, would increase their life expectancy as male to male relationship affectionate expressions increased. This is not an attempt to change the gender norms or even disrupt social norms but to better understand men's' comprehension and utilization of affection; a human feature that is essential to our human experience and the achievement of optimal physical, mental and relational health (Denes et al., n.d.).

Curran & Yoshimura (2016) studied the potential for mothers' and children's perceptions of affection with the children's father to influence their perceptions of affectionate communication related to family subsystems and life satisfaction. Assessing 75 mother-child dyads the researchers wanted to understand if the experience of affectionate communication rendered from the father spilled over into the way other family members (e.g. mother, children) experience their individual relationships with father (Curran & Yoshimura, 2016). Their results indicated that children often generalize father's affectionate communication towards them, towards all other familial relationships (Curran & Yoshimura, 2016). For example, a child may consider that because father is always sweet and nice to me he treats mother the exact same way.

Taking a more direct approach, Floyd & Morman (2009) examined the relationship between the father-son dyad. The study was aimed at exploring the effects of affectionate communication, closeness, and satisfaction in men's relationships with their fathers and their sons. Previous research has documented the effects of father-son relationships and results indicate that a males' (e.g., boys and men) relationship with their father might be among the most influential and socially significant same-sex relationship they will form in their lives

(Beatty & Dobos, 1993; Berry, 1990). The study was comprised of 139 father-son dyads. The results indicated that men experienced more satisfaction, expressed increased nonverbal, verbal and through supportive affection with their sons than they experienced with their fathers.

Curran & Yoshimura (2016) results were similar, as family satisfaction and life satisfaction were predicted by how much affection one perceives in her/his immediate experiences with the father. The authors suspected a change in the culture of fatherhood, shifting from a traditional authoritarian emotionally detached approach towards one more nurturing and emotionally available (Floyd & Morman, 2009). Traditionally, boys and men have been socialized to communicate utilizing affectionate expressions in ways that differ from their female counterparts. For instance, when a boy is crying, he may be met with responses such as "quit crying" or "don't be a girl" (MacArthur & Shields, 2015). These message relay to the male that some emotional responses are inappropriate if expressed by boys and are socially feminine; though modern fathers are challenging many of those outdated perceptions of masculinity and fatherhood (MacArthur & Shields, 2015).

Considering the socialization of gender and the prescription of appropriate behaviors, it would not be inaccurate to say that we perform or "do gender". According to the research of Stamps (2018) masculinity and femininity today are not singular terms, nor binary for that matter but refer to a wide range of acceptable behaviors and communicative interactions within social networks. In other words, there is not an agreed upon modern archetype that epitomizes what a man is, thus men must be explored within multiple contexts, moods, social systems, era's and the like to gain an understanding of those men. For example, heterosexual, white American male masculinity identity may include hegemonic practices, patriarchy and control. This outlook differs largely when compared to homosexual white American males' masculinity, which may

embrace dominant, non-dominate practices, community, or none of the above. Due to the expanding views of masculinity, characteristics and qualities associated with men, men are now explored within a framework of inclusive masculinity, which allows concepts such as male to male affection to be explored through a wider lens (Stamps, 2018). Men, like women, desire to engage in fulfilling and emotionally satisfying relationships evident by displays of intimacy and self-disclosure amongst their male social networks. Gender research suggests that men have a baseline expectation of receiving social support within their social networks, especially outside of romantic relationships, from their close male friends (Feng & Xie 2016).

Although there have been tremendous strides to expand identities of male-hood, a theme resulting from the socialization of men is the capacity to be emotionally distant or the ability to hide emotions (De Boise & Hearn, 2017). Feminist theories coined a phrase which refers to the price individual men pay due to the collective social norms developed by the traditional approach to masculinity, cost of masculinity (Bridges, 2019). It is a phrase developed from feminist scholarship referring to a man's lack of affectionate and emotional experiences, due to his lack of critique towards the norms of maleness. Many researchers have noted how men's inability to discuss experiences of grief, suffering, loss and vulnerability, parallel to gender social norms, are the principal factor in depression, anxiety and other mental health issues going underreported (Holmes, 2015). Pease (2012) posited that emotions form a connection between psyche and subjectivity of the individual on one end, and the wider social order on the other. He noted that relationships with others are largely responsible for how people create meaning to their emotional experience and then their behavior. Affectionate communication becomes an expression of an initial emotional experience, thus encouraging further research towards men's emotional experience (Holmes, 2015).

Affectionate Communication

According to the AET, affection is communicated three ways: verbal affection, non-verbal affection, and expressions of support. Verbal affection refers to direct statements that convey intimacy, love, an appreciation for the relationship, and liking. Floyd & Custer (2020) evaluated the written as well as oral expressions of affectionate communication and identified psychophysiological benefits for both participating communicators. The non-verbal affection refers to direct behaviors that transmit messages of affection within the relational context in which they are displayed (Floyd & Custer, 2020). For example, many western societies use hand holding, kissing, and close physical proximity to convey affectionate communication. Non-verbal affectionate communication has been associated with reduced stress related effects and an increase in relational commitment and satisfaction (Floyd & Custer, 2020). The results support previous research that nonverbal affectionate communication yields advantages in psychological and physiological domains (Floyd & Ray, 2016). Expressions of support, which are behaviors intended to provide tangible or emotional aid to another person. The expressions of support require the greatest effort on the part of the giver of affection coupled with the highest probability to be misunderstood by the receiver of affection (Floyd & Custer, 2020). For instance, a wife may choose to help with husbands' chores by cutting the grass, but her husband may fail to identify the assistance (e.g. grass cut) or attribute the behavior to another cause (e.g. her impatience, his incompetence).

Affectionate communication is intended to engender feelings of warmth and love, and at times, even validation. Floyd (2014) investigated the relational function of empathic listening and compared the similarities between empathic listening and affectionate communication. The author posits that the characteristics and properties of active listening such as eye contact,

welcoming posture, responding sensitively and accurate paraphrasing of feelings and emotions are also present during affectionate communication. Thus, identifying the relationship between empathetic listening and affectionate communication seems to lie in the function of empathetic listening as a form of affectionate communication (Floyd, 2014). Furthermore, according to AET one's willingness and ability to listen empathically within interpersonal relationships is associated with relational satisfaction, intimacy, closeness, and commitment, whereas the lack of willingness or ability to listen empathically would be associated with relationship deterioration (Floyd, 2014).

The interpersonal acceptance and rejection theory (IPARTheory) was utilized by Denes et al., (2017) as a framework to explore previous research on affectionate communication and implications for comprehending interpersonal rejection and acceptance. The IPARTheory is an evidence-based theory of socialization and lifespan development intended to predict and explain major consequences and other correlates of interpersonal acceptance and rejection globally. The authors applied the IPARTheory in conjunction with the AET to explore affectionate communication. However, the IPARTheory focuses on cross-cultural components such as economics, politics, and environment whereas AET focuses on bio-evolutionary factors, which supersede cross-cultural and environmental elements. By applying both theoretical perspectives, researchers were able to measure affection across cultures as it relates to the experience of acceptance and rejection. Their findings suggested that people not only experience affection by receiving affection from another (e.g., parent, spouse, offspring) but also experience affection from giving affection as well. Furthermore, the feeling of acceptance or rejection is not solely based on the affectionate communication of others. This may explain why some individuals stay in relationships in which they receive low levels of affection. Some individuals receive

acceptance by being the primary source of affection within the relationship; affection becomes in and of itself beneficial to the individual expressing it (Denes et al., 2017).

Affectionate communication is generally considered to be a positive relational contribution, however, there are risks. Trask et al., (2019) evaluated deceptive messages of affection across three relational context including romantic relationships, cross-sex friendships, and friends with benefits relationships. Deceptive messages of affection were operationally defined as expressions of affection that are incongruent with an individual's affectionate feelings or fondness and caring toward another individual. The researchers used multiple group analysis using structural equation modeling on 526 college student respondents. There were two identified versions of deceptive affection: withholding affection and deceptive affectionate messages. Withholding affection refers to suppressed affectionate feelings, such as not saying "I care about you" although it is felt. Deceptive messages of affection refer to overt expressions of affection that are not consistent with the sources' internal feelings, an intensified affectionate expression. The results identified more deceptive affection or intensified affection amongst the friends with benefits relationships, than romantic relationships and cross sex-friendships.

Floyd's (2006) findings highlighted the notion that individuals' expressing insincere verbal affection reported initiating sexual activity as the most common reasons as to why they engaged in deceptive messages of affection. Thus, friends with benefits may engage in more deceptive messages because they do so, in an effort to engage sexually. Romantic relationships were identified as involving intensified affection and withheld affection, and both were positively related to relational health. The research indicated that deceptive messages are not inherently unhealthy for the relationship. Perhaps, intensified affection is beneficial because individuals are more apt to intensify positive feelings for the good of the relationship. Withheld

affection was also positively correlated with romantic relationships, and this may be due to the withholding of negative feelings about the partner or the relationship. Withholding negative affection provides the opportunity for romantic partners to perceive the relationship through their lived reality of positive affectionate interactions.

Aloia & Brecht (2017) conducted a study concerned with the extent to which affectionate communication is associated with psychological well-being and the influence of emotional intelligence. According to Aloia & Brecht, emotional intelligence is an index of an individual's ability to decode and encode emotions. Furthermore, they believe that the skill of deciphering emotional states impacts the way one experiences the giving and receiving of affection (Hesse & Floyd, 2008). Previous research has highlighted the relative advantages that accrue to highly affectionate communicators. For example, expressions of affectionate communication have been correlated with lower depressive episodes, and healthier cortisol levels, while receiving affectionate communication has been correlated with emotional well-being and physical health improvements (Hesse & Floyd, 2008). Psychological well-being was measured on five indicators consisting of happiness, mental health, stress, self-esteem and depression (Aloia & Brecht, 2017). Results indicated that emotional intelligence was positively associated with both received and given affection (Aloia & Brecht, 2017). This suggests that the variance in an individual's psychological well-being, at least to a degree, can be accounted for by evaluating one's emotional intelligence which influences the ability to understand one's own and others' emotional experiences (Aloia & Brecht, 2017).

Hesse & Rauscher (2019) explored the relationship between doctor and patient to study the influence affectionate communication had on patient perception and patient outcomes. Murray & McCrone (2015) stated that patient-centered communication research has repeatedly

found that the patient's perception of their physician is, in part, predicated on the communication the patients received from their physician. Utilizing an AET framework, researchers found a positive relationship between reception of affectionate communication and biopsychosocial wellness as long as the received affectionate communication occurs within one's overall range of optimal tolerance (Floyd, 2006; Hesse & Rauscher, 2019). Furthermore, AET also predicts that affection deprived individuals experience affection that falls short of their minimal expectations, resulting in feelings of poor health and less security.

Hesse & Mikkelson (2017) as well as Floyd (2014) found evidence that affection deprivation was correlated with insecure attachment, loneliness, sleep deprivation, chronic pain, and negatively influences relationship satisfaction, closeness, and commitment. However, previous research supported a positive correlation with outcomes such as patient adherence, patient satisfaction, patient compliance as well as the patients' openness to talk when doctors apply affectionate communication such as using messages of confirmation, showing emotional support, concern, care and kindness (Baker & Watson, 2015; Rathert et al., 2013).

Floyd (2005) identified affectionate communication as language that conveyed messages of care, warmth and showing emotional support to another. However, Hesse & Rauscher (2019) found that affection deprivation was negatively correlated with all study outcomes except for patient's openness to talk. The findings suggest that patients have an innate desire to receive affection from their healthcare provider during a health care engagement (Hesse & Rauscher, 2019). Their research also concluded that affectionate communication was not positively associated with a wide set of patient perceptions and outcomes within the realm of healthcare (Hesse & Rauscher, 2019). This finding suggests that although people need affectionate communication innately across cultural and social context, the doctor-patient relationship, like

other relational dynamics, must provide the patient the appropriate amount of affection, related to the individuals' trait affection level (Hesse & Rauscher, 2019).

<div align="center">**Affection Deprivation**</div>

There is robust literature on the benefits of affection which include higher self-esteem, better academic performances, and reduced stress. According to the AET, all people have a fundamental need to receive and give affection; however, if these needs are not met negative outcomes are more likely to ensue, such as developmental delays, drug abuse and violence (Floyd, 2001). Affection deprivation is defined as a state or trait characterizing the receipt of less affectionate communication than one wishes to receive. Affection deprivation is related to the individual's expectation of affection not being met, which is based on each individual's personal trait affection level. An individual's trait affection level is measured by the Trait Affection Scale (TAS), an instrument created by Dr. Floyd to identify one's affectionate scale for giving score (TAS-G) and affectionate scale for receiving score (TAS-R). It should also be mentioned that excessive affectionate communication, expressions of communication that exceed an individual's trait level, are equally unhealthy (Floyd, 2014). The topic of excessive affectionate communication will be discussed in the limitations section as it is not a focus of the study.

Floyd (2014) evaluated the concept of affection deprivation by surveying 509 adults from all 50 states, Puerto Rico, District of Columbia along with 16 other countries. Floyd (2014) reported deprivation of affectionate touch positively linked to alexithymia, stress, insecure attachment, depression, loneliness, and diagnosed mood disorders and secondary immune disorders. Affection deprivation was negatively associated with social support, happiness, attachment security, relationship satisfaction and with general health. Men, in the survey, experienced more affection deprivation than their gender counterparts.

Floyd (2016) later conducted a total of three studies which included 1368 adult participants. The findings identified a correlation between affection deprivation and experiences of sleep disturbances including duration, latency, and quality, long-term physical pain as well as daytime dysfunction. Other affection deprivation research identified a variety of associated social indices such as an inverse relationship between affection deprivation and relationship satisfaction and closeness; this also included an inverse relationship between affection deprivation and commitment (Hesse & Floyd, 2008).

Hesse (2015) researched affection deprivation and found it inversely associated with family satisfaction and directly related to loneliness, attachment, anxiety, and depression. Hesse (2015) hypothesized that affectionately deprived people may use pornography to cope with the lack of affection, the results supported the hypothesis as affection deprivation was positively correlated with the frequency of use of pornography. In a separate study, Hesse and Mikkelson (in press) explored the connection between relational quality and affection deprivation in individuals currently in romantic relationships. The authors found that affection deprivation was negatively associated with closeness and relationship satisfaction.

According to Floyd (2014), men experience affection deprivation at higher frequencies than women. Feelings of care and compassion are associated with affectionate communication and affectionate behavior; affection deprivation, on the other hand has been correlated with deficits in mental and physical health, as well as associated with insecure patterns of interpersonal attachment (Hesse & Floyd, 2008). Floyd et al., (2005) suggested that affectionate expressions result in individual and relational benefits, including increased happiness and self-esteem, decreased fear of intimacy, susceptibility to depression, and higher relationship

satisfaction. The authors propose that the capacity to receive and give affection is inherent to the human experience, due to the biological operations associated with affection (Floyd et al., 2005).

Affectionate people experience healthier outcomes to acute and chronic stress, than those experienced from persons less prone to expressing affection (Floyd & Ray, 2016). Thus, affectionate deprived populations experience higher levels of insecure attachment, chronic pain, social and relational problems, and elevated stress, and exacerbated depression (Floyd & Ray, 2016). Theodore Robles et al., (2016) studied the leukocytes telomere length (LTL) of children and determined longer LTL's were positively correlated with lifespan and shorter LTL's were correlated with age related disease. After observation, Robles et al., (2016) discovered that the lack of affection correlated to shorter LTL's and stress levels.

Gender and Affection

Research correlates biological benefits and relational advantages for both men and women engaged in affectionate communicative relationship (Floyd et al., 2005). Premenopausal women that received more hugs from their romantic male partners displayed lower baseline blood pressure, and higher oxytocin. In addition, men that receive more affection within romantic partnerships have increased relational satisfaction and commitment. Although, according to Floyd (1997), affection is less present in relationships between men that do not involve a woman. Floyd and Ray (2006) not only highlight the benefits of interpersonal relationship between men and women garnered from the utility of affection, but also place emphasis on the individual's benefits as it relates to personal physical, mental and emotional health. In other words, men that find themselves without a romantic relationship with a woman increase the risk of affection deprivation along with the risk of losing the associated mental and physical benefits associated with being in a romantic relationship with a woman.

AET does not support a sex-differentiated difference in affectionate communication, though through the lens of the SLT gender norms are observed and carried out, maintaining social standards. Females are generally given more opportunities in public and privates institutions (e.g., family, school, community park) to express a wider range of emotional expressions that may be viewed as inappropriate from a male (Floyd, 2014). Male to male relationships are the least affectionate when compared to any other relationship dynamic involving a female (e.g., male to female, female to female). Thus, men are socialized into not being as authentically emotionally expressive, avoiding behaviors deemed unmanly or feminine.

According to Floyd (2014), females operate within the most affectionate fulfilling relationships as they express high levels of affection towards their children, romantic partners and female friends. For example, during times of trauma and loss, women often express affectionate communication towards the sufferer. If a woman loses a parent or child, her female friend may come over to hug and embrace her, her friend may also disrobe her and bathe her, and may even sleep in the same bed with her to comfort her during the loss. These behaviors, which are customary within many women cohorts would be inconsistent with the way in which men are socialized to do gender roles in America.

Although married people, in general, have better physical healthy, live longer and enjoy better mental health than non-married people, there are benefits received by married men that are not experienced by married women nor unmarried men (Jonnon et al., 2020). For example, the age-adjusted death rates for married men were the lowest of all marital status groups (e.g., single, widowed, divorced) as well as all nonblack groups (e.g., White, Asian, Hispanic); (Curtin & Tejada-Vera, 2019; Raley et al., 2015). The daily affection provided by marriage nourishes the male's psychological and physical health domains; married men are more likely to exercise and

have lower rates of depression than their single counterparts (Floyd, 2014; Yoo et al., 2014). This is significant as Black men are less likely to marry than any other demographic outside of Black women (Pew Research Center, 2014). The infrequent expressions of affection between platonic male friends is increasingly significant to the single man who lacks a significant relationship with a woman wherein he could receive and express affection in a health manner.

Although prison is one of the institutions within which affection would seem to be inactive or impractical, there is literature that supports that it can be a setting in which affectionate communication can be observed. According to AET, affection is an evolutionary drive which supports long term survival through interpersonal relationships. The authors Laws & Lieber (2020) investigated if "care" operated inside of prison establishments. "Care" was identified as affectionate communication, consistent with previous research (Floyd, 2014; Laws & Lieber, 2020; Murray & McCrone, 2015). Laws and Lieber's (2020) study included 43 total prisoners from two different prisons using a semi-ethnographic approach. The authors found that care is an essential variable of prison life which can be characterized by a wide range of behaviors including parental roles, information sharing, close physical bonds, and intellectual expertise (Laws & Lieber, 2020).

Other research has placed an emphasis on positive prison peer engagement being correlated with strong feelings of safety, well-being, and autonomy (Van der Laan & Eichelsheim, 2013). Male peer relationships reduced prisoner distress, and interactions with like-minded people allowed some to avoid negative influences (Cesaroni & Peterson-Badali, 2010, Kerley & Copes, 2008). Their research highlights that even in settings typically viewed as inappropriate for affection, affection functions as a necessary ingredient for long term survival and serves the purpose of relationship management and maintenance.

Kennedy et al., (2020) researched the beliefs of affection, masculinity, and gay teammates of football players. Kennedy and colleagues (2020) applied a consensual qualitative research approach to explore the experience of 10 ex-high school male football players with an average age of 24. It is worth mentioning that all ten identified as straight (sexual orientation) men, and nine of the ten identified as white, while one self-identified as biracial (Kennedy et al., 2020). The reality that boys are conditioned to be non-physically affectionate towards one another is socially accepted, as are the few occurrences and settings that allow young boys to show this very form of affection (Kennedy et al., 2020). For example, men console one another often at funerals and in times of loss. Men also hug, chest bump and even slap each other on the rear end during sporting events. These instances highlight the dilemma for men as it relates to the prevalence of homophobic views paradoxically coupled with physical affection between men, especially amongst male athletes (Kennedy et al., 2020). Their results identified five thematic domains: physical affection towards me, views on man-on-man affection, coaches taught me what it means to be a man, football taught me what it means to be a man, and attitudes towards gay men (Kennedy et al., 2020).

The results provided insight into the young men's attitudes towards affection as well as influential entities that impacted their socialization. For instance, respondents reported that past coaches influenced their perspectives on masculinity, evident in their report of coaches "what a man is" lessons. The same was true when regarding the sport of football itself, generally referring to the concepts of hard work, tough minded and physical performance. Participants also acknowledged that football welcomed a broader range of affectionate behavior between men; however, each respondent also reported reservation regarding physical affection towards men and believed the acts to be only conditionally acceptable (Kennedy et al., 2020).

Black Men and Friendship

Social scientists have long discovered the link between friendship, health and longer living (Grief, 2009). The capacity to not only establish but sustain friendship is of the most significant domains of human engagement associated with positive outcomes such as coping efficacy, improved mental and physical health, and improved self-esteem (Mattis et al., 2001). However, although research has highlighted these findings such as the benefits of friendship on mental health and physical health (DeVries, 2018; Fitzsimons et al., 2015,), little research has been given to the experience of Black men within a friendship with another Black man, without conjoining race relation (Joseph-Salisbury, 2018; Thelamour et al., 2019; Rogers et al., 2017). For example, Jackson & Hui (2017) investigated the need for Black male bonding at a predominantly White university as prior research suggests that Black male pairs are a result of Black student's attempt to negate the uneasiness of racial isolation. Their findings highlighted that Black male students desired emotional and social connections with others, as well as wanted to associate with successful Black male peers (Jackson & Hui, 2017). However, much of the literature focused on Black men's social behavior has generally been pathologizing, including homosexuality, mental health and criminality (Han, 2017; Ramos, 2018; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016,). Subsequently, there is little known concerning the variables that impact normative friendship construction among Black men.

One of the most frequently cited studies addressing Black men and friendship was conducted by Mattis et al. (2001). Mattis and fellow researchers (2001) interviewed a sample of 171 Black men ranging from age 17-79 based on the constructs of religiosity, spirituality, affective sharing, and advice exchange. The researchers were interested in the level of perceived support Black men experienced from their Black male and female friendships related to the

aforementioned predictors (Mattis et al., 2001). The findings revealed that younger Black men between the ages of 17-34 shared feelings and exchanged advice with their male and female friends more than older Black men between the ages of 35-79. These findings may indicate that although Black men continue to be socialized into traditional roles of masculinity, younger men are provided more access to a wider range of accepted male behavior than men before (Mattis et al., 2001). By using a multivariate analysis, controlling for age, education, income, subjective religiosity and affective sharing, subjective spiritualty directly impacted Black men's perception of the support received from their male friends (Mattis et al., 2001). Thus, the results identify spirituality as a significant variable within the Black man's same sex friendship. Mattis and colleagues (2001) posits that as spirituality places emphasis on self-awareness, interdependence, sacredness and intimacy, men may benefit as it counters social messages that encourage men to remain affectionately distant from their male friends.

Black Men and Affection

Hurt et al., (2017) studied married Black sons' observations of their fathers' teachings about husband-hood. About a third of Black men are married, which is less than Asians 58%, Whites 53%, and Hispanics 44%. Previous research highlighted the benefits and advantages men receive due to marriage including longer health, improved health, and less stress (Feld & Meyer, 2018). However, due to the low number of married Black men, it seems that many Black men are not receiving the benefits garnered through marriage relationships. Hurt et al., (2017) interviewed 52 middle-class Black men who participated in the pathways to marriage project in 2010. Their findings supported developmental pathways and family processes linked to modeling husband-hood, managing conflict, protecting, and providing, demonstrating trust and commitment, displaying teamwork and partnership, and showing love and affection. Focusing on

showing love and affection, Black male married interviewees recalled memories of dad kissing mother every time he left the home. Some recalled playing with toys and opening the doors as if to mimic courtship behavior. These Black sons identify their father's engagements with women or listening to the absence of affection experienced by others as sources of information. The sons noted how their fathers taught them affection.

Summary

AET along with the SLT provided the theoretical groundwork for this study. As evident in the literature review, there is a substantive gap in the research concerned with the expressions of affection, affectionate communication, affection deprivation and trait affection related to the experience of Black men. Previous research has predominantly focused on heterosexual white men and a few other sub populations (e.g., white women, LGBT community and relationships between parent/grandparent and child); (Fitzsimons, 2015, Hesse & Floyd, 2008). This research was intended to better understand the expressions of affection between Black male friends as well as understand the experience of affection between Black male friends within a platonic relationship. How are Black male friends communicating affection between one another? Do Black male friends meet one another's affectionate communicative needs? These are the questions this research sought to better comprehend by interviewing Black male friends and hearing about their lived experience in their own words.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction to the Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research methodology for this study. A phenomenological approach was used within a qualitative design study exploring expressions of affection between Black male friends. This qualitative approach provided me with the opportunity to obtain an in-depth understanding of Black men's experience within friendships and how the participants perceived the role of affection within these friendships. A phenomenological approach allowed Black men to define affection in their own words as they experienced it within their male friendships. The applicability of phenomenological methodology is explained in detail in this chapter. The research rationale, role of the researcher, participant selection logic, instrumentation, recruitment and data collection, data analysis, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures are also explained in depth in this chapter.

Research Design

This research study was conducted to better understand expressions of affection between Black men within friendships. The qualitative research approach was applied in order to best address the research questions. Qualitative research is a research method in which study participants are asked to convey their lived experience in their own words as they understand these experiences. Qualitative research allowed me to gain a more detailed and richer account of the phenomenon that was the basis for this study. The research approach provided in-depth data on the subject matter, specifically related to the lived experience of Black men in friendship with other Black men. The qualitative approach, applied systemically, involved collecting data directly from Black men and reviewing the data for patterns and themes regarding the phenomena of Black men expressing affection toward one another.

Role of Researcher

For the purposes of this study, my role as the researcher included the design of the study, the recruitment of study participants, the collection of data via interviews, the review of incoming data, and the report of study findings. It should be noted that no participant had a previous direct relationship with me that represented a conflict of interests such as familial, professional, or any other dual relationships that may have increased the potential for bias within the study. I was responsible not only for conducting the interview (asking questions), but also responsible for note taking as well as recording the interview. I was responsible for recruiting participants for the study as well as locating a suitable setting to carry out the interview.

Methodology

A phenomenological approach was used within this study. Edmund Husserl, a philosopher, was the developer of phenomenological ideas, though the approach has had multiple contributors over its evolution including Sartre, Schutz, Moustakas, Heidegger, and de Beauvior (Vance, 2019). Phenomenology is foundationally a philosophical strategy used to collect, process, and interpret information from others in the real world with an emphasis on the language used and its intended meaning (Vance, 2019). According to Moustakas (1994), the process of investigating phenomena includes epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. Epoche refers to a suspension of judgment as it relates to research. More specifically, Moustakas explained it as a conscious process of identification and subsequent quarantine of naturally occurring thought patterns. Some researchers use the technique of bracketing to address the process; bracketing is a process in which researchers note their own beliefs, values, feelings, and experiences associated with the study. This is done in order to

diminish the impact of preconceived outlooks and tainted perceptions toward the population being explored.

The phenomenological reduction process is associated with the epoche process as the researcher becomes the first informant to contribute to the research (e.g., bracketing). During phenomenological reduction, the identification of themes and units of meaning are the major tasks, as the stage should result in a textual description of the researched phenomena. Horizontalization is one way to address thematic labeling; this process involves assigning value to each statement, thus identifying clusters of themes (Moustakas, 1994). Next, imaginative variation is the process of exploring the textual description (the what) to gain a structural depiction (the how). This is a procedure wherein the researcher's intuition and imagination are used to reflect on the themes associated with the experience. Synthetization, the process of conjoining the textual and structural descriptions to form the essence of the experience, is the next step in the process. After synthetization, the process is thoroughly repeated until saturation. In qualitative research, saturation refers to the lack of new developed themes, meaning the researcher does not observe any novel patterns in the data.

According to Schultz (1964), the social world has a particular meaning and relevance structure for the human being living, thinking, and acting therein. Schultz proclaimed that people have preselected and preinterpreted this world by a series of commonsense constructs that determine their behavior, define the goal of their actions, and the means available for them, which helps them find their bearings in their natural and socio-cultural environment and to come to terms with it. Alfred Schultz believed that phenomenology is based on two concepts: first-order constructs and second-order constructs (vom Lehn & Hitzler, 2015).

According to Schultz, first-order constructs refer to the individuals themselves, not the concept that researchers would like to explore (Gros, 2017). First-order construction involves identifying individuals' natural attitudes toward their lived experiences in the real world. This allows researchers to develop what phenomenologists call *meaning structure*. Meaning structure refers to the words used by the participant and the words and phrases that they relate to, which are associated with other meanings. In other words, the language used does not have meaning because of the formal definitions of the words used, but its meaning is garnered through the cultural and regional coding of language. Schulz (1967) posed that the nature of meaning is reflexive as people make sense of today's experience by reflecting upon yesterday's. This process of looking back allows the social actor to look forward to anticipate future events, project them in terms of their typical characteristics, and ultimately plan for their occurrence; experiences that are never reflected upon remain prephenomenal (Schultz, 1967, p. 70).

According to Schultz, the practice of phenomenology operates with people being identified as the first-order constructs and the thought objects that they create as second-order constructs; that makes them constructs (second-order) of constructs (first-order) created as it relates to their lived experiences (Gros, 2017). For example, if a researcher operationally defines affection to be related with behaviors that emit care, warmth, and love but interview participants socially relate affection with behaviors such as "tough love" and domestic violence, the researcher may need to allow the participants' definition to guide the study, as it may lend thematic data. The phenomenological approach allows the respondents to communicate their reality as experienced by them. This systemic approach is common in qualitative methodology.

Schultz's analysis of Max Weber's approach to the science of sociology coupled with Edmund Husserl's position that science should be involved with the "life-world" of people

allows phenomenology-based research to explore many other real-world experiences in various populations in the fields of sociology and psychology (vom Lehn & Hitzler, 2015). This is not to be confused with ethnographic studies, commonly used by anthropologists, which to involve an effort to better understand the experience of the collective culture. Phenomenological studies explore the life-world of the individual; such studies might involve research on the life-world of body builders, do-it-yourself workers, DJ in the techno scene, and so forth.

According to Schultz, the approach to phenomenological research was missing a practical element, as defined by Husserl; however, Schultz later developed phenomenological psychology the psychological investigation of a person's subjective experience through concepts of intersubjectivity, subjectivity, and objectivity (Gros, 2017). Intersubjectivity refers to the collective psychological experience between people. Sometimes known as common sense, intersubjectivity identifies the shared subjective experience of a cohort. This differs from the subjective experience, which merely refers to the lived experience of one person, or objectivity, which refers to observable data gathering leading to measurable findings. After interviewing each participant and gaining information about their experience (subjectivity), themes will emerge in which common experiences are identified (intersubjectivity), followed by a funneling process intended to get a more comprehensive understanding of the topic, while a nonbiased product is the goal of qualitative research (objectivity).

It is worth noting that Shultz, along with other champions of phenomenological research, including Moustakas, contended that researching phenomena does not have a standard process because of the way qualitative data are gathered. The researcher plays an increased role in participation in the study (e.g., probing, open-ended and closed-questions), which heightens the researcher's influence over the study as the data given from the interviewee are directly

correlated with information deemed vital to the interviewer. Some might view the role of the researcher as more of a participant-observer in contradistinction to the role of the researcher in a quantitative methods study design.

<h3 align="center">Participant Selection Logic</h3>

The sample for this study was recruited among males who self-identify as Black and have a friendship with another Black male. Inclusion in this study required that both Black male friends within a dyad were available to be interviewed individually. If a Black man stated that he had a Black male friend who was not interested or available to be interviewed, the original interview was not analyzed until one friend was verified. Both male friends were interviewed (separately) to ensure the validity of two Black male friends as well as provide the opportunity to identify common themes within the relationship. Due to snowball sampling, there was potential for all 10 participants to be friends, although this was unlikely. *Black man* was also operationally defined as applying to those men who make up the diaspora of African people in America. Terms such as *African American, Afro-American, Black people*, and *Black American* were all accepted terms to qualify for the study. The rationale for the term *Black men* including men from the African diaspora was that Black is a race, defined by phenotypical features.

Another criterion for participation selection involved length of Black male friendship. Each friendship dyad had been established for a minimum length of 1 year. The rationale for this condition was to avoid newly formed friendships in which individuals might not have had the opportunity to formulate and identify affectionate communicative norms within their union. The minimum requirement of 1 year for the duration of a friendship also filtered out relationships that might have been nonreciprocal in status. One individual might view another person as a friend, but that perception might not be reciprocated; one individual might perceive the other person in

the dyad as an associate or "close colleague." Both participants identified as being within a friendship with another Black man.

Lastly, the selected participants were platonic friends; this is in reference to men who might have dual relationships such as friends and lovers. Due to the constructs studied, such as friendships, affection, and male relationships, it was imperative to identify friend relationships that were strictly platonic in nature. This reduced the number of interviews conducted within male dyads wherein romantic ideas were intermingled with friendship dynamics. This was not meant to imply that Black homosexual men cannot have platonic friendships with other homo- or heterosexual Black men, nor does it imply that Black heterosexual men are not engaged in their own ulterior motives that are other than sexual in nature (e.g., befriending for money, social status, and access to power). This criterion merely allowed Black men to express their experience of affection within friendships with other Black men that were not influenced by romantic or sexual associations.

Instrumentation

The semi structured interview was the predominant instrument used for the purposes of data collection. The interview is one of the most common methods of data gathering used by researchers, particularly in social and behavioral sciences today. It should be noted, however, that the instrumentation of interviews varies in format and delivery, based on the objective of the research. There are three types of interview styles used in research: structured interviews, unstructured interviews, and semi structured interviews.

Structured interviews are interactions wherein the researcher asks predetermined questions based on hypothesized themes. Structured interviews are standardized as the researcher asks each interviewee the same questions, generally in the same order. Unstructured interviews

are interactions wherein the researcher asks questions based on the interviewee's responses without a predetermined standard of inquisition. Though unstructured interviews may begin with a question, the information garnered is highly dependent on the information that the interviewee is led to reveal, which is further explored by follow-up questions. Semi structured interviews are a combination of structured and unstructured interviews. Semi structured interviews involve a set of predetermined questions based on hypothesized themes, though previously unconsidered themes are also accounted for and followed up in more depth.

A semi structured interview approach allowed me to investigate the same themes during each interview while also leaving open space for personal interpretations and associations received from the sample of respondents. This approach also lent itself to questions varying among interviewed participants as questions developed and progressed upon the narrative of the participant interviewed; different participants and diverse friendships dynamics led to different lines of inquiry. The approach allowed me to be flexible and organized in the development of the interview format (de la Croix et al., 2018).

Recruitment, Participation and Data Collection Procedures

The Black men selected to participate in the study had to meet certain criteria. Each participant was over the age of 18 years and was the current friend of another Black man. The Black men selected also self-identified as males and their relationship with another Black man had lasted a year or longer. The social media platforms Facebook and Instagram were used to recruit Black men. Groups, specifically Black Male Therapists, and 100 Black Men of Houston were targeted for purposes of recruitment. For access to more participants outside the purposive sampling approach, selecting participants based on research criteria, snowball sampling was also employed. Snowball sampling is a recruitment technique wherein previous participants inform

other potential participants about the study and assist in recruitment. However, in this study, the previous participant either informed another Black male friend of his or referred a Black man who was a friend to another Black man. The study had with a total of 10 participants, although some participants might have had more than one Black male friend involved in the study due to the nature of snowball sampling.

Participants were informed of the purpose of the study prior to their interview. Participants received information about the way in which they were expected to contribute to the study as well as how their data were to be used. Participants were provided the material for informed consent for the interview and audiotaping of the interview. The participants were provided with information about their rights to withdraw from the study at any time or skip a question during the interview session. Each participant was given 10 dollars for their participation.

The participants were reminded of the confidentiality associated with the study and received options to access the study results upon completion of the research. The respondents were also provided a member check-in follow-up email to review their contribution to the research; this was done to make sure that the participants were comfortable with the way that they had been represented. The participants were also given my contact information, the university internal research board, and the research participant advocate.

The study participants were informed that each interview would last between 45 minutes and 1 hour. The data were gathered via the online platform Zoom. The participants were also audio recorded using a recording device. As participants responded to me, I also noted behavioral observations (e.g., changes in tone, long pauses, and shifts in mood were noted during the phone interview). I secured the data on a secure server until the completion of the study. The

participants were provided a consent form via email prior to the study that detailed the aforementioned. Participants were to respond to the emailed consent form with "I consent," verifying participation in the study. Respondents were also instructed to keep the consent form for their personal records. The participants were also provided with resources in order to address any psychological distress that might ensue as a result of their participation in the study, though it was not anticipated.

As the researcher, I maintain firsthand knowledge pertaining to the phenomenon being explored. Cultural competency pertaining to Black men and friendships might have benefited the study. However, it should also be noted that my personal experience also posed a potential limitation to the study. As potential biases are inherent to the nature of qualitative research my intimate familiarity with the population being explored highlighted the potential limitation to the study. Bracketing was a practice used in effort to address the aforementioned bias. Bracketing consists of the researchers acknowledging their own beliefs, experiences, and expectations before and during the research process (Baksh, 2018). The technique provided me an opportunity to moderate unacknowledged preconceptions associated with the research process (Baksh, 2018).

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). According to Smith and colleagues (2009), IPA is a qualitative approach concerned with a detailed examination of the human lived experience. The aim of IPA was to inspect the lived experience in a way that provided those subjected to research the space to express their experience in their own terms, as oppose to predetermined categories (Smith et al., 2009). The data analysis process began after I interviewed two male friends within a single dyad. The process of data coding started with me reading the responses from the participant's multiple

times, a minimum of three times each. This was done to identify common themes; such as phrases or words repeated throughout the interviews. Additionally, Creswell (2013) encouraged researchers to develop a list of significant statements to act as a foundation to understanding the phenomena being studied. The process allowed me to condense the sentences and paragraphs of the transcript. This was followed by another round of re-reading and re-listening to the audio recording of the interviews to gain more clarity and identify common ideas. The process was then conducted once more for a total of three complete cycles.

After the third cycle of condensing the data into a more themed and manageable material, I developed meaning units. According to Alase (2017), meaning units are a bunch of words or statements that relate to the same core essence or central meaning of the lived experiences of which the research participants are attempting to convey via their response. This phase allowed me to narrow down the respondent's information into a few words and phrases. This stage allows researchers to gain the core essence of the respondents lived experience in one or two words. A thematic narrative approach was employed to identify links between data sets. Descriptive coding analysis were used for the purposes of identifying themes between friendship dyads as well as between the respondents as a cohort.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

A qualitative research approach demands that researchers address issues of trustworthiness. Due to the nature of qualitative research, issues of trustworthiness are addressed by way of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Korstjens et al., 2018). Credibility demonstrates whether or not the research is accurate and indeed reflects participant responses. Techniques such as triangulation and member checks were used to establish

credibility. Triangulation refers to the process of asking different participants the same questions and collecting data from the words they use, their body language, tone, and observable mood shifts. Member checks refer to following back up with the interviewee to check gain clarity pertaining to specific responses, as well as allowing the participants to look over a summary of their analyzed interpretation in an effort to address anything misinterpreted or gaps in understanding.

Transferability

Transferability allows the findings from the study to be generalized to real-world situational context. It should be noted that researchers cannot, with complete certainty, prove that their interpretation of data and results are transferrable to the other contexts. However, researchers, addressing the issues of trustworthiness can establish that it is likely. According to Denscombe (1998) and Stake (1994) although research may be specific to a given population, the results come from a representative sample of a larger population, and thus transferability should not be immediately rejected. However, only with empirical research methods can confidence increase in the representative sample, increasing the generalizability of the findings. Nevertheless, the approach should be undertaken with caution as the limitations of the study are apparent in the narrowed contextual factors (e.g., 10 men make up the sample). Moreover, we assume that findings from a phenomenological approach are not generalizable. If we find patterns, it only applies to the study sample.

Dependability

The issue of dependability involves the reliability of the study. This means that if the research were repeated, with the same populations, and within the same contextual setting, using the same research approach, that similar results would ensue. It should be noted that the results

will differ and will not be exact due to the individual researcher being an intricate part in the interpretative analysis process. IPA provided techniques and strategies that increased the dependability of data collection and review. Using IPA, I documented the process of reading, re-reading, identifying preliminary themes, developing concepts from themes and summarizing thematic concepts (Rodham, Fox & Doran, 2015). Thorough documentation of the data collection and review processes provided future researchers with the relevant information necessary to replicate this study. I also noted his association with the population and topic being researched, his feelings associated, as well as the experience of interviewing research study participants; this is known as reflective appraisal. This was performed to address the limitation on the study that intimately involve my personal, education and theoretical understandings.

Confirmability

The final issue of trustworthiness is that of confirmability. Confirmability refers to the degree that the findings are a result of the research study participant responses and data, and not influenced by researcher bias (Korstjens et al., 2018). As the nature of qualitative research holds the researcher accountable for data analysis, there will always be an element of bias within research (Korstjens et al., 2018). However, previous researchers have also developed techniques to mitigate the impact of research bias. An audit trail was used throughout the research process and reported in Chapter 4. Audit trails are detailed accounts of the data collection process, data analysis (coding) as well as data interpretation. Audit trails are not to be confused with reflective appraisals which are carried out throughout the research process, as audit trails specifically refer to the data collecting and processing procedures of the study.

Ethical Procedures

The issue of ethics is of the utmost importance throughout the study. The informed consent form was sent to each potential participant via email to explain confidentiality, interview procedures, explain potential risks of participation, express possible benefits of participation, as well as the option for the potential participant to withdraw. The informed consent form was reviewed over to each respondent prior to the beginning of each interview. The participants met criterion to participate in the study, by being over the age of 18 as well as identifying as a Black male, in a friendship with another Black man for 1 year or longer. All data from the study were kept on a password protected computer. I was the only person with access to the computer, and it was secured in a locked room while not in use. The data was also backed up on a secure cloud server while the study was carried out, after which it was deleted from the cloud server, only remaining on the password protected computer for five years. The names of the respondents were also changed to a number, in order to de-identify the data in efforts to increase the security regarding confidentiality of participant information.

Summary

To explore the expressions of affection between Black male friends a qualitative approach was most suitable as it aligned with the study, including the research questions and methodology. This chapter also highlighted why a phenomenological approach was appropriate as there has been empirical precedent for such. This chapter also detailed the process in which data were collected, the instrument used for collecting data, participation selection, methodology, and how data was analyzed. Chapter 4 will detail the study including the setting wherein the data was gathered, data analysis, and provide results.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction to the Results

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the setting, demographics, and data collection relevant to this study. This also includes evidence of trustworthiness, understood in qualitative research as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Finally, this chapter identifies the themes established from analyzing the interview responses. The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

RQ1: What is the experience of Black men receiving and giving affection to other Black men within the context of friendships?

RQ2: Are the affectionate needs of Black men being met within their Black male friendships?

Setting

Initially, the study was to include face-to-face interviews to gain a better understanding of the phenomena of Black men expressing affection among their Black male friends. Face-to-face interviews were to include direct observations of somatic responses, mannerisms, and changes in affect and mood. However, due to the COVID-19 virus, a global pandemic, all interviews were completed using technology platforms to ensure the safety of the interviewees and interviewer. Interviewees were given the option of phone interviews, Zoom, Web-ex, and FaceTime, though all interviewees chose to have their interview conducted via Zoom platform. Having access to reliable technology was a barrier in the interview process. Technology limitations interfered with recording some potential candidates for this study and therefore precluded their participation. The global pandemic impacted macro and micro personal, vocational, and social functions. In

some cases, increased time constraints due to workload prevented potential interviewees from participating. In other cases, increased demands at home also limited the time allocated to participate in the study. The interview consisted of 13 questions (see Appendix I), which included follow-up questions to gain a richer understanding of what participants were saying. Due to the limitations of technology, which does not provide for the observation of body language and more, an increased focus on the respondents' tone, silence, laughter, and other verbal and behavioral cues was necessary to lend insight into the participants' responses. Appropriate questions were rephrased for purposes of accuracy and fit, and supportive questions were included to elicit more content. It should be noted that questions were not altered in purpose or nature from the original interview procedure.

Demographics

This section includes a review of participants in the study. Although the participants were initially recruited in Houston, Texas using social media platforms and snowball sampling, many of the participants were from other places, originally and currently. The global pandemic made recruiting more difficult, but the technological platforms opened recruitment for out-of-state persons to be interviewed, expanding the interviewee population to include Black men outside of the regional Texas south. Through these means, the study was able to reach saturation by interviewing a sufficient number of criteria-meeting Black men. Saturation is attained when continual interviews return the same or similar data, and no new themes can be identified in the data set. Saturation provides an indication of data validity when adequate data have been gathered and therefore no more interviews are needed. Questions were modified when appropriate to gain richer information relating to the lived experiences of the Black men being interviewed. For example, some respondents used terminology such as *partner*, *brother,* or *day-*

ones to identify friendship. Thus, questions such as "How are you and your Black male friends at apologizing?" were appropriately modified to engage with the participants from their understanding of the phenomenon. For example, "How are you and your Black male *day-one's* at apologizing?" models the types of modifications made. However, it should be mentioned that questions were not changed in intent or nature of scope outlined in the interview protocol.

In providing a review of the participants in the study, the demographics of interviewees are highlighted. Out of the 10 Black men interviewed five currently live in Houston; of that five, two were originally from Louisiana. Two of the Black men interviewed currently reside in Ohio. Two reside in Florida and one resides in California.

All participants self-identified as Black men. Two of the interviewees were born outside the country. One participant was born in Nigeria, and another was born in Haiti. The demographics also included annual income, level of education, age, and number of children. The oldest interviewee was #11 at 44 years old, while the youngest interviewee was #61 at 27 years old; the average age was 39 years old. Five of the 11 Black men interviewed obtained a bachelor's degree from a 4-year college or university. Two of the respondents had master's and another had a Juris Doctor degree. One of the interviewees obtained a high school diploma and learned a trade. The youngest interviewee received a medical degree (M.D.) in psychiatry.

The lowest annual income for an interviewee was $50,000 (#71), while the highest was $100,000 (Participants #11 and #61). The median income was $76,500 among the Black men interviewed. The Black men varied in the number of children they had or whether they had any children at all. Eight of the 10 men interviewed had at least one child, and two participants had yet to father children. Of the eight who have fathered children, three men had three children, three men had two children, and two men had one child each.

Table 1

Participant Demographics I

Participant	Age	Highest education	Annual income	Kids
#11	44	Master's	100<	3
#21	35	Master's	$75,000	2
#31	42	HS/Trade school	$60,000	3
#41	42	Bachelor's	$70,000	1
#51	41	Bachelor's	$65,000	2
#61	27	Medical Doctor	100<	0
#71	36	Bachelor's	$50,000	1
#81	38	Bachelor's	$85,000	2
#91	42	Juris Doctor	$75,000	0
#01	43	Bachelor's	$85,000	3

Table 2

Participant Demographics II

Participant	Ethnic identity	Birth place	Current location	# of years friends with Black man
#11	African American	Texas	Texas	14yrs.
#21	African American	California	Ohio	Life
#31	African American	California	Ohio	30yrs.
#41	African American	California	California	22yrs.
#51	Haitian American	Haiti	Florida	Life

#61	Nigerian American	Nigeria	Florida	College
#71	African American	Texas	Texas	20yrs.
#81	African American	Louisiana	Texas	20yrs.
#91	African American	Louisiana	Texas	10yrs.
#01	African American	Texas	Texas	Life

Data Collection

The Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the interview protocol used throughout the data gathering process. The interview guide functioned as a document that allowed me to modify questions when appropriate to gain greater clarity and understanding. The interview guide also allowed me to build upon previous interviews in order to enrich future investigation during the study. Each participant was sent a consent form via email and was instructed to reply with "I consent" if willing to participate. The consent forms were sent in accordance with IRB protocol and ethics. The form was intended to inform participants about the research study, the process of data gathering, confidentiality, expected questions, and participant rights, most notably the right to withdraw from the study whenever they chose, without retribution or penalty.

Information pertaining to the audio recording of each interview was within the consent form. Participants were also reminded that a follow-up interview would ensue for the purposes of gaining clarity and to allow the participant to review how they were interpreted. The follow-up interview was less formal and was not audio recorded. Participants were advised that all data collected would be coded, stored, and secured on a password protected computer. All 10 participant interviews were transcribed and assigned an alphanumeric code. Participants were

also given $10 for their participation in the study, a feature also highlighted in the given consent forms.

The interviews were intended to be a minimum of 45 minutes long. It is also typical in qualitative research for there to be considerable variation in interview time per participant. Some participants elaborated more than others and required follow-up questions; this was not necessary with other participants. The first interview was the shortest at 38 minutes, and the third interview was the longest at 1 hour and 10 minutes. The interview was open to participants spending more time if they were so inclined and available. The average length of the interviews was 46 minutes. The first interview manifested many complications including poor technology and sound quality, and the interviewee was in the car during the interview. Later interviews were held in a more controlled setting, decreasing the potential of other influences diverting the interviewees' attention and maintaining a more reliable internet connection. All interviews were audio recorded using the Zoom platform and the recordings were immediately saved, stored, and transcribed onto Otter. The initial recording was deleted, and the transcribed recording was coded and securely stored on a password-protected computer.

Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded for later review as well as transcribed to ensure that the integrity of the participants' experience was maintained. As outlined in Chapter 3, the five steps suggested by Moustakas (1994) were applied for data analysis. First, epoche, or suspension of judgement, was applied using bracketing. Bracketing is a way of identifying one's own personal experience as it relates to the phenomenological content being investigated. Second, phenomenological reduction was initiated. This process was approached using horizontalization, which refers to the valuing of each of the participants' phrases and words. The process is

intended to reduce the massive amount of data gathered to measurable units of data. Next, imaginative variation was begun. Imaginative variation involves the researcher considering the phenomenon being experienced from different perspectives by imaginatively altering various features of the phenomenon (Turley et al., 2016).

Although imaginative variation is a thought exercise, the operations are to be undergone as suggested by Husserl (Vance, 2019). For example, after reviewing the audio recording of an interview, I employed the three stages of imaginative variation. First, I interpreted what was heard as an actualized possibility. During the second stage, I interpreted what was heard as a mere possibility, intentionally forgetting or not holding onto my response in the here and now. The change in attitude was to align with the initial attitude of the epoche, which is refraining from conclusion. Observing what was heard as a possibility (mentally) provided space for future possibilities to be imagined and for other respondent's responses. The variation came into play when I imagined the of possibility in multiple variations such as no father/with father, no older male role models/access to male role models, and other demographic units (e.g., sex, height, skin tone). The third stage of imaginative variation occurs after a series of variants have been applied to a single response, bringing into focus a common core of properties, features, and structure (Turley et al., 2016). The fourth step applied in the data analysis process was synthesis. Synthesis refers to the conjoining of the textual description (respondents' narratives) with the structural description (common core features of response) to form the essence of experience. The final step is to repeat the first four steps; this is done to reach saturation. Saturation refers to the exhaustion of coding novel information related to the research.

Coding Procedures

The coding procedure was carried out using IPA, as explained in Chapter 3. Meaning units were assigned to key words and phrases reported by the participants. After meaning units were declared, codes were given to responses as a way of organizing data. Codes were later synthesized into themes based on consistencies in meaning and purpose. The themes were analyzed based on the research questions posed in Chapter 1:

RQ1: What is the experience of Black men receiving and giving affection to other Black men within the context of friendships?

RQ2: Are the affectionate needs of Black men being met within their Black male friendships?

The coding reflected ways in which Black men give and receive affection, including how Black men consider affection, masculinity's influence on how Black men express affection, preference for other language outside of "friend" and "affection" to denote a close male bond (existential language), and satisfaction regarding current level of affection received from Black male friends.

Participant #81 reported,

"I can sit on the phone with my partners all day and just let them run it, and of course I'm going to give my advice whether they like it or not, and it's the same whether I like it or not."

This was his response concerning what expressions of affection he personally valued. The response related to how he experienced giving and receiving affection from his Black male friends.

Participant #11 reported, "It's not the most comfortable thing to do" when responding concerning his comfort level with discussing affection with Black men. Later, he discussed how

the "brotherly" aspect of the friendship made uncomfortable conversations about affection

between his male friends more comforting. This response highlighted terms such as "brother"

and "brotherhood" and influence had on the phenomena.

Participant #31 stated, "No, kissing a person, hugging a person, or smiling at a person, I

don't think has a gender role," when addressing whether men and women should express

affection differently. This response highlighted how he considered masculinity in the content of

how he expressed affection toward his male friends.

Participant #71 stated, "When it comes down to friendship, we just say, look, that's my

brother." This statement revealed a preferred language that may be absent from previous research

but is present within the phenomenon and denotes a level of intimacy. According to Mattis et al.

(2001), spirituality was recognized as a significant feature within the friendship dynamic

engendering elements such as self-awareness, interdependence, sacredness, and intimacy. These

benefit men because they counter social messages that encourage men to remain affectionately

distant from their male friends (Mattis, 2001).

Participant #41 stated, "Just shut the whole thing down and just keep on pushing," when

questioned about his responses to Black male friends when his affectionate needs were not being

met. This response highlighted the affection deprivation experienced by Black males. The

participant responses identify the five themes discovered after coding of interviews. These codes

were then grouped into five themes: loyalty, brother/brotherhood, affectionate

communication/expression, affectionate development, and affection deprivation.

Table 3

Theme/Code/Frequency

Themes	Frequency participants	Code	Frequency of code
Loyalty	10	Loyalty	159
		Relational commitment	86
		Trust	36
Brother/Brotherhood	8	Brother/Brotherhood	112
		Family	73
		Sense of community	15
Affectionate development	8	Models of affection	89
		Childhood experiences	48
		Father's impact	39
Affectionate expression	7	Verbal-direct	53
		Nonverbal-direct	6
		Socially supportive behavior	67
Affectionate deprivation	7	Emotional avoidance	44
		Hurt feelings/disappointment	28
		Affectionate needs unmet	7

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Evidence of trustworthiness enables research to establish reliability and validity.

However, due to the nature of qualitative research the process comes with limitations not

typically associated with quantitative research. The objective of establishing trustworthiness is to

ensure that data has been analyzed and the methods have been disclosed in such a way that the

audience can determine credibility. There are four components in qualitative research which

include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Research may only assert something to be credible by presenting information with

accuracy and reliability. This was carried out in a few ways throughout the study and data

analysis process. Each interviewee was administered the same Walden IRB approved interview

guide, to ensure each respondent was asked the same question. Credibility was also established

by asking similar questions and concepts to my chair, personal friends and Black male (non-

participants) as well as reviewing literature on similar research. Consistent responses from

multiple participants and others reinforced the practice of triangulation. Triangulation supported

the process of establishing internal validity as the responses became analogous and even

undeviating (Creswell, 2012). For example, several participants responded that "brother" and

"brotherhood" reflects their experience as compared to friend. This outlook was also

corroborated with other Black men (non-participants) as well as my friends. Member checks

were also utilized as a means of garnering credibility (Creswell, 2012). Members checks were

administered via phone call, FaceTime, and emails. For the follow up interview, participants

were presented a summary of the analyzed interpretation and given the opportunity to add

clarity, elaborate, or amend their responses. No respondents chose to amend their original

responses after review.

Transferability

As mentioned in Chapter 3, qualitative research cannot provide generalizability towards

people or populations outside of the study (Denscombe, 1998; Stake, 1994). The age range of

participants interviewed was between 27 and 44; the educational status ranged from a high

school graduate with a trade to a medical doctor. Some of the participants were from southern

states such as Texas and Louisiana, while others were from other countries including Nigeria and

Haiti. The respondents also varied in annual income ranging from $50,000 to $100,000. Children

also varied, as some participants had no children and others fathering as many as three children.

However, the diversity amongst the Black male interviewees' that made up the sample size

represented a microcosm of the variety amongst the population.

Dependability

Using IPA the researcher documented the process of reading, re-reading, identifying

preliminary themes, developing concepts from themes, and summarizing thematic concepts

(Rodham et al., 2015). I outlined the five procedural steps in such that another researcher can

replicated the study and should yield similar results. I also described the procedure for

recruitment, data gathering, the interview process, and data storage. Recordings, transcribing,

journaling, member checking, and interviews were conducted for each participant by use of the

same procedures and methods. It should be noted that this research took place during COVID-19.

This is intended to highlight any differences in future similar research studies should consider the

influence of a global pandemic.

Confirmability

The result of dependability, transferability and credibility establishes confirmability.

Confirmability is intended to confirm whether my judgment was suspended and if I was

objective throughout the data collecting, data coding, and data analysis processes. Due to the

nature of qualitative research, I could have impacted the results both intentionally or

unintentionally, skewing the trustworthiness of results (Korstjens et al., 2018). This study also included an audit trail for purposes of exposing my biases and preconceived notions.

<div align="center">

Results

</div>

This study explored the expressions of affection between Black males within friendship. The research questions being addressed regarded the experience of Black men receiving and giving affection to other Black men within the context of friendships, and the affectionate needs of Black men being met within their Black male friendships. The five themes were a result of meaning units being coded, analyzed, and organized. The five themes were as follows: loyalty, brother/brotherhood, affectionate development, affectionate communication/expressions and affection deprivation.

Theme 1: Loyalty

The most common theme identified amongst all ten participants was loyalty as an expectation within their Black male friendships. Issitt (2020) defined loyalty as a complex behavioral and emotional state in which an individual or group displays adherence, allegiance, support, or devotion to another entity. In the case of the Black men interviewed, loyalty functioned more so as a practical phenomena evidenced by the maintained allegiance to another Black man, and it is also expected in return. The theme of loyalty lent insight into the phenomenon of Black male friendship as loyalty had not previously been investigated in the context of Black male friends. Though, according to the participants interviewed, loyalty is part of their lived experience. The coding frequency of loyalty highlighted the value Black men place on relational commitment, specifically in the context of friendship. Participant #51 shared this,

> The best parts of being a friend with a Black man, I would say for
>
> the most part is the loyalty. The loyalty. Most, if not all my friends

are Black and there's a certain level of loyalty we all have towards

each other that is second to none. …. you know loyalty to me is

showing constant support. I wouldn't say unwavering support…

because you know there's a limit to everything.

Of the ten interviews, six of the respondents shared specific ways in which they exercised loyalty. According to Issitt (2020) evolutionary psychologists reported loyalty to be a necessary evolutionary trait which helps regulate and maintain group cohesion. Interviewees expressed a commitment to friendships as well as an expectation that their friends also uphold a principle of devotion toward that relationship, sometimes stated as "loyalty" and sometimes explained with a response that met criterion for allegiance towards another. According to Floyd & Brandley (2019), affection may be expressed through socially supportive behaviors, which may not be observed as traditional affectionate expression; though in some communities and cultures they are the most frequent use of expression and are the most valued. Affectionate communication not only benefited relationship quality but also positively correlated with maintaining relationship as well. Participant #21 gave this response,

Once you realized that you've done something wrong…if this is a

person that you call your friend, a person that you been vulnerable

with, that you trust, ask forgiveness. There's no need to withhold

that forgiveness…We could talk candidly about the situation, about

how that made us feel or what that means for our life. And then we

can move past it because life is too short for you told that type of

grudge towards a brother.

Six of the ten participants interviewed perceived the absence of loyalty to be grounds for terminating the friendship. Previous research indicated that personal relationship are in jeopardy and increase risk of termination when loyalty is questioned (Brady, 2017). It is necessary to restate that the operation of loyalty, as experienced by Black male friends, is to preserve and maintain the relationship regardless of personal or social circumstances. Participant #81 had this to add,

> I just feel like everybody needs to be them and understand some of
> the words that they preach like friendship and loyalty. It's a real
> true meaning out here bro. You know what I'm saying, so if you're
> not fond of friends and loyalty, and all of that, stay your distance
> man because it got real people out here that really cherish friends.
> They really cherish loyalty, and that really cherish people in
> general.

Theme 2: Brother/Brotherhood

The second most endorsed theme found from the data was family. Eight of the ten men interviewed reported being friends with another black man as a familial relationship; something valued greater than "friendship". The relationship was depicted as one wherein affection and intimacy were present, elements which are often identified in familial relationships. The men interviewed used "brother", "brotherhood" and "family" to identify the closeness of the relationship. According to Riley (2021), fictive kin relationships amongst African American men were found to be supportive, closely involved in friends lives, responsive to problems, and taking familial roles. Due to emotional and social causes, Riley (2021) suggested that Black men wish to create bonds as they leave the familiarity of childhood home. However, it should be noted that Riley's research referred to fictive kinship of Black men in the context of college friends.

Although many participants previously attended college, the friends that were identified as

fictive kin or familial were a mix of childhood friends, college friends, high school friends, and

sometimes family members that were identified as friends. This was also done to place emphasis

on the intimacy of the relationship. Floyd's research provided a theoretical rationale from

Swain's covert intimacy perspective: men may intentionally avoid overt expressions of affection

towards their male friends out of fear of being seen as homosexual (Morman & Floyd, 1998).

However, it seemed brothers are less tied to such arbitrary rules and there has been empirical

evidence to support this idea (Floyd, 1996, 1997). Men are allowed to openly express affection

towards persons identified as brothers without social scrutiny as familial bonds have less rigid

rules of engagement (Morman & Floyd, 1998). This theme supported a pattern of research that

suggests Black male friendship relational hierarchy, as the climax is kinship, family, an expected

brotherhood. Participant #01 responded this way,

> I define partner as if I'm saying yo, this my partner that means
>
> close to being like my brother. Like this is somebody that I've
>
> been with I've been knowing for a while. Like we share common
>
> interests. We look out for each other… Something that's real close
>
> to being like a brother…When I say friendship or aka partner I said
>
> it's a step above friendship to me it's like almost being a relative.

There is a closeness within the relationship that is not encompassed by the term

"friendship." Participant #71 explained like this,

> You know a brotherhood, a strong brotherhood. To me, its
>
> knowing that I can call you and you'll answer, no matter what. I
>
> feel like cheating on my wife. And you tell me, Hey, man, it's not

what you to do. This is why you married her. This is what she

means to you, you know talking you off the ledge, you know,

speaking knowledge in your brain not ignorance… Either I'm

broke or I'm not, but a brotherhood- it's going to make sure you

have a prosperous life, a healthy life mentally, physically, is a true

sign of caring.

Participant #11 indicated that the term "friendship" does not include expectations of obligation associated with the level of intimacy implied by "brotherhood."

I mean we use, we're using the term friendship, but it's going

deeper than a friendship at this point it is, is a brotherhood now,

you know we, you know we, we're brothers…You sit up there are

you know that "hey man, I got somebody who's going have my

back and who's going to be there for me, regardless of how bad it

may get."

Eight out of the ten interviewees were adamant about conveying the point that the identification of family, within the absence of blood-ties, is the point that friendship is elevated to the level of family, rendering blood-ties trivial. Participant #41 shared this,

You know friendship is essential to the soul. You know so that we

build off of that. I mean that friendship, that camaraderie. Just

being able to hang, hang out, and hang around—you know which

then gravitates towards the family… It builds us and brings us

together so then they're family.

Theme 3: Affectionate development

Eight of the ten men interviewed highlighted their affectionate development influenced their future expectations surrounding affection. This is consistent with Floyd's research on affection which reported a positive correlation amongst affectionate communication experienced in youth and the future expressions of affectionate communication (Floyd & Ray, 2016). The participants spoke of their environmental upbringings including parenting, neighborhood, father figure, and family culture (Floyd & Ray, 2016). Theme 3 also garnered support from SLT which posited that behavior, including affectionate expressions, are learned through using others as models and mimicking what is observed as the social behavior of others. Floyd's research indicated that father's express affection towards their sons, and those sons express more affection than shown to them towards their sons (Floyd, 2001). Men model affectionate behavior for their sons, from handshakes, to hugs, and even offering favors in the form of physical help (e.g., helping a friend move). This is also supported by Floyd's research which identifies environmental factors such as behaviors that are reinforced and punished during one's childhood development (Floyd & Ray, 2016). Participant #91 approached his ideas regarding affectionate development as follows,

> I think in our community, I think respect is one of the greatest gifts
>
> you can give and I think as a young man seeing older me just have
>
> a high regard for respect for each other. You could sense that you
>
> know, I was like, you know the handshakes. (Participant #91 stated
>
> earlier "I think we all know there's a lot of historical significance
>
> with the DAP and the way we shake hands. And then that sense of
>
> affection being, you know one form of it".) But you just seen all

kinds of connection was there, trust being exchanged. There was

vulnerability that was being exchanged. (Participant #91 verified

he assumes vulnerability and trust to be forms of affectionate

expression.) … I mean the fact that another man would trust other

men to discipline you. That is affection to me…I think when you

understand where affection comes from, when it comes from a

good place, where people are, you know, they're teaching you and

providing lessons. But they're also providing things that come

from a safe space of love. It's not because no one wants to hurt

you. No one wants to embarrass you…My father and my

grandfather, did I see affection from them? No, no I didn't see that.

But I think it was a different era that my grandfather was raised

and, you know, my father and I could sense that. Because you

know, regardless if you become a great father in life, you raise

good children, every single son, I believe is longing for a sense of

connection that could have maybe been expanded on, you know.

Participant #31 recalled his experience relating to his affectionate development as

follows,

The men in my life didn't show emotions. Never saw my

grandfather cry. Only time I seen my grandfather cry was after my

grandmother passed away. And even that it was painful, it was

hard for him to let that show. Never seen my dad cry even up to his

death, never saw him cry. I've seen my brother, the one that's 12-

year age difference, seen him cry once. And that was when he was actually going through something because he was in the military and he suffered through PTSD…And of course I had male cousins and uncles, you showed emotion, aww you a punk, suck it up. So growing up it was like I can't show emotions. And then coming into adulthood that tied into once I did start showing emotion, it was used against me. Some of the women I dated, if I had a sad moment, the moment I showed emotion or showed some kind of weakness in that respect, they were gone or they used it against me to get what they wanted from me. So then I get to a point where it's like, Okay, I'm not showing anybody any kind of emotion, and that started to make me sick. To where I stopped wanting to be around people, because I have all this stuff bottled up and instead of releasing it I became a powder keg, because it got to a point where I ended up having a terrible temper…I was angry…So once I learned to stop holding all that in and realized it takes a stronger person to show their emotions than it does for a person to bottle it up. Because the true test of strength is not to show how strong you are, its knowing that now's not the time to show that strength. Now's not the time to be *the man*. Now it's time to be like, Okay, I am a man that's hurting and I need help. And being able to ask for help at that moment, that's where the true test of strength internal comes in.

Five of the participants also remarked about a pivotal relationship in their affectionate development. Participant #01 had this to share,

> My father figure, not my biological but my father figure and I learned a lot of affection from him because how his culture is, growing up because he's from North Carolina. He taught me a lot. Matter of fact, the hugging aspect of hugging your brother, hugging a Black man is what I learned from my father. Like its ok to actually hug a Black man and not feel self-conscious about it or anything like that. And I learned that I that at an early age. Maybe 16 and carried it with me…Once we got acclimated with each other, you know that bond was made, that's what it was. It was hey, how you doing? Hug, every now and then. Not just a pat on hug it was an embrace hug. You know, I love you. That was from a young age, it was an embrace hug… That's something I carried with me.

Theme 4: Affectionate communication/expression

Seven of the ten participants' responses identified how they expected to receive and give affection or affectionately communicate. There were a number of texts, words and phrases that were coded under "affectionate communication" as the respondents offered a wide range of affectionate expression. The verbal behavior (e.g., I love you), nonverbal behavior (e.g., holding the phone) and socially supportive behavior (e.g., helping a friend move). The reported affectionate communication amongst Black men was comparable to research conducted by Floyd regarding other populations in that Black men expressed and expected affection in a multitude of

ways. This also supports Floyd's research that suggest that men are affectionately expressive, although they may express their expression in behaviors not well-understood as affectionate communication. Participant #41 had this to say about affectionate communication,

> Towards my homies, I just want them to have my back you know
>
> what I mean?... Let's hangout, lets chill, lets relax… It's just being
>
> loyal in a way that's it, you know...That friendship, that
>
> camaraderie, just being able to hangout and hang around gravitates
>
> towards the family…It build us, bring us together so then their
>
> family becomes our family, their kids become our kids, you know.
>
> That's the affection of the fraternal world and it's not always like
>
> that in your regular community or your village. It's a lot of
>
> competition to where folks rather compete with you than, you
>
> know, support you and be there for you.

Seven of the participants also stated that they frequently told their Black male friends that they loved them, as a means of affectionate communication. Participant #01 reported forms of affectionate communication he was willing to express for certain Black male friends like this,

> One of my partner's is that affectionate dude like that. He'll do the
>
> little hug dap…and do the cheek thing. "I love you bro". He'll kiss
>
> me on the cheek. It's not an issue. But that's just his affection.
>
> He's like that. This is one of my real good partners, because he
>
> was shown affection growing up.

Participant #91 added this perspective,

> Love hearing love from a Black male… I remember right before
>
> my father passed away and I was caregiving for him. I was telling
>
> my father every night, I love you dad. I love you dad. I love you
>
> dad. You know what my father would say? He would say, same to
>
> you. Same to you… But it was one night where I talked to him in
>
> bed and I told him Hey dad I love you. And I walked out and he
>
> said I love you back. I timestamped it and put it on my phone
>
> because it just meant that much.

Theme 5: Affection deprivation

The final theme that emerged from the use of data analysis was Black men avoiding voicing their possible affection deprivation. As mentioned in Chapter 1, affection deprivation is an acute and chronic state in which one failed to receive the level of affection desired from others (Floyd & Hesse, 2016). Seven of the Black men interviewed stated that they would not voice to their Black male friends when they feel that their affectionate needs were not being met. This finding was interesting as not only did the interviewees response state that they were not interested in reporting affection deprivation to their Black male friends, they were also not expecting to hear such declarations from their friends either. Floyd (2016) introduced affection deprivation in 2014 as a theoretical construct indexing a state in which a person's needed affection was not being attained; although Floyd's (2016) research does not mention the reluctance of men to disclose their affection deprivation. Participant #51 had this to say pertaining to him and a friend dealing with unmet affectionate expectations,

> Yeah, I'll be like hey, you want to come over and play some video
>
> games. I can come over and play some video games with you.

That's the way we show that we want to put things behind us…

Some people like to hear you say you're sorry and tell them what

you're sorry for…If I see that you're genuinely sorry for what you

did, I don't mind you don't say that because that other person may

not be comfortable saying it now, just they're not comfortable

saying that you know they are able to show it other ways.

The pattern of avoiding personal affectionate needs in effort of avoiding potential friendship conflict was observed throughout analysis. Participant #61 explained it this way,

Life has a funny way of just figuring stuff out… Whoever in the

situation get to a point where it's not that serious, we really just

need to just move on. And then it would be a slight, maybe like

two-minute conversation. "I'm sorry, this is what it is". And then

we realize maybe that it really isn't that serious, and we move on.

Hadn't had that many conversations to begin with because I don't

like too. And also, I was raised where I had to move on…

In responding to how he addresses his Black male friends when his affectionate needs were not being met participant #51 answered this way,

I don't think I've ever had to do that, not with my friends.

Conflict becomes a joke. It becomes a joke. Because with my

friends, that are true friends, the conflict that we had never existed

until after we've gotten over it. I wanted to Bay to be one of my

best men for my wedding. It was supposed to be Bay and Chris. It

ended up being Chris and my brother… They (Bay and wife)

didn't even come to the wedding. I kept explaining it away because

they had just moved, I was not realizing how hurt I was with it.

One day I think about a year and a half ago, we were talking and it

just came out.

Summary

This chapter provided a thorough description of participant, demographic, and methods of data collection. This also included coding processes, along with graphics/tables to help follow procedure for development of themes. Lastly, this chapter explored the five themes which emerged as central within the participants' narratives: loyalty, brother/brotherhood, affectionate communication/expression, affectionate development, and affectionate deprivation. These themes align with Floyd's research in expressions of affectionate communication by men, environmental factors that influenced affectionate development and the presence of affection deprivation. However, unique findings such as loyalty being an expected feature of friendship, brotherhood being the highest level within Black male friendship hierarchy, and Black male friends caution regarding reporting affection deprivation to their Black male friends seem to build upon previous research, contributing to the literature. This chapter also provided first-hand data from the interviewees as evidence for theme development. Chapter 5 explored interpretation of findings, limitations of study, possible social change implications, and possible considerations for future studies.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendation

Introduction to Interpretation

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss how the findings from this study confirm, disconfirm, or expand the knowledge base within the field of psychology relevant to the topic of Black male friendship. The limitations of the study and possible recommendations for future studies are also provided. The chapter ends with a conclusion wherein implications for social change are addressed

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the expressions of affection between Black men in male-to-male friendships. This study adds to the psychological literature concerning affection and provides a phenomenological scholarship on Black men that may be further explored in future studies within the field of psychology. Affection is an evolutionary trait necessary to sustain long-term relationships and secure procreation (Floyd & Ray, 2016). Black male respondents interpreted friendships to be close relationships wherein mutual intimacy and trust abide (Jarvie, 2019). Floyd's research has indicated that affectionate communication is linked to multiple benefits such as immunocompetence, self-esteem, mental health, and mood (Aloia & Brecht, 2017; Hesse et al., 2020; Hesse & Rauscher, 2019; Mansson et al., 2017). As a Black man, I was also interested in Black males' experience, if at all, of affection deprivation. Lack of affection has as significant an impact negatively as affectionate communication has positively. Floyd and Hesse (2017) explained that affectionately deprived persons are more likely to become depressed and develop personality disorders, physical ailments, and secondary

immune disorders. This study helps explain the phenomenon of Black men expressing affection to Black men from the perspective of their Black male friends.

This study yielded five themes from respondents: loyalty, brother/brotherhood, affectionate communication/expression, affectionate development, and affectionate deprivation. It should be noted that each of the themes was coded as such, taking a larger meaning than a mere word "loyalty," but each theme is a substantive data point. This chapter also goes in depth on each theme to ensure clarity of interpretation.

Interpretation of Findings

A phenomenological qualitative research approach was used to investigate the phenomenon of expressing affection between Black male friends. There is vast literature concerning the issues of affection, affectionate communication, and affectionate deprivation; however, none of it pertains to Black men, nor is this robust literature related to Black male friendship. The goal of the interviews was to better understand the lived experience of Black males within their friendship with other Black males.

Loyalty

Loyalty represents a unique finding, a theme not represented in earlier research performed by Floyd and peers. However, loyalty has long been a feature or trait associated with men and friendship, supported by years of research (Bigelow, 1977; Bock & Brown, 2021). Developmental psychologists have pointed to the emergence of loyalty as a feature of friendship arising as early as 3 years old (Shaw, 2016). According to Shaw (2016), children identify loyalty/alliance in early childhood, and throughout development the concept becomes more valued as relationships grow in complexity. There is also research that supports loyalty related to men in honor cultures highly patriarchal societies wherein retaliation generally involves

violence, usually carried out by men to defend reputation, of which the United States is an exemplar (Cross et al., 2014; Winegard et al., 2014). Within honor cultures, reputation is pivotal and related to status; thus, acquisition of a favorable reputation becomes the goal carried out by two processes: dominance and prestige. Dominance is identified as a status-seeking strategy that is maintained through violence and physically aggressive means, which differs from prestige, which includes loyalty and integrity. The latter is interpreted as an evolutionary development, as dominance approaches are less appropriate for modern societies and problem solving. Loyalty is evident in various realities including secret keeping, reputation defense, and resource sharing. In the context of Black males, research is limited as it relates to loyalty within friendships. The Black men interviewed found meaning in their friendships as dynamic and reciprocal relationships. They reported that loyalty is not only a feature of friendship that they expect from others; they expect to be loyal to their friends as well. Future research can productively further probe and explore the specific pathways in which loyalty manifests and is maintained within the context of Black male relationships.

Brother/Brotherhood

Brother/brotherhood was another theme identified from interviewing Black men regarding affection and the role that it plays in friendships. The Black men interviewed regarded close male relationships or friendships from a hierarchal perspective. Language such as "friend," "brother," "partner," and "day-one" was also used to display close relationships, yet "brother" was used as a remark that signified a relationship of greater value than others not synonymous with other friendships. Floyd addressed this dynamic in a number of ways in his previous research. For example, Floyd's (1996) research compared closeness behaviors among same-sex siblings and same-sex friends; he identified that brothers and sisters considered saying that they

loved each other, saying that they liked each other, and hugging as more appropriate than these behaviors would be with nonrelated friends. Floyd (1996), in a later study, focused on adult fraternal relationships. He found that men considered expressions of verbal and nonverbal affection toward their brother to be more appropriate than towards men with whom they had no relation. Floyd has consistently reported a plausible reason for this phenomenon as follows: The family relationship mitigates suspicions of sexual involvement often engendered by affectionate interaction, and for this reason affection may be considered more appropriate in familial than in nonfamilial relationships. Future research should explore whether Black men who exchange affection within their same-sex friendship identify their Black male friends as "brothers" to eradicate the questioning of sexual intent.

Affectionate Development

Affectionate development was another theme identified while exploring the expressions of affection communicated by Black men in friendships. Many of the participants acknowledged the ways in which they were exposed to and learned affection. This corresponds with findings from Floyd and Morman's (1998) study of affectionate communication in nonromantic relationships with a focus on influences of communicator model along with, relational and contextual factors. The authors highlighted that affectionate communication was important for affectionate development within interpersonal relationships. Affectionate development is marked by experiences that relay caring and value to an individual. For example, many persons can recall their first hug, or first kiss, or first time that they stated "I love you"; these constitute pivotal moments within their affectionate development. This is similar to the participants' responses as they recalled moments wherein affection was communicated and they remembered the incident as notable as it related to their affectionate development. Some participants stated

that they learned affection by receiving affection from their mother or father and sometimes both parents, but others stated that they did not receive affection from their parental dyad but nevertheless learned it through close relationships. Participants highlighted the impact of grandparents, step-parents, and familial friends and how those significant persons influenced their affectionate communication.

Affectionate communication/expression

Affectionate communication/expression was another theme that emerged through data analysis. The Black male respondents detailed ways in which they communicate affection to their friends as well as how their friends communicate affection to them. The participants reported experiences that corresponded with previous research. For example, Floyd (2014, 2019) proposed a tripartite model in which affectionate expressions consist of verbal statements, direct nonverbal gestures, and socially supportive behaviors. For example, some respondents reported stating "I love you" or "be safe, brother" to their male friends before hanging up the phone or upon departing in person. Direct nonverbal behaviors are defined as nonverbal gestures with obvious affectionate implications. Some respondents also reported hugging and giving a handshake-hug or "dap" to communicate affection to their Black male friends. Socially supportive behaviors do not carry obvious affectionate intent. However, research has shown that in some cultures not only is it the most common, but also the most valued means of expressing affection. The socially supportive behaviors identified by participants included, but were not limited to, lending a friend some money, helping a friend move, making time for one another, and talking a friend out of a poor decision (e.g., cheating on his wife).

Affection Deprivation

Affection deprivation was the last theme identified through analysis of responses. Affection deprivation is a condition wherein one receives less affection from others than one desires (Floyd, & Hesse, 2017). Floyd stated that relationships that include a woman have higher rates of affection than those that do not involve a woman; thus, one can reasonably conclude that men have higher rates of affection deprivation. Indeed, the affection deprivation of men is well established (Floyd & Hesse, 2017). Another take away from this theme was the idea that Black men were not concerned with alerting their Black male friends of their affectionate deprivation. This was possibly due to the means that men use to resolve conflict. According to Benenson (2019), men are likely to engage in friendly physical contact with one another, after conflict. Although Benenson's research was related to sport competition (conflict), the process is the same, including limited discussion of the conflict, handshaking, back patting and hugs, as well as hanging out after the event to grab dinner or have a drink. Beneson contended that the male warrior hypothesis explains the phenomenon the belief that men maintain relationships with other men after intergroup competition to ensure assistance from allies if attacked by outsiders. The results also indicated that participants were disinterested in hearing instances in which they were the catalyst for a friend's affection deprivation. Future research should investigate the reasoning behind Black males' relationship with their experience of affection deprivation.

Socially Supportive Gestures

Affectionate communication consists of verbal behaviors (e.g., saying "I love you," "I miss you, honey"), nonverbal behaviors (e.g., cuddling, caressing, hugging) and socially supportive gestures (e.g., helping a friend move, lending a friend money, giving a friend advice); (Floyd & Custer, 2020). However, the interviewees expressed or communicated socially

supportive gestures more often than verbal or nonverbal expressions. Verbal and nonverbal expressions were usually communicated during times wherein affectionate expressions were expected and socially appropriate, such as saying "I love you" just before hanging up the phone or greeting a loved one with a hug. This differs from the expression of affection through socially supportive behaviors as such gestures were expressed during both socially appropriate and unexpected moments, and during times of affection deprivation. For example, a friend may ask to borrow money shortly after an argument. By lending the friend the money the gesture becomes socially appropriate, as it is reinforced, the potential for recurrence is increased (Floyd & Custer, 2020). The gesture also becomes unexpected or less likely due to the friend asking directly following a falling-out. Socially supportive behavior was also used as a "behavioral apology" for times when a friend has hurt another and had not directly addressed the offense. In situations that included affection deprivation, a socially supportive gesture functioned as a behavioral apology with the intent to communicate affection from one Black male friend to another. Socially supportive behavior was applied as the dominant expression of affection among Black men per the data from the research participants.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of the study was the fact that it was carried out during a pandemic. The pandemic or COVID-19 greatly impacted the method by which the study was conducted. For example, all interviews were carried out via Zoom. This limited the population of men available to be interviewed. Some willing participants could not contribute due to being technologically insecure (e.g., no access to internet, no access to a computer/laptop). Another limitation of the study was the variety in Black men, specifically in relation to education. Nine out of the 10 interviewees held secondary degrees from colleges or universities; the one

respondent who had not graduated from college had successfully completed trade school. Another limitation of the study was the age range of the men interviewed. Each participant was between the ages of 27 and 44 years; this did not account for Black men in early adulthood or senior Black men. Future research should expand the study by increasing the number and age of Black men who are interviewed.

Recommendations

One recommendation for future studies should be to gain further clarity on the themes found in this study. Future research should investigate the findings of this study to move the research forward, eventually taking the qualitative study toward a more quantitative or mixed methods approach, after a peer-reviewed consensus on themes has been established. Another recommendation would be to have the interviews in-person. Body behavior and gestures communicate a message as effectively as words, at times. When interviews occur via Zoom or by the use of other internet-based platforms, the participants' depiction may not be recorded accurately due to the limited view of the respondents. Another recommendation would be to compare the results found with Black men with results found among other racial demographics of men (e.g., White, Hispanic, Asian).

Implications

This study has the potential to impact social change by highlighting cultural awareness issues among practitioners, as well as increasing social understanding of how Black men relate to affection. The findings have the potential to influence future research, which will inform future practice, which will then impact the ways in which mental health practitioners assist Black men in dealing with issues, such as affection deprivation. According to Floyd and Hesse (2017), affection deprivation is linked to stress and depression, attachment insecurity, and social

isolation. This study may also aid in the general public's understanding of the role that affection

plays in the dynamic of Black male friendship. Black men have been socially understood to be

angry, aggressive, mad, violent, threatening, and abusive; a deeper understanding of Black men

should also foster empathy towards the population.

Summary

Chapter 5 highlights the fact that there is a need for more research on the topic of Black

male friends and how they express affection toward one another. I conducted this study in an

attempt to add to the repertoire of psychological research regarding affection, affectionate

communication, friendship, and Black platonic male friends. It is important to remember that the

findings from qualitative research cannot be generalized beyond the current sample of

respondents. Future research can build upon the themes identified within this study through

mixed method and quantitative approaches. Based upon the findings of this study, Black men

appear to be as affectionately competent as other groups and also seem to desire affection from

their male friends, similar to other same-sex friends within other racial groups. Black men also

seem to be aware of the level of affection that they can receive and the degree of affection that

they can give as it relates to their male friends. Black men, similar to other men, do not lack the

experience of affection among one another, even if they may communicate affection differently

than traditionally understood (e.g., kissing and cuddling may not be appropriate between male

friends; thus, socially supportive behaviors may be observed more frequently). Socially

supportive behaviors such as being a listening ear, giving wise advice or counsel, loaning money,

helping move furniture, and going for drinks were also identified as applicable affectionate

expressions. These do not trump direct (verbal) exchanges of affection such as "I love you" or

direct (nonverbal) expressions such as holding hands. Socially supportive behaviors are a third

form of affectionate expression, though in the case of the Black men interviewed, socially

supportive behaviors may be more dominant than other forms of affectionate communication.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Good *(Morning, Afternoon, Evening)*

I would like to start off by thanking you once again for agreeing to take part in this study, which is aimed at better understanding the phenomenon of Black men expressing affection towards their Black male friends.
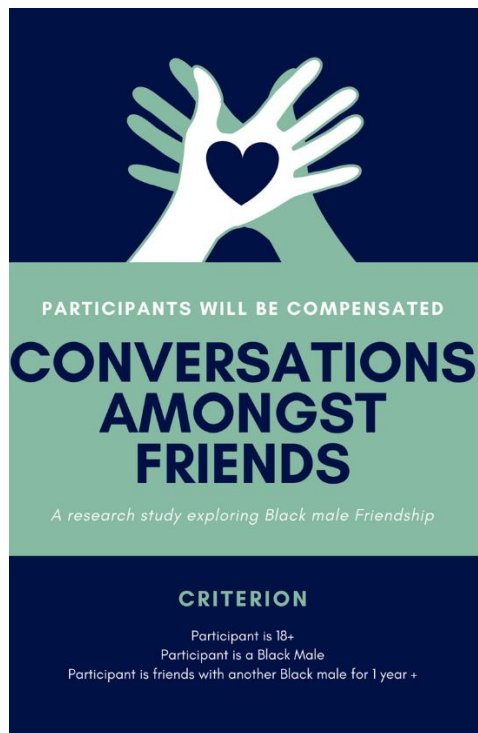
As stated in the consent form, this interview will be confidential and audio recorded used only for the purposes of the study.

Do you have any questions? (If not, we may begin).

- Is there another word, term or phrase that you would prefer we use in replace of affection? How would you define affection? **Ask the same question pertaining to "friendship".**
- In your experience what are the best parts of being friends with a Black man?
- How would you explain your comfort level in discussing affection with your Black male friend? Black men? or men in general?
- In what ways (if any) have you observed Black men express affection between other Black men? (Childhood/Adulthood) Please be specific.
- What expressions of affection do you personally value, do you find some expressions of affection as more significant than others? (e.g., is loaning a friend money more significant than being a listening ear for them, or vice versa).
- What does it mean to express affection to your Black male friends? Is affection appropriate for Black men to express, why or why not?
- What has your friend said or done (if anything) that has communicated affection to you? Describe in detail the most recent situation in which this occurred.
- What have you said or done (if anything) that has communicated affection to your friend? Describe in detail the most recent situation in which this occurred.
- In what ways (if any) do you express to your Black male friends that your affectionate needs are not being met? Please be specific.
- How do you and your Black male friend deal with conflict between one another? Is affection expressed? Please be specific.
- How are you and your Black male friends at apologizing?
- Should men and women express affection differently due to gender expectations?

After the last question is fully responded to… I would like to thank you again for volunteering to participate in this study. I will send you 10 dollars via (agreed upon secure financial app). I will also be contacting once more, to allow you to review how you were interpreted and provide me with feedback.

Do you have any questions for me? (If not, we will be in contact soon)

Appendix B: Flyer/Invitation