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Same-Sex Relationships Among African American Women Previously in Heterosexual Relationships

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Abstract

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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

In the United States, same-sex relationships have been a popular topic for the past decade, largely in relation to marriage. This phenomenological study examined the life experiences of African American women currently in same-sex relationships but previously in heterosexual relationships. Exploring the participants' experiences to the fullest extent was important to understand each person's journey through the stigma and biases that she faced when making life choices. Given the rarity of literature on the subject matter, professional practitioners and clinicians may not know how to assist these women. Queer and social identity theories were applied in exploring the directed research question, which focused on avenues the participants consciously chose to take in order to pursue the lifestyles they wanted to live. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with 10 African American women aged 40 and older who were in same-sex relationships at the time of the study but had previously been in heterosexual relationships, and who lived in the 5 boroughs of New York City. The study recruitment method was snowball sampling, and numerous interview questions were used to capture the essence of each woman's experiences. Inductive analyses revealed a positive and productive social change for practitioners, clinicians, educators, and researchers concerning African American women in same-sex relationships who were previously in heterosexual relationships. Psychologists and researchers who work directly with African American women in same-sex relationships might benefit from these findings.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, the late Mary Coreen Thomas Smith, for all of her guidance and for teaching us that the Creator is real and that my sisters and I only have each other as well as our families as we grow. Next, I want to thank my husband, soulmate, and father of our two beautiful and smart daughters, Candra and Kashondra, Benjamin Carter McArthur. He has always had faith in me as his wife and friend, and he is my greatest supporter. I want to thank both of my daughters for showing me what unconditional love means. My sisters Cheryl, Susan, Sandra, Shellie, Joyce, Mary, and the late Lela Mae Hart: Thank you all for being available for me when I needed you. I have to give special thanks to my two sisters: Susan Y. Smith is my friend and sibling and always has my back, and my youngest sister, Sandra Kay Smith, is the one who can always make me laugh. I want to give a special thanks to my one and only Aunt Susie Y. Thomas-Brown and my mentor and godmother and friend, Miss Elnora Gibbs. I want to thank my nieces Octavia, Shawanika, and Deidra for all their support. I have to especially give thanks to all my peers: Dr. Margaret (Peg) Henderson, who is one of the most positive and supportive people I know in this universe; Dr. De'Angela Joi Mitchell; Dr. Angela Denise Pope; Dr. Dorothy Wyatt-Youmans; Dr. Cheryl Riley; Dr. Avon Hart-Johnson; Irena Glover; Linda Scope; Latonia Greene; Dr. Martha Green; Dr. Keica Freeman; Senetha Ramsey; Kimberly Dudley; Nathasha Brooks-Harris; Latoya White; Vanessa Earth Bey; and Dr. Juanita White. I thank my best friends, Maria Cox (cousin), Joyce Latham-Pittman (oldest friend), Michelle Walker (godsister), Freddie

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Same-sex relationships have increased in prevalence, according to U.S. Census Bureau (2010, 2014) reports; African American women have been included in this trend. This study addresses the life experiences of several African American women 40 years of age or older who were previously in a heterosexual relationship but are now in same-sex relationships.

Various surveys have been conducted to discover how many individuals are living in same-sex relationships as well as how many are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT). The Williams Institute, for instance, conducted global surveys to determine how many people are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered. The results were analyzed by Gates, the primary researcher, after several population-based surveys were conducted in the United States and around the world (Gates, 2011). The goal of the Williams Institute's research was to estimate the population size of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community (Gates, 2011). Gates (2011) discussed the research summary and challenges associated with collecting improved data about the LGBT community and reviewed 11 new national (U.S.) and international surveys with questions concerning sexual orientation or gender identity (Gates, 2011). The research showed that an estimated 3.5% of adults in the United States identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual; an estimated 0.3% of adults were transgender (Gates, 2011). This means that, roughly

speaking, 9 million LGBT persons resided in America, which is equivalent to the population of the state of New Jersey (Gates, 2011). Approximately 19 million Americans (8.2%) reported that they had engaged in same-sex sexual behavior, and nearly 25.6 million Americans (11%) acknowledged at least some same-sex sexual attraction (Gates, 2011).

The research conducted by Gates (2011), by indicating a large number of individuals who identified as LGBT, shone a positive light on a group that had been invisible to many in this country and around the world. Because the LGBT population, for many years, was not reflected in survey results, it was basically out of sight and out of mind. Research should be neutral, but in this country and others, the LGBT population has been overlooked in many cases. According to the Williams Institute findings, more survey research should be conducted to capture the experiences of individuals from the LGBT community. Many individuals do not self-identify as LGBT and are considered as "questioning" or "queer," which are different from announced sexual orientations (Kemp, 2009).

An increase in the number of same-sex relationships has been recorded, especially after recent changes in laws with reference to same-sex marriages in many states. Before these changes, the number of same-sex couples residing in the United States was not clear (American Psychological Association [APA], 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). A

significant change has occurred in the legal system pertaining to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning (LGBTQ) individuals in American culture (Forbes, 2014).

Since the 1980s, the LGBTQ community has been the focus of research throughout the country, with this scholarship giving its members a voice to express their rights as citizens of the United States. Surveys and studies were examined by researchers who were interested in this populations overall outcomes and to produce a positive format, thus ensuring their rights to government assistance and making sure that they receive "a fair shake" in society. Positive outcomes have occurred for LGBTQ individuals and for groups fighting for their right to be treated equally. One of the most noted surveys used to give an overview of how lesbians have been affected mentally by their life style choices throughout the United States was the National Lesbian Health Care Survey (NLHCS; 1984-1985). The NLHCS was the latest and most comprehensive study on the lifestyle, demographic, and mental health of lesbians, capturing data from approximately 1,925 lesbians from all 50 states (Bradford, Ryan, & Rothblum, 1994). To date, a survey of this magnitude has not been conducted that gave such a thorough overview of lesbians in the United States, and their mental and physical health. Herek, Norton, Allen, and Sims (2010) referenced the U.S. National Probability Sample of self-identified lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults ($N = 662$). These data gave an outline of

demographic, psychological, and social variables that focused on public policy and law. Sampling is one of the most important considerations to take into account when conducting research within the LGBTQ population in order to get reliable data and make sure that no biases are involved.

The current study was designed to provide additional insight for practitioners and scholars that might help them to enhance therapeutic interventions and to develop better techniques for treating African American women in same-sex relationships. This research need was substantiated by Bates's (2010) study on African American bisexual women who were married, in which Bates identified a major research gap in relation to understanding African American women in same-sex and heterosexual relationships. Bates noted the need for greater sample sizes to get a more rounded understanding of the life experiences of African American women in same-sex relationships and the challenges that come along with being members of this population. Researchers established a need for research to identify intervention strategies to be used in counseling for women who are struggling with issues concerning their lifestyle choices. Lesbian women who were socially connected and engrossed in positive, social support groups within lesbian communities tended to be more open on all levels and sought mental health services in their communities (Bradford et al., 1994).

In a study of 662 lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults, Herek et al. (2010) placed emphasis on the relevance of demographic, psychological, and social variables to public policies, procedures, and laws. This emphasis was special due to the fact that public policies and laws were indicated in demographic, psychological, and social variables concerning the LGB population when in the past these elements were not displaced (Herek et al., 2010 The research authors compared the respondents from a younger adult population within the United States to other younger adults from different races, who were more highly educated and less likely to be non-Hispanic White; differences were observed between gender and sexual orientation groups that included these variables (Herek et al., 2010). By and large, the participants were inclined to be politically liberal, not highly religious, and supportive of the idea of marriage equality for same-sex couples (Herek et al., 2010). Although the research data used were from a U.S. national probability sample of self-identified lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults, the researchers provided an in-depth analysis of the LGB population compared to other adults in the United States. This study fell short of an adequate analysis of African American women in same-sex relationships who were previously in heterosexual relationships by failing to examine their life experiences.

By using a qualitative methodology, the present study provides an accurate analysis of each woman's personal life experience, capturing various aspects of her daily

life as it relates to the phenomena under study. The findings from this study may be valuable in assisting clinicians and other practitioners who work with and provide services to this population. At present, organizations exist that tailor their services to address the core biases women may face within lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) communities; however, more research is needed to unveil the social, emotional, spiritual, and interpersonal areas that affect each woman's experiences (Bates, 2010, 2012).

Background

In the United States, African American women may be seen as a minority group on various levels, so a need to study this population is definitely present. Furthermore, there has been a lack of research on African American women in same-sex relationships who were previously in heterosexual relationship. In this study, I focused on the life experiences of women who had changed their relationships from heterosexual to same-sex. In order to give an overall view of the issues that these women encounter, more detailed research with a phenomenological approach must be done to understand their current and past experiences. Forbes (2014) highlighted the importance of how discrimination and labels influence the negative dynamics of LGBTQ culture. Lewis and Marshall (2012) completed research on African American lesbians and emphasized that the group is large and diverse, comprising people from various age groups, social classes,

and educational backgrounds. Lewis and Marshall's study also referenced this population as minority women of African descent with the intention to be inclusive of same-sex-attracted women who may identify as Black, irrespective of identification as a lesbian, and irrespective of their country of origin. However, a psychological perspective was missing in relating to the Black population, so it is imperative to continue to clarify the relevance of LGBT psychology, which has been absent from research, as noted by Lewis and Marshall (2012).

In the early part of 2012, Lambda Legal and 12 other social justice agencies organized and filed an amicus brief with the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, requesting that the court review the 1986 U.S. Supreme Court ruling *Batson v. Kentucky*, 476 U.S. 79 (1986) when appraising the constitutionality of striking a juror because of sexual orientation (Forbes, 2014). The *Batson v. Kentucky* ruling stated that no attorney can use peremptory challenges to strike jurors according to race, as this action violates the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment of the Constitution (Forbes, 2014). This case is an example of the hardships that the LGBTQ community continues to endure on a daily basis. Furthermore, it is imperative that LGBTQ and African American women in same-sex relationships are not politically or socially invisible but are allowed to practice their rights as citizens of the United States.

In sum, research shows that African American women in same-sex relationships have not been seen as being as important as others in the LGBTQ community. Research on lesbians in America does exist, but the last reported National Lesbian Health Care Survey was completed in the 1980s and analyzed in the 1990s, and it was still highly referenced in the 2000s as one of most comprehensive studies to date. The Herek et al. (2010) study provided an overview of demographic, psychological, and social variables impacting this population. The researchers' attention was focused on public policy and law in their use of the U.S. National Probability Sample of self-identified LGB adults.

Bates (2010) conducted a study of African American women's identity development and the coming-out process of once-married lesbians and bisexuals by using a grounded theory approach. Interviews were conducted by using open-ended questions that addressed matters relating to sexual development and the understanding of "coming out" as lesbian or bisexual. After the data were collected, noteworthy themes were examined and categorized (Bates, 2010). According to Bates (2012), more research has been done on African American bisexual and gay men than on African American bisexual women; most of this research has not specifically addressed bisexual identity development. However, in some cases, women who were in heterosexual relationships but then enter same-sex relationships identify as bisexual. A higher percentage of information is available on bisexual behavior and associated risk factors, but it does not

address identity development within the orientation of these women who do not consider themselves as bisexual (Bates, 2012).

Research on people of color in the LGBTQ community, especially African American bisexual and lesbian women and transgender-identified individuals, remains lacking (Bates, 2010). African American women in same-sex relationships who were previously in heterosexual relationships have not been studied as extensively as others in the LGBT community. Therefore, a need for research to understand the lived experiences of these women is present. The purpose of this study was to understand what these women need to enhance their lives. The study identified significant themes after data collection that highlights areas in which additional services are needed for this population. African American women were chosen as the focus of this study because of the compounded stigma that they may face concerning certain issues. More specifically, African American women have often struggled with social stigma in relation to their ethnic classification, lesbianism, sexual orientation, and associated issues (Hetzel, 2011). Furthermore, as women move from heterosexual to same-sex relationships, their communal networks often suffer (Martin, 2014). According to James (2011), African American women in same-sex relationships have to contend with changes in their professional, personal, and even spiritual communities. Due to the significant issues that have historically been present concerning same-sex orientation, African American

women may face the anxiety of ideas and beliefs that others hold about them as they relate to their individual sexual orientations (Smith, Zanotti, Axelton, & Saucier, 2011).

The impulse behind this study was to discover what takes place when an African American woman leaves her heterosexual status to enter a lesbian or a same-sex relationship and how this is measurable (Thompson, Forsyth, & Langley, 2009). Previous research suggested that it was difficult for family members as well as friends to adjust to the new relationship status of same-sex couples (Thompson et al., 2009). Other studies suggested that African American women may have a different experience with relationship status changes than Caucasian American women when these changes involve same-sex relationships (Vincent, Peterson, & Parrott, 2009). African American women view sex roles in same-sex relationships through a different social lens than Caucasian American women (Vincent et al., 2009). Research has supported the claim that different mindsets are evident between African American and Caucasian American women in relation to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities and the sex roles within these communities (Vincent et al., 2009). Whitley, Childs, and Collins (2010) researched the attitudes of Black and White American college students from a university in the Midwestern United States toward lesbians and gay men. Before the authors started the study, other studies and reports had already suggested that Black Americans were less accepting of the lesbian and gay population (Whitley, Childs, & Collins, 2010). In the

study were 60 Black students (36 females, 24 males) and 62 White students (25 females,

37 males). The analysis showed that Black students had a more neutral attitude whereas

the White students' attitudes were slightly more positive concerning the acceptance of the

lesbian/gay population (White et al., 2010). Stafford (2015) cited research indicating that

African Americans hold more negative views on LGBT minorities than Caucasian

Americans do. Nevertheless, Stafford noted that other research supported the position

that African Americans do not have negative opinions concerning LGBT minorities as

compared to Caucasian Americans. In future research, additional opinions from different

races and groups concerning the same issues will most likely be found.

In sum, past research has indicated that the African American population can be

somewhat apprehensive concerning the LGBTQ population; therefore, African American

women may have more complications in moving from a heterosexual to a same-sex

relationship. Seemingly, African Americans have not been as open to the LGBTQ

community as Caucasian Americans have, and some studies have indicated that African

Americans are neutral in their opinions concerning the LGBTQ community.

Unfortunately, information has been lacking that might give insight into the life

experiences of African American women in same-sex relationships. The current study

provides an understanding of how important each woman in the study felt that her

relationship status was. The next section focuses on the literature specific to sexual orientation as it relates to this topic.

Sexual Orientation

In U.S. society, there appears to be widespread confusion about the appropriate terminology to use when referring to a person's sexual orientation. In the past, terms such as *homosexual*, *homosexuality*, *lesbian*, *gay*, *bisexual*, *sexuality*, *sex orientation*, and *gender* were used interchangeably to refer to sexual orientation, at times inappropriately. *Sexual orientation* is a concept that was researched in the past and is now deemed a proper term to use when referring to an individual's sexual preference (Maccio, 2011; Robert, Glymour &Koenen, 2013). According to Maccio (2011), *sexual orientation* refers to a self-reported definition of sexual orientation in which a person identifies with being gay or lesbian, and it may involve a change of orientation from same-sex orientation to opposite-sex orientation or vice versa.

Daley (2012) noted that self-disclosure of one's own sexual orientation is an important factor because refraining from this self-identification may have an adverse impact on an individual's mental health. Whereas sexual orientation may be relatively easy to understand, sexual prejudices are less clearly understood, specifically concerning the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities (Smith et al., 2011). Sexual orientation may also include a definition of how a person behaves both sexually and

emotionally, in addition to conveying how he or she expresses feelings of love for another individual. When women in same-sex relationships were compared to men in same-sex relationships and to heterosexual couples, women in same-sex relationships reported higher satisfaction and a more positive reaction to relationships than the other two groups (Boon & Alderson, 2009). Individuals who were in same-sex relationships also appeared to enjoy feelings of freedom and autonomy because their relationships did not compromise their independence (Boon & Alderson, 2009). The authors' discussion on sexual orientation provided insights on how individuals identified with sexual attraction and expressed the emotional aspects of the relationship.

Problem Statement

According to U.S. Census data, the number of same-sex family units has increased rapidly in recent years, rising from 581,000 in 2009 to 5,594,000 in 2010. Moreover, in 2014, the U.S. Census reported lesbian and gay couples as legally married for the first time in history, no longer listing them as unmarried under marriage status. Thompson, Forsyth, and Langley (2009) found that many women who were previously in heterosexual relationships were coming out and socially identifying as lesbians. This accounted for the increasing number of same-sex family units, as many legal systems were now recognizing same-sex family structures as legitimate. New laws created policies and procedures that allowed same-sex marriages throughout the country. The

American Psychological Association (2010) had made it clear that homosexuality was no longer considered or classified as a mental illness, and sexuality was seen as an orientation rather than a pathological disorder. Vincent, Peterson, and Parrott (2009) noted that regardless of the progress in the acceptance of same-sex relationships in society, many biases and awkward attitudes toward the LGBTQ community existed. One problem was a lack of scientific research on the experiences of African American women aged 40 and over who had previously been in heterosexual relationships but were now in same-sex relationships. The aim of this study was to understand the life experiences of African American women who were previously in heterosexual relationships but were currently in same-sex relationships.

The literature indicates that the process of entering into a same-sex relationship often creates conflict for women in their personal and religious lives (Hetzel, 2011). However, I have found very little research that specifically examined African American women age 40 and over who had left heterosexual relationships and were currently in same-sex relationships. Furthermore, a paucity of literature is available regarding African American families headed by same-sex couples. Thompson, Forsyth, and Langley (2009) posited that when individuals make a change such as entering a relationship with a person of the same sex after previously having been in a heterosexual relationship, it impacts both their lives and the lives of those around them. Research indicates several concerns

for women contemplating entering a same-sex relationship, such as losing support from their family, their friends, their religious institutions, and their employers and colleagues (Thompson et al., 2009). In summary, there is a limited amount of information on African American women in same-sex relationships and their concerns in relation to community biases that may cause conflict for them on various levels, such as socially, spiritually, and professionally.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this existential phenomenological study was to give an understanding of the life experiences of African American women aged 40 and over who had previously been in heterosexual relationships but who were in a same-sex relationship at the time of the study. Specifically, social identity theory and queer theory provided a foundation for examining the experiences of African American women in same-sex relationships (Angelini & Bradley, 2010; Jagose, 1996). An additional goal was to accomplish a sound and reliable social change that connects each woman who is in need of a positive atmosphere. Practitioners, counselors, life coaches, and therapists must be trained to meet each individual woman's needs in a manner that accommodates where she is in her life at the time of service. Following this research, more productive techniques may be developed.

In my research study, I interviewed 10 women living in the northeastern part of the United States who were part of the lesbian or same-sex community but previously were part of the heterosexual population. The conceptual framework has ensured the assimilation of the question below into the present study. In other words, theoretical definition has given meaning to specific terms and words that include knowledge and acceptance of theories that are used throughout the study.

Research Question

The primary research question was as follows. This question was deconstructed into subquestions, which are presented in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Central Question: What are the experiences of African American women age 40 and over who were previously in heterosexual relationships and are now in same-sex relationships?

Theoretical Framework

Queer Theory

According to queer theorist Jagose (1996), *queer theory* is a new way of thinking about sexual identities as well as other phenomena such as sexuality and gender. The theory goes beyond fixed ideas of homosexual and heterosexual orientation (Jagose, 1996). Queer theory is concerned with forms of sexuality that expand the scope of an individual's behavior, including all aspects of sexual minorities. Turner's (2000) seminal

work suggested that everyone is queer and defined queerness as ill-fitting within a single category; he stated that everyone has felt out of place one time or another in life. In other words, Turner's application of queer theory went beyond sexual orientation. The author made additional insights that influenced queer theory and ideas of how gender and sexual identity may be categorized through the lenses of other theorists (Turner, 2000). Further, Turner noted that his work neglected to fit gracefully in any existing corrective category; indeed, his work redefined what *queer* means.

Queer theory is a contemporary theoretical perspective derived from gay/lesbian studies, which grew out of the feminist studies and feminist theory of the mid-1980s. The idea behind creating a new theory was to provide a better understanding of people who sexually identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender (LGBT). In the early 1990s, de Lauretis (1990) gave queer theory a more intensive definition, explored the dynamics of coming out, and extended the focus of queer to minorities. According to Elund (2012), queer theory is difficult to explain due to individual self-expressions of sexual orientation. The theoretical vanguard that represented queer theory was based on the study of sexuality and the idea of queer historical research that emphasized dominant ideology on sexual attraction within the homosexual population (Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell, 2009). In correlation, many in society view feminism as a thing of the past, at the same time as queer theory has developed, there has been a social shift away from

feminism. Feminist theory is believed to be related to the political, social, and economic equality of sexes; therefore, the question for many people was this: How long would this new queer theory last? (Duncan,2010). James (2011) noted that queer theory was developing a new direction, which included religion and how it had potentially established an open door in the study of sexual orientations. Despite the growth in societal understanding of these phenomena, great issues have remained in relation to gender, sexual identity, and sex orientation concerning individuals in same-sex relationships because what these terms mean has been confusing to the public as well as the LGBT community.

Social Identity Theory

According to Angelini and Bradley (2010), *social identity theory* indicates that the societal groups to which individuals belong defines them in society. Individuals identify with others on the basis of race, age, and gender; nonetheless, social perceptions are important elements with what individuals as well as groups perceive themselves as. Similarly, same-sex relationships may be explored through social identity theory because of the ideas of self-concept and self-identification. The societal problems created by discrimination and prejudice may be translated into opportunities to use social and psychological approaches because individuals identify with ideas expressed within specific groups (Angelini & Bradley, 2010). As previous research has suggested, social

identity theory offers an understanding of how sexual prejudice, as well as other areas of

discrimination, affect people (Cripps, 2011). According to Banana and Murphy (2009), in

social identity theory (SIT), people tend to classify or categorize themselves by social

groups such as age, gender, and religious associations. However, others who are not a

part of the group, which may be very biased, assess the behaviors of the group's

individuals and can either see the members of the group as prejudiced or see themselves

fitting in with the ideology of the group. For the purpose of this study, the application of

social identity theory was not limited to an individual's sexual orientation; rather, it was

used to understand how women view themselves and perceive how they are viewed by

the world. In exploring African American women, identity related to relationships and

roles was also addressed in relation to social identity theory.

Nature of the Study

The methodology was a qualitative design using an existential phenomenological

approach. Husserl developed the phenomenological approach with the intention of

surveying phenomena as they exist in human consciousness with attention to depicting

human experiences (Bloomberg, 2008; Lewis & Marshall, 2012). The current study

examined the experiences of African American women age 40 and older who were in

same-sex relationships after having previously been in heterosexual relationships. To

ensure that my use of the qualitative method addressed this study's research question, I

fully integrated the research question into the interview question design. The interview questions were designed to help me to understand women's experiences related to this study's research question and ultimately provide information that contributes toward future tailored support (Janesick, 2011; Mertens, 2014).

Definitions of Key Concepts

The following are crucial terms that were used in this study, which was designed to increase understanding of the experiences of African American women in same-sex relationships who were previously in heterosexual relationships.

African American woman/women: In this study, the term *African American women* references the population studied. The term can be succinctly defined as applying to women who may or may not be citizens of the United States but who have racial and ethnic identities and lineages of African descent (Kertzner, Meyer, Frost& Stirratt, 2009; Webster, 2008). This term refers to a woman's self-identification with this ethnic group. Other women may self-identify as African American women for other personal reasons.

Bisexual: This is the sexual orientation that describes either a man or a woman who is attracted to both males and females (Forbes, 2014; Robinson, 2010).

Coming out: This phrase gives a description of the ideas and processes of an individual's coming to terms with his or her sexual orientation and sharing that sexual disclosure with others (Daley, 2012; Potoczniak, Crosbie-Burnett & Saltzburg, 2009).

Some individuals are reluctant to be open with their sexual orientation because of social stigma (Daley, 2012).

Existential phenomenology: This approach is concerned with how the exploration of human existence, the analysis of existence, and individuals' perceptions of their experience(s), as well as their free choice and/or actions, are interpretations of their existence in their society (Luijpen & Koren, 1995; Reitinger, 2013).

Gay: This word has several contexts, but for the purpose of this study, gay males are self-identified men who are attracted physically, emotionally, romantically, or sexually to another person who identifies as male (Forbes, 2014).

Heteronormativity: This is the idea that individuals fall into definite and distinctive genders (males/females) with expected roles in life (Ducharme & Kollar, 2012). It emphasizes that heterosexuality is only sexual orientation and affirms that sexual and marital relations are most appropriate between individuals of opposite sexes (Ducharme & Kollar, 2012).

Heterosexual: This is translated as normal or natural behavior when it concerns male and female attractions or opposite sex attraction (Ducharme & Kellar, 2012; Han, Kersey & Kimberly, 2012). In other words, this means that an individual is primarily, romantically, and sexually attracted to the opposite sex.

Homosexual: This is no longer an appropriate term to use to refer to a man loving another man, a woman loving another woman, or an individual who changes his or her gender. Terms that are used to describe individuals who are in the same sex group and are attracted to each other fall under the category of sexual orientation (Forbes, 2014; Kellier, 2010).

Homosexuality: This term has been used to describe people who are interested in a romantic relationship with a person of the same gender or who have a sexual attraction to a member of the same sex (APA, 2009). This term commonly refers to individuals in same-gender, same-sex relationships, or individuals who have an interest in the same sex. The definition centers on the cultural lifestyle and relationships of same-sex couples (Colucci-Coritt, 2005; Ducharme & Kollar, 2012; Okun, 1996).

Lesbian: This term refers to a woman who identifies herself as having an attraction to or being sexually interested in another woman (Boon & Alderson, 2009), whereas *women in same-sex relationships* refers to individuals who are intimate and sexual with other women regardless of their current self-definition (Boon & Alderson, 2009).

Queer: This is a unique term that is used to depict individuals' self-concept of their sexual orientation identity, which is how they explain who they are (Forbes, 2014).

Queer theory: In this study, this term is concerned with describing forms of sexuality that expand the scope of an individual's behaviors to all aspects of sexual minorities (Kemp, 2009).

Phenomenology: Qualitative phenomenological research that communicates the lived experience of a phenomenon (Fischer, 2006; Luijpen & Koren, 1995).

Relationship: The connection of two or more people or concepts as well as the state of being connected together (Bancroft, Long, & McCabe, 2011).

Same-sex: This term describes a homosexual relationship or individuals who are attracted to the same gender (Ducharme & Kollar, 2012).

Sexual orientation: This term is deemed the proper or preferred term to use when referring to an individual's sexual preference (Lippa, 2012; Maccio, 2011). According to Maccio (2011), the term refers to a self-reported definition of sexual reorientation in which a person identifies with being gay or lesbian and possibly includes a range of behaviors and identities, from same-sex orientation to opposite-sex orientation or vice versa.

Social identity theory: This term describes the rationalization that individuals in this society are defined by the societal group of which they are part (Angelini & Bradley, 2010).

Assumptions

The first assumption of this research study was that each woman gave thorough and sincere answers to each interview question. Next, I developed my research study with the assumption that the theoretical and conceptual frameworks connected the components to give an overall understanding of the current study. I also assumed that reaching African American women in same-sex relationships who were previously in a heterosexual relationship would be difficult because of certain stigmas as well as biases associated with their lifestyle changes. Consequently, various approaches to recruitment were used, as described in the methodology section of Chapter 3. One of my responsibilities as the researcher was to guarantee that each assumption was identified properly; I have accepted that if any assumptions were not true, I translated the research study strategy appropriately.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of my study included an overview of the experiences of African American women in same-sex relationships who had previously been in a heterosexual relationship for at least 5 years. Participants gave their personal reflections of their lived experiences within a qualitative methodological design that captured the whole person. A delimitation of the study was the omission of women of other ethnic groups. African American women were the identified population; therefore, this was the only group that

was researched. I based my decision to study this population on the stigma and prejudice against same-sex relationships in the African American community and the need to understand how this impacts this population. The African American community is notorious for being incredibly homophobic. A need is obviously present to give a clear overview of overwhelming issues within the culture. My choice and interest in this population along with my research question results have given a more insightful analysis of the life experiences of this group.

Limitations

I anticipated three limitations of this study (Moustakas, 1994). First, the sample was small. However, qualitative samples are generally small (Moustakas, 1994). In spite of the small sample size, an interview guide was developed and used, which was patterned after Rubin and Rubin's (2012) responsive interviewing model. I managed the limitations when drawing upon the model's techniques for the interviewing process. While limitations existed, small things could be done to compensate for certain measures. Additionally, the responsive interviewing model has three major components (Rubin & Rubin, 2012): a focus on the human aspects of the interviewee and the interviewer; a petition to gain a comprehensive understanding rather than seeking usual generalizations; and accommodation for interviewing centered on the need to know more information,

such as with theoretical sampling. Questions for interviews were designed on best practices.

Second, the phenomenological approach varies with the participants, who provide profound and powerful information through which processes may be recognized by establishing themes that have come directly from the participants. In order to manage this limitation, I encouraged each individual in the study to explain her story as she answered the interview questions in a style that was sincere and without reluctance. Third, the findings from this study may not be generalized to other populations. The findings are limited to the population under study.

Significance

This study has potential to assist clinicians in gaining further clarity on the experiences of African American women age 40 and over in same-sex relationships who were previously in heterosexual relationships, and it may aid in the development of interventions and support networks (Thompson et al., 2009) to assist individuals who may be experiencing emotional duress due to the stressors associated with being in a same-sex relationship or the reactions of others (Thompson et al., 2009). Additionally, the study provides practitioners and scholars with information on the experiences of individuals who have entered same-sex relationships for the first time. The data collected

may lead to new therapeutic intervention techniques for practitioners and may create a clearer understanding of each individual woman's experiences (Bates, 2010).

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the problem of a lack of research on African American women aged 40 and older who are in same-sex relationships but were previously in heterosexual relationships. I provided the background of the study, a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the central research question, the theoretical framework, the nature of the study, definitions of terms used, limitations and the significance of the research, assumptions, and the scope and delimitations of the study. I described the sample of 10 participants from the northeastern part of the United States, each of whom had moved from a heterosexual coupling to a same-sex relationship. The research used a qualitative, phenomenological methodology that focused on the existential aspect of the population's lived experiences from participants' own reflections.

The results of this study may be useful by assisting clinicians and practitioners in assessing and developing interventions and additional supportive social services for women in need (Thompson et al., 2009). The second chapter provides a review of the literature and the theoretical and conceptual framework of my research study. Further, I clarify the theoretical and conceptual ideas undergirding this study as they relate to

understanding the essences of participant experiences and explaining the phenomenon of

interest.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

The purpose of this study was to examine the life experiences of African American women age 40 and over who had previously been in heterosexual relationships but were in same-sex relationships at the time of the study. This review of literature is presented through the lens of queer theory and social identity theory, which provided the conceptual framework for this study. This literature review also includes aspects of relationship dynamics and the phenomenon of same-sex relationships.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search strategy involved three processes: (a) searching databases, (b) visiting onsite library facilities, and (c) identifying keywords in the literature that led to a refined focus on specific keywords related to my study. The first step involved identifying related databases. I found the following databases to be relevant and to have peer-reviewed articles: Academic Search Complete, SocINDEX, LGBT Life, PsychINFO, PsycARTICLES, ERIC, and Central. I also searched the ProQuest database to review dissertations with similar content. Additionally, I visited the following venues to access their hard-copy volumes: City College of New York Library, Schomburg Center for Research Black Culture, The Lesbian Herstory Archives, and African American Women's History Resources at Rubenstein Library.

Finally, I selected articles based on their relevance and alignment with this study's conceptual framework by searching the aforementioned databases and facilities' archives using the following keywords: *African American history, African American women, African American lesbians, same-sex relationships, bisexual, gay, coming out, heterosexual, homosexual, religious beliefs, mental health, ethnicity, race, queer theory, social identity theory, transgender,* and *sexual orientation as it pertains to social identity and the phenomenon of coming out.* In the context of this study, *coming out* refers to a person disclosing his or her sexual orientation to others.

In this chapter, I provide an analysis of the literature and discuss the major themes that emerged on this topic. I present an examination of these themes as they relate to this study's research question. More specifically, research revealed the following themes: African American history as it relates to influencing African American women, African American women as an ethnic group, sexual orientation, homosexuality, significant relationships, coming out, homophobia, religion, and African American lesbians. Finally, I provide a summary of the major findings in this literature review.

Conceptual Framework

In this section, I examine queer theory and social identity theory as a foundation and conceptual framework for this study. These theories provide a context for the literature review and allow for addressing this study's research question specific to

African American women who were in heterosexual relationships but are now in same-sex relationships.

Classic Queer Theory

Jagose (1996) indicated that queer theory is not a fixed ideology of homosexual and heterosexual orientation; it goes beyond the scope of individual behavior. Turner's (2000) historical work noted that everyone in the universe is queer. In Turner's definition of queerness, he specified that fitting within a certain category is important to all individuals, regardless of sexual orientation. Turner provided different perspectives on the impact of queer theory and how gender and sexual identity is categorized through the lens of other theorists. Further, Turner explained that his work failed to fit neatly into any existing disciplinary category, as he sought to redefine what *queer* means.

Turner (2000) provided the conjunction of various strands in feminist and lesbian/gay thinking, offering an important element required to understand the perspective of African American lesbians. Of note, African American lesbians were found to experience prejudice because of their positions as expressed by their counterparts (both male and female). Therefore, these women faced double oppression based on their race and gender (Turner, 2000). African American (Black) feminists have noted that the idea of sexuality has proven to be complicated when it concerns women of this ethnic group. More specifically, these women face a double dilemma of encountering

homophobia from African American heterosexuals and racism from Caucasian lesbians (Turner, 2000). Accordingly, queer theory has been used to understand the dual oppression that could be experienced by African American women who are now in same-sex relationships but were previously in heterosexual relationships.

Queer Theory

Queer theory has evolved over the past few decades and has been widely used in different research domains, including sociology (Green, 2007), public health (Hays & Wood, 2011), and human services (Semp, 2011). Queer theory was first introduced during the mid-1980s, when it originated from feminist studies and feminist theory (Nicholson & Seidman, 1995). This theory is concerned with forms of sexuality that extend the scope of heterosexual behaviors to include what is sometimes known as *gender bending* (Nicholson & Seidman, 1995). Gender bending has been defined as nontraditional behaviors that are related to opposite conventional gender roles, such as the behaviors of a woman or a man who dresses or behaves like the opposite of his or her natal sex or gender (Nicholson & Seidman, 1995). More specifically, this may include behavior such as a female wearing socially accepted male clothing (Nicholson & Seidman, 1995). It is reasonable to assume that African American women in same-sex relationships may have to face biases in terms of their sexual orientation and partnership status and how they relate to and interact with other members of LGBTQ communities.

According to Blackburn (2010), queer theory involves any minority forms of sexuality. Queer theory and gender bending are each derivatives of feminist theory in which gender is a system of behaviors associated with one's orientation (Jagose, 1996). While queer theory may help to explain some homosexual and potentially bisexual orientations, it does not explain the experiences of African American women previously in heterosexual relationships but currently in same-sex relationships. A research gap remains in understanding each woman's personal experience as well as shared and common experiences across this population. Future research should inform helping professionals and mental health practitioners in order to help them provide needed support (Jagose, 1996). In this current study, however inadequate, queer theory has provided the theoretical lens to gain an understanding specific to this study's topic.

This theoretical lens may also help in understanding the variations of societal responses to same-sex relationships that are in contrast to responses to heterosexual relationships. Despite the prevalence of same-sex relationships in society, societal stigma and marginalization remain against individuals of differing sexual orientation, gender, and/or religious affiliation (Blackburn, 2010). Moreover, overwhelming factions of society still consider gay, lesbian, and bisexual orientation as a mental disorder, based on past but erroneous documentation by the American Psychological Association (Bates,

2010) stating that homosexuals were considered mentally ill. Examining queer theory's history and origin helps to partially explain this societal reaction.

Queer Theory Related to Minority Status and Feminist Theory

Queer theory is concerned with an individual's alternative lifestyle being perceived as a minority perspective (Blackburn, 2010). An interconnection exists between feminist and queer theories because of the identified guidelines that are based on a new ideology that has emerged regarding sexuality and gender (Richardson, McLaughlin, & Casey, 2006). The nexus between queer theory and feminist theory is that both theories are founded upon disenfranchisement, marginalization, and discrimination (Blackburn, 2010; Richardson, McLaughlin, & Casey, 2006).

This intersection between queer theory and feminist theory as it relates to African American women can be understood from the historical context of the work by Sojourner Truth (1850), who argued that if African American women were expected to work like men in the fields, then they should be granted equal rights (McKissack, 1994). Further, she indicated that this unequal treatment was flawed in perception (McKissack, 1994; Truth, 1850). Before the mid- to late 1980s, negative connotations were associated with being gay, lesbian, and queer. For example, words such as *faggot*, *lesbo*, *homo*, and *dyke* were negative and derogatory terms associated with a person's alternative lifestyle, in contrast to the terms *gay*, *lesbian*, *bisexual*, and *transgender* (Boyd, 2008). Based on

these findings, a logical connection appears between queer theory and feminist theory. Additionally, both theories are grounded in the context of discrimination, oppression, and alienation. Empirical investigation has shown that queer theory has been used as a foundation for French theory, which was primarily based on the French influence (Kollias, 2012). This theory provides this study with a lens to understand how an individual's alternative sexual lifestyle may be perceived as a minority status.

French Theory

The process of constructing known thoughts about sexuality and gender roles as counter from mainstream thought processes is referred to as *French theory*. According to Kollias (2012), French theory and queer theory represent the culmination of the works of scholars such as Foucault, Derrida with Sedgwick, and Lacan with Butler. Each of these scholars made major contributions to the study of transformation and other supporting ideas related to these theories and ideologies.

Kollias (2012) further posited that the nexus of French theory and American identity politics, combined with a historical context, created antihumanistic behavior toward this new identity or phenomenon of sexual orientation. The intersection between these two phenomena, French theory and American identity politics, is the grounding principle that conveys that certain individuals are viewed as a part of a group or classification of people and are viewed ideologically as being *different* (Kollias, 2012).

These groups do not necessarily need to belong to a political affiliation or party. Conflicting postures are present among scholars, including Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan, who do not agree about common political orientation (Kollias, 2012). These political orientations provide an understanding of how social, political, and human sexuality (differences) are connected through these baseline theories (Kollias, 2012). This theory provides a means to understand how my sample may be subjected to adverse social opinions about their sexuality and gender roles, as French theory indicates that their orientations may be considered counter from mainstream thought processes.

Other Applications of Queer Theory

After three decades of queer theory being in existence, Mieszkowski (2012) explained that many scholars have extended the use of queer theory to apply to studies outside the context of sexual orientation. This includes an assessment of personal ideas as well as political ideas (Mieszkowski, 2012). Moreover, these specific ideas are differentiated through thought processes concerning the sexuality and sexual orientation of many individuals and groups (Mieszkowski, 2012). Mieszkowski's study is relevant to my study in that it provides an understanding of the characteristics as well as the conflicting viewpoints associated with queer theory. In his study, 22 participants were identified as scholars in the field, and each scholar was queried on the distinction between sexual and nonsexual matters regarding queer thinking (Mieszkowski, 2012).

Mieszkowski found that individuals believed that they had the right to choose their behaviors and orientations.

Examining literature from a cultural perspective, Hasting and Hoover-Thompson (2011) focused more on a historical purview and placed greater emphasis on philosophical perspectives as they relate to sexual orientation. These researchers examined rural communities to understand what support systems were in place for lesbians, especially in the realm of mental health services. These authors explained the heteronormative (heterosexual ideology) standards that are prominent philosophies held by people in rural areas, which are also barriers for those who *come out* or disclose their orientation. Hasting and Hoover-Thompson found that, in general, women living in rural areas were subjected to stereotyping or taboos, especially in professional, religious, and personal domains. The researchers also indicated that a gap exists within professional mental health services, and, further, these services are not designed to meet the needs of the LGBT population or same-sex couples in society. Although the Hasting and Hoover-Thompson study provided insights on the importance of LGBT individuals having proper access to mental health and other support services, these authors fell short in providing a specific theoretical context for the study. In my study, I sought to apply both queer theory and social identity theory to examine similar characteristics. I used a sound theoretical basis to understand how women who had previously been married or in heterosexual

relationships but were in same-sex relationships at the time of the study decided to change their lifestyles.

Queer Theory and Black Feminists

Using a Black feminist approach, James (2011) provided an overview of African American girlhood in which queer theory was examined from a Black perspective. The author explored her own same-sex sexual desires through a qualitative narrative approach when conducting her personal research. She narrated her story of growing up and recalled experiences on the playground with a group of girls and boys in which she began to identify with her emerging sexuality as early as her elementary school years. However, she remained "undercover" until she was well into adulthood. Examining the impact of James's childhood experiences revealed the intertwined consciousness of queer theory. James's self-examination unleashed what others might define as *queer subjectivity*. The definition of queer subjectivity relates to the understanding of queerness as it represents how a marginalized group may be subjected to politicization. In her study, James explained American lesbians and the struggles they have had as members of the African American community, as well as the overwhelming biases they may face concerning same-sex marriages and relationships. Their relationships may be seen as disrespectful because they are not traditional relationships with men. Finally, James, a queer, Black, feminist scholar and social theorist, strove to give voice to other African American

women who are coming to terms with their own sexuality. James's study provided a narrative account of how experiences of being different/queer may begin as early as childhood or the elementary years. Further, this study provided critical insights on how women who are African American lesbians may have challenges in meeting traditional expectations of heterosexual marriage.

Lewis's (2011) Black queer feminist approach defined pedagogy, which pertains to what is prepared to be taught and what needs to be learned. Lewis identifies as a Black woman who is a lesbian, queer, a feminist, and an acknowledged teacher, living all these components to unite the embodiment of her whole self. Lewis's research addressed how working directly with students in the Black Women Study Program connected with all of the personal and professional components of being the same or having similar complexions. In my study, I went beyond the scope of complexion to the heart of the lived experiences of African American women who were previously in heterosexual relationships and are presently in same-sex relationships.

Puar (2007), on the other hand, combined transnational feminist ideology and queer theory (Morgensen, 2010). She argued that configurations of sexuality, race, gender, nation, class, and ethnicity were realigning in relation to contemporary forces of nationalism (Morgensen, 2010). In Puar's analysis, the pathway was open to view homonationalism during times when the term *queer* was popular and acceptable, even

though it was a negative term within the LGBT community (Morgensen, 2010).

According to Morgensen (2010), Puar's analysis developed the term *homonationalism*,

which relates to how racialized sexuality and national terror currently interact in society.

Additional empirical investigations have interpreted homonationalism as the terrorizing

sexual colonization that historically was a part of native people's biopolitical ideas of

modern sexuality and gender (Morgensen, 2010). In Puar's analysis, the term *biopolitics*

was defined as a new technology of power within the universe, which existed on

numerous levels within both physical and political bodies of population (Morgensen,

2010; Puar, 2007). In the next section, I explain how queer theory complements social

identity theory in the effort to understand women who were once in heterosexual

relationships but are now in same-sex relationships.

Social Identity Theory

In social identity theory, people tend to classify themselves and others by the

social group of which they are a part, such as age, gender, religion, and profession (Niles,

2013). Further, according to Tajfel (1982), the groupings are more prevalent during

certain time frames of people's lives. Tajfel's research was based on social perception

and intergroup conflict within the groups as well as social comparison. Social perception

is concerned with the ideals held by members of society when others' value judgments do

not align with the group (Tajfel, 1982). Intergroup conflict is concerned with individuals

within a group who hold similar core values but residual values differ, resulting in

conflict (Tajfel, 1982). Core values are the principles held by the group or individuals,

and these principles that have been developed by the group or individuals direct

behaviors and actions (Tajfel, 1982). This idea is opposed to residual values which are

defined as ideas that hold merit only as much as the group or individuals need them;

when the ideas do not serve a purpose, they are no longer needed (Tajfel, 1982).

Tajfel was the first theorist to offer social identity theory to the research

community. He advanced that, overall, the idea of belonging to a group is an important

factor in order to adapt socially in this society (Tajfel, 1982). Beatty and Kirby (2006)

supported Tajfel's findings by researching individuals who categorized themselves and

others based on the initial perception of social identity. The Beatty and Kirby (2006)

study was concerned with how stigma in the workplace influences invisible identity

groups, which include the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender populations and are

based on moral threat dimension. Beatty and Kirby described moral threat dimension as

a threat to one's self-concept as it relates to his or her sexual orientation. Society's

concept or the individual's concept can differ from the morals and core values of the

individual or of groups within society.

In their study, Beatty and Kirby found that in employment relationships, invisible

social identity phenomena are present which have adverse implications for employers and

LGBT employees. For example, these adversities may include discrimination by the employer and stressful implications for the affected LGBT employee (Beatty & Kirby, 2006). Additionally, the study found that despite the isolation within LGBT groupings and other identity groups, the diversity of those groups is noticeable by their peers (Beatty & Kirby, 2006).

In my current study, I seek to determine if African American women in same-sex relationships who were previously involved in heterosexual relationships, identify as a separate group, experience similar phenomenon of discrimination, and/or are exposed to social isolation as with the LGBT women (Beatty & Kirby, 2006). Going beyond this idea, other negative phenomenon may exist in the workplace for individuals from the LGBT population, such as sexual orientation harassment, which has been overlooked in many cases (Fox & Lituchy, 2012). According to Fox and Lituchy (2012) only a limited amount of legal protection is in place for those who have, in the past, experienced sexual orientation harassment within the workplace. Congruent with the LGBT groups, other groups have also been discriminated against in the workplace. Beatty and Kirby's (2006) study indicated that 25 to 66% of respondents were exposed to some type of discrimination, including job denial and job loss (Beatty & Kirby, 2006). These authors concur with Tajfel's (1982) work on social identity theory, in that they, too, believe that social groups have both invisible and visible social identities.

Cripps (2011) explained that social identity theory has different levels within the human existence. A key element of this theory is based on the context of sexual prejudice that is engrained in elements of society. For example, discrimination against individuals based on their sexual orientation is embedded in laws that affect same-sex parents who seek to adopt children in certain states such as North Carolina (Maxwell, 2014). Hall and LaFrance (2012) expounded upon this theory, indicating that gender identity, homophobic behavior, masculinity, and sexual prejudice are the main influences that form social identity as it relates to social norms. Social prejudice may be a reason that social identity theory can be used to examine African American women who move from heterosexual relationships to same-sex relationships and to understand their perceptions of sexual prejudice as well as how their social identity is possibly influenced based on external factors (Hall & LaFrance, 2012). Further, social identity theory may perhaps give a complete overview of the experiences of this population. However, other same-sex relationships can also be examined for stereotypes and other unfavorable undertones. Social groups are impacted by overwhelming interpretations of how society views their individual groupings.

Ferguson (2013) posited that gender has to be fully examined in order to understand systems of social identity and how they can be perceived as negatively connotative towards a social group. Conversely, Bates (2010) argued that a social

identity aligned with homosexuality is often not accepted in America and is seen as stereotypical when it concerns same-sex relationships. With regards to African American women, the fear of disgrace that may occur when moving from one lifestyle to another can be overwhelming to one's personal self (Bates, 2012). According to Bates (2012), an impact is felt on women's psychological, religious, sociological, and professional selves when they cannot express who they really are on all levels. Bates also stressed how overwhelming this can be for individuals because the psychological and sociological impact that it has on the self may cause problems in coping with their sexuality, and, ultimately, their sexual orientation. Nevertheless, (Bates, 2012) provided insight into the idea of social identity and homosexuality when moving from one relationship style to another, as my study seeks to understand.

Thompson, Forsyth, and Langley (2009) noted that women in same-sex relationships have many things to consider when leaving, what is known to society, as a traditional relationship. They must consider the impacts to their finances, social networks, and the possible societal stigmas associated with running the household. More specifically, women have earned less income than their male counterparts; therefore, when becoming head of a same-sex household, their earnings are potentially reduced (Thompson et al., 2009). According to Thompson et al. many bisexual or lesbian women married men because they had an overwhelming need to be married; these desires

outweighed their sexual orientation. Therefore, their true feelings were left suppressed due to societal biases and the need to be in a relationship that was seen as acceptable. Further, my existing study on the examination of African American women in same-sex relationships can be supported by both studies.

Social identity theory is enlightened by influences that society has placed on individuals and groups, identifying individuals of different orientation in diverse groupings or categories (Angelini & Bradley, 2010; Niles, 2013). According to Morrison (2010), social identity is an important concept when analyzing in-groups or out-groups as they relate to sexual orientation among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities. In-groups were defined in Morrison's study as a group in which a person is a member at birth (e.g., race or ethnic group) as opposed to the out-group that is consciously chosen by the group member. Niles (2013) noted that same-sex led families, were seen as an outside group which has been deemed as deviant in certain social groups. Contrastingly, Banana and Murphy (2009) indicated that a deviant behavior is not the same in all groups because individual behaviors are based on the individual self whereas group behavior is a learned, social behavior. Therefore, each individual has to stand for himself or herself because different people have different ideas on how others should behave, whether negatively or positively (Banana et al., 2009). In my study, the experiences of African American women have been impacted by social groups which, in

turn, affect their assumed behaviors when concerning same-sex relationships. The idea is to give an overview of historical concepts based on the African American woman and sexual orientation. In the succeeding portion of my study, the literature that has been reviewed relates directly to the key components that correlate with American African women in same-sex relationships who were previously in a heterosexual relationship and who are age 40 and older.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

This section provides an overview of African American history as it relates to this topic. This section also describes literature specific to African American women and their experiences with the phenomenon of being in same-sex and heterosexual relationships. Sexual orientation is examined from a homosexual perspective. To provide a context for this study, a general discussion specific to relationships is covered. Finally, the term "coming out" and topics of homophobia, religion, and African American lesbianism are described.

African American History

In order to discuss African American women, a brief overview of how, historically, conditions and the lack available mates may have influenced African American women in transitioning from opposite-sex relationships to same-sex relationships. The 17th century marked the period in which the African slave trade

contributed to the diaspora of African men who were taken away from families to be used as laborers (Strickland & Weems, 2001). According to Strickland and Weems's (2001) seminal work, a great difference occurred in the male to female ratio which interfered with building cohesive family and community amongst the African population in the United States. However, it was noted that by the 18th century, the gender ratio evened. The North American slaves, unlike those in other countries, were sustaining their population through reproduction (Strickland & Weems, 2001). From this historical perspective, it can be surmised that procreation between heterosexual African Americans was not only a tradition or perhaps a preference, but rather a business strategy and a norm coerced by Europeans slave owners (Gorrhermer, 2003). This historical reflection provides insights on how integrated and long-standing the expectation of heterosexual relationships has been an influence in the African American community and its respective history.

African American Women

Past studies on African Americans have been underrepresented in the literature. More specifically, the examination of African American women's experiences has been covered less than their Caucasian American counterparts (Strickland & Weems, 2001). Since the 1960s, the introduction to new scholarship and concepts was developed in the history of American women; however, no systematic attempts were made to study or

write about African American women (Clarke, 2011; Strickland & Weems, 2001). According to Strickland and Weems's, a scholarly dialogue about race needs to be generated and included in the research literature. Furthermore, Brooks Higginbotham (1989) argued that African American women were still without a voice in research and were largely unheard (Strickland & Weems, 2001). Consequently, the scholarship on African Americans and, specifically, African American women, fails to recognize their history as critical components that contribute to understanding the current state of African American women's lives (Strickland &Weems, 2001; Higginbotham, 1989).

In his book, *Articulating Rights*, Parker (2010) discussed the interrelated reforms for which several women fought from a race and gender perspective in order to have and enjoy, equally, the rights that are enjoyed by men. The subject of race, gender, class, and religion are still as relevant today as they were during the 19th century (Parker, 2010). According to Clarke (2011), at present, African American women have new concerns that extend beyond African American women's experiences with sexism, racism, or classism; these include issues such as education and employment challenges. Unlike the 1920s, when African Americans became a more popular culture because of the early reforms that marked that period for women in general, at this present time African American women are seen as a double negative in society, meaning they are minorities, both as Africans and as women (Chapman, 2012). To cope, religion was sought as the most

positive component within African American communities. However, even religious factions held limitations and unequal treatment towards women, in that women could not hold official offices within the church (Chapman, 2012). Therefore, many African American women imitated the role of their male counterparts as a means of being accepted (Chapman, 2012; Dyson, 2003).

Clarke (2011) provided an overview of college-educated African American women and the barriers that they face in managing a family and maintaining a romantic relationship. Being an African American or Black woman is very complicated because many Black people have been classified as second-class citizens in this country in the past as well as in the present. Therefore, to be both a female and Black is to be at a great disadvantage according to Clarke (2011).

Clarke (2011) did find that while education has created opportunities for African American women, racism and sexism are still prevalent in society (Clarke, 2011). While racism is a clear inequality, it extends greater than prejudice to a level that influences feelings of inferiority and a lack of worthiness; consequently, African American women are marginalized as American citizens (Clarke, 2011). According to Clarke (2011), the historical images of African American women are based on negative stereotypes; therefore, society, in general, expects for these women to conform to negative behaviors, whether true or false. Taken together, the aforementioned authors suggested that being

an African American female has possible adverse consequences in itself. First, the literature is scant, which may distort the view and understanding of this ethnic group. Second, the existing literature conveys a double-standard, and marginalization of these women may be a common experience. Finally, this phenomenon of disadvantage for these women has existed in a historical as well as a current-day context.

However, from the pre-civil war to the post-civil war years, women have been historically creating new avenues which include a positive intellectual, political, and cultural development of social groups for Black women which are now considered African American clubs or sororities (Parker, 2010). These groups help to focus attention on and demand more federal laws as a key element in fighting the issues that Black and White women have had to face, historically, in order to be heard across the country. Groups such as the National American Women Suffrage Association (NAWSA) established laws that would declare racism and sexism as inhumane, stating that every person should be treated equally (Parker, 2010; Cade, 1970).

Other advocates for African American women include Shirley Chisholm, who was elected to the New York State Assembly 50 years ago, in 1968. Ms. Chisholm became the first Black woman to be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. She replaced James Farmer, the former leader of the Congress of Racial Equality (Gotthermer, 2003). Chisholm created the National Organization for Women (NOW) and

the National Women's Political Caucus (Gotthermer, 2003). In addition to those accomplishments, when in 1972 the Equal Rights Amendment was enacted, Chisholm addressed the House of Representatives saying that "discrimination against women, solely on the basis of their sex, is so widespread that it seems to many persons as being normal, natural, and right" (Gotthermer, 2003, p. 340). She expressed the idea that prejudice based on the grounds of religious or political beliefs has become a minor problem in our society. Prejudice on the basis of race is, at least, under systematic attack due to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Gotthermer, 2003).

The Gay Movement and the African American Lesbian

African American women have played significant roles in developing their roles as women in the United States. However, their spiritual selves have been developed on different levels (Brice, 2011). On one hand, older and seasoned African American women have contributed to their personal development and growth by creating new journeys for young African American women to follow; on the other hand, they hide behind religious traditions regarding their own sexual orientation (Barnes & Meyer, 2012). According to Rev. Delores Jackson, lesbian and gay individuals need a positive meeting place other than bars to communicate their personal, spiritual, and racial selves (Lesbian Herstory Arch, 1982). Accordingly, before the gay rights movements of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, African American gays had no voice. According to Chwalik

(2012), racism was a clear topic among the gay communities as well as the heterosexual communities. However, White gays were not a part of the Black gay world, leaving yet another void in the literature (Lesbian Herstory Arch, 1982). African American women need to be researched in order to establish an understanding of who they are as well as to let others know how they identify within the community. The gay movement was the start of opening a new door to recognize the African American lesbian on all levels.

Clearly, during earlier years both women and men were unfairly classified as gay, without a differentiation between labels such as lesbian, transgender, or transsexuals (Lesbian Herstory Arch, 1982). Findings indicated that because of this lack of consensus specific to defining gay history and to understanding the variations between groups, a need arose to explain the differences between males and females who are considered homosexual (Chapkis,1986). Despite using the same terms for all gay people who are in same-sex relationships or who are attracted to the same-sex, women may prefer to be recognized as lesbian (Chapkis, 1986). Further, according to Chapkis (1986), African American gay women should be described in an even different way. Accordingly, race has been a major factor in determining how African American women are described. An example of race factoring into descriptions occurs when delineating society's idea of what is deemed beautiful. What was beautiful to the White man was considered important, and that definition of beauty was solely applied to Southern white women

during the era of slavery (Chapkis, 1986). These types of definitions continued to be

prevalent. Consistent with this analogy is the description of homosexuality. African

American gay females as well as gay men were not considered positive images (Chapkis,

1986).

Within the gay movement were identifications such as "femme" and "butch" that

became a part of the new culture within the gay community (Lesbian Herstory Arch,

1986). As with the 1950s and 1960s, femmes and butches were in an overwhelming

transformative status because racism was still a major issue with women of color

(Chapkis, 1986). Although these historical reflections provide insight on how race and

gender may influence perceptions of worthiness and value for both African American

women and gays, these studies fall short in providing a specific understanding of my

sample of women. Specifically, this literature provides a general insight on the

experiences of marginalization for the aforementioned groups.   However, the specifics

related to women who were in heterosexual relationships and are now in same-sex

relationships are not discussed in these historical findings. Therefore, to have a study that

focuses on the inclusion criteria for this study's sample is necessary.

The African American Gay Movement

Consistent with the "Gay Liberation" movement in New York City, African

American gays in the 1980s made great strides in achieving equal social status with other

cultures specific to issues of racism among homosexuals and the disrespectful attitudes

that heterosexuals presented (Chapkis, 1986). As with the gay community in the 1990s,

the next steps were to enhance relations that fostered a political voice concerning gay

rights, especially among the business community in the State of New York (Colucci-

Coritt, 2005). Consistent with these themes, the gay movement opened the doors for the

LGBTQ communities to implement same-sex marriages and address other issues, such as

health care and adoption (Maxwell, 2014; Colucci-Coritt, 2005). The African American

women who are among the LBGTQ communities still face many hardships because of

what their communities might think about their sexual orientation. This philosophy may

influence them on all levels of their development which includes personal, professional,

religious, and mental development (Niles, 2013). As stated earlier in this section, African

American women, in general, have been subjected to continuous struggles within their

own culture as well as in society. Additionally, this review of the literature indicated that

although these women may have roots and support networks within religious groups and

spiritually-based organizations, these factions may not be favorable towards same-sex

relationships. Finally, expectations of heterosexuality are the norm and have deep roots in

the African American culture. These expectations have been found to extend to the

familial views on same-sex relationships which may have an adverse emotional and

social impact on these women.   Additionally, these women have been defined as less

than beautiful, according to Caucasian male standards, and further, they have been ill-defined, and their identities as lesbian females have been conflated with other categories of gay definitions. The lack of clarity and a paucity of recent literature on the topic of African American women in same-sex relationships who were in previous heterosexual relationships leads to a need to conduct my study. The next section focuses on the literature specific to sexual orientation as it relates to my topic.

Homosexuality

Homosexuality is a term used to define individuals who are in romantic relationships or have a sexual attraction to members of the same sex (APA, 2009). This term is commonly known as same-gender or same-sex orientation. This definition is based on the cultural lifestyle and relationships of same-sex couples (Colucci-Coritt, 2005; Ducharme & Kollar, 2012; Okun, 1996). Homosexuality has been associated with a negative stereotype that reduces an individual's identity to their sexual behavior rather than looking at the individual as a whole (APA, 2009). The terms "lesbian," "gay," and "bisexual" are all considered terms that identify with being homosexual, as well as being a part of that culture and identity (APA, 2009).

In contrast, Massey (2009) described heterosexual identification as an attraction to the opposite sex that is considered more positively by many in society. This sexual preference is accepted in society as the majority rather than the minority (Massey, 2009).

Historically, many individuals have been influenced by society to believe that relationships are based on the concept of procreation, meaning that man was designed or created for woman and visa-versa to produce children (Konik & Stewart, 2004). The philosophy that relationships are developed from a different perspective than heterosexual relationships is discussed in the next section. Further, these sections lend an understanding of the complexities and variations in relationship configurations and reactions to them, such as homophobia and religious views.

Heterosexual and Same-Sex Relationships in Context

"Relationship" is defined as the connection of two or more people or concepts as well as the state of being connected (Signorella & Cooper, 2011; Merriam- Webster, 2010). In this research study, I have used the reference "relationship" as referring to how couples engage in partnerships, whether those partnerships are same-sex or heterosexual configurations. When examining the impact that same-sex relationships have on African American women, many variables concerning the transitioning period were involved when changing lifestyles (Thompson et al., 2009). Consequently, many struggles were on both sides of the relationships and affected many individuals, not just the persons in the same-sex relationships (Thompson et al., 2009). As with the ideology of relationships based on heterosexual phenomenon as opposed to same-sex relationships, how the

differences are injected into society's ideas or feelings on what is the right relationship to have is interesting to study (Bates, 2010).

According to Thompson et al. many bisexual or lesbian women married men because they had an overwhelming need to be married; the desires outweighed their sexual orientation. Therefore, their true feelings were left "bottled up" due to societal biases and the need to be in a relationship that was seen as acceptable (Thompson et al., 2009). Thompson et al. posited that women in same-sex relationships have many things to consider when leaving what society calls traditional relationships, such as finances, social issues, and sexual stigmas that are attached to women running households. In contrast, according to Reeves and Horne (2009), same-sex relationships are currently growing in acceptability, but social support systems are not as prevalent. Other relationships may include lesbian, gay, and bisexual couples who are connected emotionally or physically, but are still considered sexual minorities (Reeves & Horne, 2009).

Some relationships include individuals who were in opposite-sex relationships and are now in same-sex relationships. For example, Boon and Alderson (2009) described, in their phenomenological study, a sample of women who were in same-sex relationships and were previously married to men. They noted that only one-third of the women identified as lesbians (Boon & Alderson, 2009). The above studies highlight

variations in relationship configurations and expose the many challenges that non-mainstream pairings may bring. Additionally, the previously mentioned studies convey how prejudice and stereotypes exist when relationships do not conform to the majority status. These reactions to couples' preferences may bring about stress and emotional responses for affected couples.

Specifically, Reeves and Horne (2009) found that higher stress levels exist among women who are in same-sex relationships. For example, those who were first-timers in same-sex relationships encountered greater stress levels than those who were previously exposed to these types of relationship in the past (Reeves & Horne, 2009). These researchers found that different levels of relationship satisfaction and social support were received (Reeves & Horne, 2009).

The study by Boon and Alderson (2009) revealed that lesbians and lesbian couples relate themselves as being in same-sex relationships as well as women who are in intimate and sexual relationships with other women, regardless of the various, related self-definitions. This study also indicated that women in lesbian, same-sex relationships reported positive satisfaction more than their gay male or heterosexual counterparts (Boon & Alderson, 2009). In this same study, the authors found that women in same-sex relationships found new openness and happiness in their relationship styles (Boon & Alderson, 2009). Notably, the literature conveyed that not many role models in our

society are open about being in same-sex relationships (Boon & Alderson, 2009; Spitalnick & McNair, 2005). Accordingly, many women in same-sex relationships feel that others believe that their bond is based on their sexual orientation rather than one that is influenced by a successful relationship as compared to the difficulties heterosexual couples face (Boon & Alderson, 2009; Spitalnick & McNair, 2005; Fisher 1993). Based on this literature, it appears that the lack of same-sex role models may influence how these women view and interpret their successes or failures in their relationships.

All relationships experience some type of problems. As with the experiences of women who were in heterosexual relationships, a universal problem that arises is in the area of communication (Boon & Alderson, 2009). According to Heiman, Long, Smith, Fisher, Sand, and Rosen (2011), a couple's relationship appears to be connected to their quality of life, health, and personal satisfaction.

In Bancroft, Long, and McCabe's (2011) article on sexual well-being, they compared African American women (*n*=251) to Caucasian women (*n*= 544), between the ages of 20 to 65, who were in heterosexual relationships for at least a 6-month period. The study focused on women's sexual well-being—how each woman assessed her sexual relationship and her own feelings of sexuality (Bancroft, Long, & McCabe, 2011).The authors found that African American women evaluated themselves in a more positive view than Caucasian women. Hence, relationships are seen from all points of view and in

all types of configurations. The literature suggests that relationships extend beyond

sexual orientation, and the race of these partnerships appears to always factor how these

couples are perceived (Cunningham & Melton, 2013).

Stereotypes are also factors that influence both heterosexual and homosexual

relationships (Signorella & Cooper, 2011). Ahmetoglu, Swami, and Chamarro-Premuzio

(2010) found that love in all relationships remains an elusive psychological construct that

is the main dynamic in all relationships. Finally, love is typically the human emotion that

starts a connection for most people. As with many relationships, certain dimensions,

including love, personality, and physical attractions contribute to establishing a bond,

whether same-sex or opposite-sex (Ahmetoglu et al., 2010).

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the variations in relationship

configurations. I discussed how research on traditional or heterosexual relationships may

apply to same-sex relationships; however, the literature is scant on this topic. I further

discussed how the literature conveyed that role models may be important for couples in

same-sex relationships and, in the future, these role models may help them to understand

that successful relationships are founded upon more than sexual orientation. The general

literature helped to provide an understanding of same-sex relationships of other ethnic

groups, but the information was limited on African American women in same-sex

relationships. The next section expands the literature focus by covering the term, *coming*

out. This section provides an overview of how these terms relate to how individuals express and reveal their sexual orientation to other people, and it also conveys the importance of this disclosure.

Coming Out

The societal problems created by using a term such as "homosexuality" establishes many variables and associated connotations. Of these variations of labels, "coming out" is one of most researched (Davis, 2011). According to Davis, many reasons exist for why African American women do not discuss their orientations with others or convey their inner thoughts on sexuality or coming out. This is because of their negative experiences throughout their history (Davis, 2011). Self-identification does not necessarily coincide with same-sex relationship disclosure nor does lesbian identity correspond with coming out.

In the context of this study, coming out refers to how African American women and others disclose their sexual orientation to others. Additionally, this term refers to how individuals come to terms with their sexual orientation, and, in some cases, it exposes a person to a society that still holds prejudice against his or her orientation (Daley, 2012). Aligned with this description, the Human Rights Campaign (2013) indicated that coming out is when an individual discloses his or her sexual orientation to another individual. This process may create a reaction from all levels of the community,

including religious and professional organizations as well as from personal relationships for both men and women (Davis, 2011). Many stressors may be associated with coming out. Specifically, being honest, especially about a person's sexual identity, may bring about negative reactions from society (Daley, 2011).

African American women, who come out may face many other stresses, especially from the church or religious organizations (Boon & Alderson, 2009). Additionally, they may face opposition from family and friends and in their professional environments (Boon & Alderson, 2009). Being a minority on multiple levels can be a major problem and a major stressor because African American women may have already been exposed to marginalization and discrimination which adds to the complexity of being judged for their preference in identifying as being lesbian or bisexual women (Boon & Alderson, 2009). According to Boon and Alderson, the coming out process is referred to as "lesbian identity management" which is an on-going process that relates to self-disclosure. Typically, the coming out process is a life-long process because of the negative stigmas and concepts associated with sexual orientation (Boon & Alderson, 2009). Shame, stress, fear, and a sense of isolation go along with letting others know one's true self (Boon & Alderson, 2009). In summary, an analysis of the previous literature reveals that coming out is one of the concerns that might hinder African American women in same-sex relationships. Revealing their orientation to others may be overwhelming on a personal,

professional, and spiritual level. Moreover, to reveal their sexual orientation to others may be challenging and subject them to judgment, whether from family or society. Therefore, it appears reasonable to assume that African American females may be faced with many dilemmas pertaining to their choice to come out.

Chwalik (2012) provided an understanding of the challenges of women from the South who have faced these dilemmas. This study was conducted in the southern region of the United States. This phenomenological study focused on women coming out. To understand their experiences, Chwalik used semi-structured interviews to capture their individual stories. Study participants were native southern women, living in a rural or urban setting during their coming out process (Chwalik, 2012). The participants in the study were all over the age of 18 and were African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic (Chwalik, 2012).

All 9 women provided descriptions of their lived experiences of coming out, specifically in the states of Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, and North Carolina (Chwalik, 2012). According to Chwalik, all the women in the study expressed their difficulties of coming out in the South and how, living in southern jurisdictions, they were heavily influenced by traditions such as religion, race, prejudice, and social class. This study clearly shows that certain biases and homophobia exist about same-sex relationships in the southern part of

United States. The challenges faced by these women consisted of rejection and criticism from family (Chwalik, 2012). The author concluded that the South was still impoverished and was the least-educated region specific to understanding same-sex relationships in the United States (Chwalik, 2012).

Chwalik (2012) also noted that southern people continue to fight to keep women, African Americans, and poor Caucasians at a disadvantage. In the South, the Caucasian male still dominates as controlling and powerful in all aspects, including private memberships to exclusive clubs and gated communities as a means of class division (Chwalik, 2012). The caste system still appears to be a major factor in southern conservativeness, and racism lingers as a leftover from the old South (Chwalik, 2012).

Chwalik's (2012) research provides the present study with a perspective of how women in same-sex relationships are viewed. However, her research was in a southern jurisdiction of the United States and, further, her sample was comprised primarily of Caucasians women. My study has used queer and social identity theories to specifically study African American females and provide an additional viewpoint and geographical location in the Northeast region of the United States. Chwalik's study is relevant to my recent study because it identifies a similar population of women in a phenomenological approach to sexuality and gender. Chwalik referred to the lack of diversity as a limitation

and an undercurrent for additional research. I extended this research to focus on

understanding same-sex relationships from the perspectives of African-American women.

Homophobia

Sexual prejudice may be described as an overwhelming bias in the United States

as well universally. Homophobia expresses prejudices and an irrational fear of lesbian,

gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals (Miller, Wagner, & Hunt, 2012). Congruently,

individuals may have associated fears that extend beyond emotional responses and

possibly bring about other negative interactions associated with one's personal feelings of

sexual prejudice. According to Miller, et al. (2012), sexual prejudice is associated with

interrelated views on religion, family, friends, and the workplace. According to Miller, et

al. heterosexism is a sexually-based stigma that is concerned with non-heterosexual

behaviors being labeled as negative and powerless (Herek, 2010). As with the term

homophobia, the definition has negative connotations and views toward homosexual or

bisexual orientations (Miller, Wagner, & Hunt, 2012; Herek, 1999; Herek 2010). Sexual

prejudices may overlap with other prejudicial behaviors such as race and gender. As long

as this behavior continues, research is needed on this phenomenon. Nevertheless,

homosexuality is now seen as morally acceptable by the majority of people.

According to Lippa (2012), sexual orientation goes beyond attraction of one

person to another to include other definitions. For example, Hoang, Holloway, and

Mendoza (2011) posed that biphobia is an issue that has to be addressed when discussing

bisexual identity. Biphobia is prejudice against bisexuals. As with bisexual individuals,

with biphobia, validations from the heterosexual or lesbian/gay communities are not

forthcoming, and, in many cases, bisexuals are often met with pathological stereotypes

(Hoang et al., 2011). Commonly, many individuals are not aware of the many phobias

concerning sexual orientations, except homophobia. However, research shows that other

related phobias are present in the LGBT communities (Cripps, 2011). This lack of

knowledge and misinformation leads to using the term "queer" in the United States, in

relationship to the ideas of homonormative, nationalism, or homonationalism (Morgensen,

2010).

When examining the impact of sexual prejudice, it has been viewed from different

angles with labels such as "queer subject" as well as "homophobia," "biophobia," and

"transphobia." These ideas display negative connotations about this population (Riggs &

Patterson, 2009). According to Riggs and Patterson (2009), discrimination against non-

heterosexual and non-gender specific individuals are handled in a more sophisticated

manner than in the past. While clearly transgender people are treated prejudicially, this

appears to be the new homosexual prejudice as opposed to bisexual people being ignored

or seen as invisible (Riggs & Patterson, 2009). Riggs and Patterson's research in "The

Smiling Faces of Contemporary Homophobia and Transphobia" really focused on terms

such as "That's so gay." Many might see this as positive term, a breakthrough in society, but it is actually "insulting." These new variations of homophobia do not really change the complex idea that enactment is still negative in reality (Riggs & Patterson, 2009). Research supports that homophobia and sexual prejudices are still high on the list of discrimination and stereotypes. Even though many people state that they are not opposed to another's sexual orientation, some individuals still feel threatened by people who have different sexual interests than their own (Cripps, 2011).

The African American community has had overlapping negative information concerning discrimination against the LGBTQ population (Barton, 2010). The Christian Bible guides the American idea of what is right and wrong, and in the African American community, this is no different (Barton, 2010). Psychological distresses among African Americans are prevalent. The implications have suggested that discrimination may contribute to poor mental health among the race (Chae, Lincoln, & Jackson, 2011). These same allegations could suggest that African American women in same-sex relationships are overwhelmed with their community's biases against their life choices, and mental health issues become a factor in their decision to disclose their sexual preferences. Chae, Lincoln, and Jackson (2011) used the National Survey of American Life (2001-2003) which gives an overview on how the African American community is affected by discrimination, attribution, and racial group identification. The purpose of the NSAL

(2001-2003) was to get an understanding of American life from different perspectives, and the African American or Black American was one of the components in the survey. The African American community is overwhelmed with many issues, but for women in same-sex relationships, they have a day-to-day struggle to be open. Homophobia does exist which can be seen as a double negative because African Americans do not want to be discriminated against on a whole, but when the words "lesbian," "gay," "bisexual," and "transgender" are heard, the homophobic flag rises.

In summary, the various names and labels associated with homophobia and other classifications, may or may not be harmful or hurtful to the subjects. In order to establish an appropriate focus and research direction, words used in the current study must also be selective. For example, using the words such as "race," "relationship," and "sex orientation" had to be defined as well as addressed to establish a baseline understanding of their meaning, application, and potential connotations. All of these words have an impact on this study, including additional words such as "heterosexual," "homosexual," "bisexual," "homophobia," "sexual identity," "gay," "lesbian," and "transgender." These terms have been discussed throughout my study. An important point that maybe overlooked is that African Americans face homophobia within the community because of the Bible and other documentation indicating that being in homosexual or same-

relationships is not proper. Religion is another important element for some of the

participants. This topic is discussed below.

Religion

When examining the impact that religion may have on the African American

culture, evidence supports that women in same-sex relationships may hold strong,

religious beliefs (Niles, 2013). In Niles's (2013) study on African American adolescent

males who were living with lesbian parents, one of the main topics covered in the study

was the importance that Black churches hold in the community and, further, how

individuals are influenced by the teachings of the church. According to Niles's the Black

church can be either positive or negative for families that are headed by same-sex

parents. This depends on how these families are received by the church. As previous

research suggested, the Black church has influenced communities in many cases on how

accepting they have been in regards to same-sex groups (Manley-Johnson, 2013). The

Black church, as an institution, has been one of the most valued sources within the

culture, due to the historical context in which it was held during the slavery era (Niles,

2013). Niles's also noted that the Black church is the primary element that is used as

informal, social control in the family unit. Additionally, certain traditions are embraced

by the African American culture concerning the church, regardless of geographical

differences (e.g. northern, eastern, southern, and western parts of the United States).

Black churches have held a prominent position within their culture and community for hundreds of years. For example, during the 1700s, Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, the founders of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, began a movement of fostering strong community organizations which provided both spiritual and political leadership, especially during and after the civil rights era (White, 2013; Donahoo & Caffey, 2010). In brief, the church provided a means of supporting political movements' particular to human rights as well as offering traditional clergy support for traditions such as marriages, funerals, and baptisms.

When examining the influence of religion on the African American community, social identity theory helps to provide an understanding of how spirituality is individualized (Cripps, 2011). According to Cripps (2011), religion is a powerful source that connects social identity because identity is a derivative from different experiences and from within different levels within certain social groups. Religion is considered one of the most profound elements that many individuals follow. From the oldest noted religions, Taoism and Daoism, to Christianity to Islam, these known religions have had the ability to connect individuals together in alignment with a higher power, which is known as God or the Lord. However, a dichotomy exists, in that although religion tends to create a bond within groups, African American women in same-sex relationships may refrain from this bonding because, if they expose their true identities, they may be

exposed to ridicule and negativity (Niles, 2013). Although religion can be a sustaining

factor for African American women in same-sex relationships, it may also be a source of

judgment and negativity against their individual preferences. This situation appears to

present a dilemma for these women in obtaining spiritual support that should be further

understood. My study has sought to understand the experiences of religion as well as

other factors of social identity.

Homosexuality has been "frowned upon" in the Black church compared to other

ethnic groups (Niles, 2013). Research has documented how discrimination against

individuals in same-sex relationships has occurred in a religious context (Cripps, 2011).

Research supports that same-sex relationships are not accepted in the Christian ideology

because it is against the teaching of the Holy Bible (Cripps, 2011). Over the past century,

Christian philosophy has declared homosexuality as a non-favorable notion because

heterosexual perceptions are based on biblical and legal ideologies (Cripps, 2011). Some

research on sexual prejudice that relates to women in same-sex relationships indicated

that Christian groups do discriminate; therefore, many women in non-heterosexual

relationships disconnect from religious groups (Cripps, 2011). Lapinski and Mc Kirnan

(2013) studied Christian upbringing and found it may hinder same-sex individuals from

accepting an identity as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Additionally, the authors found that a

substantial difference does not exist between old and new Christian ideology concerning

gay identities (Lapinski & McKirnan, 2013). An individual may base his or her entire life, to a great extent, on religious beliefs. In some cases it can be very overwhelming when a person's beliefs are not consistent with his or her religious ideologies. This may cause unhappiness for individuals who are in same-sex relationships.

Heterosexual and Same-Sex Relationships

The literature is limited on the topic of women who were previously in heterosexual relationships and then committed to a same-sex partner. Of the limited studies, Boon and Alderson's (2009) research was concerned with older women who were once in heterosexual relationships but are now in same-sex relationships. These researchers examined 10 women who were at one time married to men, but are now in same-sex relationships. These women asserted that having an opposite-sex relationship can be just as complicated as having a same-sex relationship. Many explanations have been posited on why both types of relationships may have difficulties. However, findings indicated that women in these relationships encounter many challenges because of heterosexism, homophobia, and the intensity of the socioeconomic status change (Boon &Alderson, 2009).

In their study, Boon and Alderson used a snowball sampling approach to recruit women for their sample. They used a phenomenological approach because it is expressive and illustrative in nature, and it was important for them to examine the social

context concerning women who were in opposite-sex relationships, now in same-sex relationships. Of the 10 women included in the sample, their ages ranged from 39 to 61 years of age. Two of the ten women were married to each other; three were married to female partners who did not want to be a part of the study, and the remaining five were not married to their current partners (Boon and Alderson, 2009).

Data collection involved participants answering 11 semi-structured and open-ended interview questions in a comfortable setting (Boon & Alderson, 2009). Next, the data was analyzed using the phenomenological analysis technique; the transcriptions were reviewed several times by the authors, and each woman was given a copy to make sure that it was correct (Boon & Alderson, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). This analysis revealed that similarities exist between same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. Some participants in the study described universal issues that all couples face, such as communication challenges and interpersonal conflict as well as dilemmas specific to sexual routines and behaviors.

These authors provided key insight to the current study in helping me understand the commonalities shared across the domains of same-sex versus opposite-sex relationships (Boon and Alderson, 2009). Although this study provided an understanding of how a phenomenological approach using social identity theory can be used to understand women's experiences when they were in same heterosexual relationships but

are now in same sex relationships, this study did not use queer theory as a part of their framework (Boon & Alderson, 2009). Additionally, social identity was used as a concept rather than as a part of their theoretical framework. My study has filled this knowledge gap by using both queer theory and social identity theory to understand African American women in this type of relationship.

Summary

This literature review connected the theoretical perspective as well as other relevant conceptual ideas that relate to my qualitative design, which examines an existential phenomenological approach concerning the life experiences of African American women age 40 and over who have left heterosexual relationships and who are now in same-sex relationships.   Additionally, this chapter provided an in-depth analysis of African American history as it relates to understanding the African American woman. Further, an examination of the gay movement and the African American lesbian was discussed. Next, women's sexual orientations were examined, and the marginalization and oppression that women experience in their gender roles were contrasted and compared in the literature. Sexual orientation was explored from several perspectives. Challenges and issues related to this phenomenon were conveyed. Homosexuality, relationships, and the concept of "coming out" was presented and various research perspectives were described in detail.

To understand the spiritual aspects associated with women in same-sex relationships, the role of religion was explained and the various religious ideologies and spiritual postures were explored from the lens of different religious beliefs. Finally, the literature on women who were in heterosexual relationships but are now in same-sex relationships was discussed. Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology and phenomenological research design. Additionally, I discuss the data collection and data analysis processes as well as verification of trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this existential phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of African American women age 40 and older who were currently in same-sex relationships but previously were in heterosexual relationships. The literature conveyed that African American women are adversely impacted by overt or covert prejudices and social stigma that may affect this group on a psychosocial level (Bates, 2012; Herek & Capitanio, 1995). Existential phenomenology is a method of exploring participants' experiences and how participants are impacted on a psychosocial level (Ierna, Jacobs, Matterns, & Melle, 2010; Milton, 2014). This inquiry moves beyond narrow analysis to a broader context where the human experience is understood on a deeper level through each participant's experiences and the meanings attributed to them (Ierna, Jacobs, Matterns, & Melle, 2010; Milton, 2014).This method allows a researcher to examine the multiple dimensions expressed in participants' daily lives (Moustakas, 1994). Ultimately, phenomenology enables researchers to understand the core essence of a phenomenon and to further discern the underlying consciousness held by individuals as a shared experience (Milton, 2014; Patton, 2002). The phenomenological approach was most adequately aligned with the study's research question and identified problem.

This chapter provides an overview of the research design and conveys the research questions that aligned with the central concepts and research traditions. Next, I provide my research approach and the rationale for this choice. I then provide the methodology, addressing data collection and analysis. Finally, I provide evidence of trustworthiness.

Research Design and Rationale

Qualitative phenomenological research is appropriate when the scientific inquiry is designed to help the researcher understand a phenomenon that is shared by a group of individuals of the same status (Milton, 2014; Patton, 2002). Additionally, this research approach provides a means of understanding how people relate to, understand, and interact with the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). The research questions for this study helped to elicit an understanding of how the participants experienced social stigma and marginalization because of their relationship status (Trotter, 2013). I used a qualitative method to answer this study's research questions. My aim was to understand the underlying experiences and nuances of the participants' decisions to change from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship.

I believe that the phenomenological approach enabled me to gain rich insights and explicit details specific to this social problem, about which little research has been completed (Hetzel, 2011; Milton, 2014). This approach was ideally suited for my study

for several reasons. First, I did not have measurable variables related to this phenomenon. Therefore, quantitative research was not feasible (Creswell, 2013; Neuman, 2012). Next, because I was trying to identify the universal core and essence of the phenomena, phenomenology was the preferred method (Milton, 2014). Finally, I was seeking to understand psychosocial experiences and how stigmas may affect these women in order to give voice to this group, whose members may be marginalized in a manner that is not widely known or addressed in the literature (Bates, 2012). In my study, I aimed to provide an understanding of how these women are affected on an everyday level by biases and, perhaps, prejudices (Keene, 2011; Shosha, 2010). I learned about their experiences through the application of open-ended research questions.

Research Questions

The qualitative research methodology was the most appropriate method of addressing this study's research questions due to the inductive nature of this inquiry (Maxwell, 2013). Inductive research is qualitative in nature, emergent in design, and dependent upon data collection that is relevant to the research question (Lucas, 2014). In other words, my goal was to explain the importance of researching the topic as well as to explain gathering of the data, looking for patterns in the research and developing theory that gave focus to the study. This is in contrast to deductive research that is quantitative

in nature and is based on logical processes that are generally derived from hypothesis and theory (Lucas, 2014). Based on my identified problem statement, the following central research question (RQ) and sub questions (SQ) guided my study:

RQ 1: What are the lived experiences of African American women age 40 and older who are now in same-sex relationships and were previously in heterosexual relationships?

To understand the lived experiences of this population of women, the following sub questions were designed to further elicit specificity:

SQ 1: Do African American women who are age 40 and older who are now in same-sex relationships and were previously in heterosexual relationships identify any changes or challenges in their personal and social relationships?

SQ 2: Do African American women who are age 40 and older who are now in same-sex relationships and were previously in heterosexual relationships describe any changes in their professional relationships?

These research questions drove my study and served as the basis for my interview questions (Manley-Johnson, 2013). These research questions were designed to ensure that in-depth knowledge and information were captured from the participants through the extended design of the interview and data-gathering process (Manley-Johnson,

2013). Each research question contained a conceptual category or concept that was extended in each interview question (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Each of the questions was designed to ensure that bias or preconceived notions underlying the issues of bias and prejudice were exposed. Additionally, these questions were founded upon my study's conceptual framework.

Central Concept

I used two theories as a conceptual framework for my study: social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982) and queer theory (Blackburn, 2010). Based on social identity theory, I examined the following concepts: social classification (social), perceptions of prejudice (emotional), psychosocial reactions (spiritual and interpersonal), and intragroup classification (social). Each of these concepts is linked to the aforementioned conceptual category embedded in each research question as illustrated in the parentheses.

I also explored queer theory by specifically focusing on the participants' perceptions of homophobia and prejudice. Together, these concepts provided the framework and boundaries for my study. Additionally, these concepts enabled me to understand how this sample of women may be affected on psychological and social levels. By using these concepts, I developed an understanding about the most critical information specific to the core essence of the shared experiences among the identified sample of women. Milton (2014) indicated that the topic of same-sex relationships should

be handled in a sensitive manner because it is controversial. Research has shown that this group of women could be affected by social stigma and social alienation. Yamile, Keren, Blair, and Jane (2014) indicated that women who identify as lesbian and bisexual have been found to internalize stigma. Given that African American women face a higher degree of marginalization and stigma because of their race, it is reasonable to assume that social stigma, because of sexual orientation, may compound the effects of this phenomenon. Therefore, an existential phenomenological method was used to understand these social problems and possible injustices as gleaned from the participants' perspectives and interpretation.

Research Tradition: Phenomenological Approach

This research study used an existential phenomenology approach as part of a rich tradition of understanding research problems and questions through lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This qualitative research method stems from Husserl's diversion from transcendental ego-focus to the everyday experiences that influence how individuals make meaning of their lives and existential worlds (Patton, 2002). Husserl's philosophy aligned with Heidegger's ontological approach, which is concerned with how individuals interpret their realities (Reitinger, 2013). In other words, the existential approach is concerned with how individuals' everyday experiences are interpreted as their realities.

This study's design was complemented by this paradigm, which allows participants' interpretations to provide rich meanings as opposed to the researcher's assumptions.

A quantitative research design was not appropriate for this study because a theory was not being tested (Bordens & Abbott, 2008; Creswell, 2013). The use of a statistically driven approach may be possible after this problem is thoroughly vetted and variables have been properly identified. However, in my study, the life experiences of African American women in same-sex relationships who were previously in heterosexual relationships were examined using the phenomenological approach. This was the most effective design to use to investigate who these women were in their own words. The quantitative method would have allowed me to answer questions such as how many African American women are in same-sex relationships by using secondhand data, but my study gives firsthand data on each individual's experience.

Quantitative research design uses statistical analysis to demonstrate particular findings to an area of research in a selected field of study (Glicken, 2003). In social research, the researcher may not be able to use quantitative research as easily as in the hard sciences (Glicken, 2003). Quantitative research can be the primary means of focused data collection and measurement in contrast to its counterpoint, qualitative research, which provides supportive and complex behavioral information (Creswell, 2013; Neuman, 2012). For this reason, this research design allowed me to intersect

phenomenological philosophies and qualitative inquiry strategies to support this study's design (Creswell, 2012; Neuman, 2012). The findings of this study may support future quantitative investigation of uncovered phenomena and variables. These variables could be used in future research (to be identified in Chapter 5).

Maxwell (2013) noted that the lived experiences of an individual or group are examined in a phenomenological manner whereby an understanding is gleaned through naturalistic inquiry using an inductive approach. This method is preferred because, unlike a quantitative approach that has predefined variables (whereby a deductive approach could be used), qualitative phenomenology is designed to inductively elicit an understanding through the interview process based on participants' realities and daily experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). During this process, I adhered to Moustakas's (1994) guidance on acknowledging participants' feelings and rights while ensuring that my personal biases and opinions were managed through bracketing and reflexivity. I ensured that this was managed prior to data collection as well as during the process. I accomplished this through the use of a reflective journal that contained my thoughts and judgments, thus enabling me to control my biases.

The qualitative research tradition has its roots in constructivism, which is concerned with understanding multiple realties and is based on inductive reasoning (Milton, 2014; Patton, 2002). This focus is considered postpositivistic and is the

opposite of the deductive approach of quantitative research, which is primarily based on objectivity (Creswell, 2013; Neuman, 2012). The postpositivist approach is closely aligned with my own philosophy. As a constructivist, I appreciate that this approach considers multiple realities. That is, in a productive method, a certain perspective is present, as well as that which is perceived by the research participants. More specifically, using the constructivist orientation, I believe that all individuals have their own version of reality. This alignment influenced my role as a researcher, which is explained later in this document.

Finally, I did not use the mixed method research design because this methodology is a formula for data collection and analysis, "mixing" both qualitative and quantitative research methods (Merten, 2014). As stated, I do not have identified variables that can be statistically measured and tested. My study on African American women in same-sex relationships did not call for using mixed methods to achieve this study's objectives. My aim was to explore the life experiences of each participant; therefore, open-ended questions were used to address these findings. Based on this logical argument, I used a qualitative existential phenomenological research approach to record data on the lived experiences of African American woman aged 40 and over who were in same-sex relationships at the time of the study but were previously in heterosexual relationships.

Research Approach

Within the framework of qualitative research, several alternative approaches could have been used in my study rather than the existential phenomenological method. These alternatives included narrative inquiry, ethnography, case study, and grounded theory, but these methods were used in my study because phenomenological inquiry was best suited for my purposes. Narrative inquiry is best suited when the researcher is looking to understand rich narratives with plot lines and/or autobiographical stories (Bordens & Abbott, 2008). On the other hand, an ethnography approach was not used because it is used in the scientific studies that are based on humanistic ideas that place individuals in their own natural setting, in which the researcher has become engrossed in the day-to-day actions of the group (Manley-Johnson, 2013).

Case study inquiry was eliminated because it is based on an in-depth, keen approach, which requires a vast amount of time and can be very costly, and the labor can be overwhelming for one researcher (Manley-Johnson, 2013). Furthermore, this style of research design was not conducive to answering my research question because my goal was to interview a group of women who were currently in same-sex relationships and explore the common experiences they may have shared. Finally, grounded theory was not selected because to develop or construct a theory or a prototype for the study was not necessary; I had already identified queer and social identity theories as foci (Manley-

Johnson, 2013; Maxwell, 2014). In summary, each of the aforementioned research approaches was examined and considered as a methodology choice. After reviewing narrative inquiry, ethnography, case study, and grounded theory, I determined that these approaches did not meet the requirements to address the research questions for this study.

<div align="center">**Rationale for the Use of Existential Phenomenology**</div>

In reviewing potential research methods for this study, I considered several phenomenological research approaches, including realistic, constitutive, hermeneutical, transcendental, and empirical. An adequate overview of existential phenomenology mirrors the ideas of Husserl, a phenomenologist who based his approach on reflection and exploration of an individual's holistic, experiential life from multiple dimensions, especially day-to-day activities and experiences (Husserl, 1965; Lindenmayer, 2011; Sousa, 2005). Each of these approaches is compared and contrasted to my uses of existential phenomenology. This section provides reasoning for the choice of phenomenology.

Existential Phenomenological Method

The existential phenomenological method is an investigative idea of fundamental ontology to discern who a person really is by the person's own lived experiences (Ierna, Jacobs, Matterns, & Melle, 2010). Ontology is the philosophical study of the nature of being that concerns realities based on certain categories in relation to existence (Fischer,

2006). Husserl (1965) indicated how philosophy is a clear form of thinking; therefore, an all-inclusive form of an individual's unhindered, lived experience is described in a subjective manner (Ierna et al., 2010). I have sought to present an in-depth understanding of an individual's personal reflection of her existence. Husserl posited that the idea of philosophy is most important in existential phenomenology because it opens the door for individuals to explain life on various levels (Ierna et al., 2010). In this study, existential phenomenological methodology allowed for exploration of meaning and the thoughts held in the consciousness of each woman as she described her lived experience as an African American woman who had made life changes specific to her relationship and partnership choices.

According to Gipps and Rhodes (2008), this process enabled me to follow Husserlian influence, whereby participants' conscious and self-conscious thoughts and meanings were reflected in their interview responses. Their answers may provide an understanding of a phenomenon that goes beyond everyday understanding of their reflections and stories of self-defined realities that convey how they have been impacted based on their status (Cai, 2013). I followed the Husserlian influence to enable me to avoid biases while adding structure to my research. Additionally, this approach also aligned with my goals and my role as a researcher as described below.

Role of the Researcher

I was the primary instrument used for this qualitative inquiry. Therefore, my imperative was to exercise my role in a manner that used ethical considerations, managed risk, and considered beneficence, justice, and respect for all research subjects (NIH, 2014). As a researcher, my role was to acknowledge the importance of following all ethical considerations and protocol as identified in the ethical procedures identified below. My role as the researcher was to ensure that all research participants completed an informed consent before the data collection process began. That I was totally and absolutely competent to conduct this research was essential (American Counseling Association [ACA] governance, 2014). I ensured that appropriate record management practices were implemented in order to protect the confidentiality and privacy based on Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the ACA (2014) set of laws.

My responsibility as a researcher also entailed developing a successful research design. For that reason, my philosophical convictions were supported by the selected research model (Mills, Bronner, & Francis, 2006; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). Further, I trusted in the quality and thoroughness of the qualitative methodology. My role as the researcher was to implement safeguards throughout this study that aligned with ethical standards and IRB procedures. I was responsible for making sure that the environment protected all research participants from harm during the process.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure that the highest degree of ethical protocol was followed, I used the American Counseling Association's Code of Ethics. This further ensured that all research participants were protected from harm and treated with dignity and respect (ACA, 2104). Additionally, I took the National Institute of Health's training for protection of human subjects (see Appendix E). Finally, I ensured that all documentation and associated materials for this study remained confidential and unavailable to anyone outside of my dissertation committee and the Walden University IRB. The IRB protects the rights and welfare of all human research participants (Ritter, Kim, & Morgan, 2013). These protections were designed to ensure that all risks, as well as benefits to human subjects, are enforced and aligned with what was described in my IRB application. Hence, I followed these ethical procedures to protect the research subjects as well as the integrity of my research.

Managing Risk

To manage any risks associated with this study, I ensured that the informed consent form was used as a primary means of communicating any unforeseeable risks. For example, I did not anticipate that this study would impose any emotional risk or distress other than what participants already encounter in day-to-day living (NIH, 2014). However, to manage any unforeseeable risks, all known and possible risks were

communicated to participants via the informed consent process (Appendix B). Secondly, to manage any related risks should participants encounter distress, I provided a resource listing of mental health practitioners who give counseling free of charge, as well as other resources that do charge a fee for services (See Appendix D). This resource listing was given to participants free of charge, as provided by community services and nonprofit organizations. Furthermore, I researched obtainable data in New York City to make sure that resources were available from the LGBTQ community as well as from the African American community and organizations. I ensured that a variety of resources from which to choose were available, and they were provided as the necessary tools which the participants could use in New York City.

Managing Power Differentials

Liss and Erchull (2012) indicated that when researchers work with minority populations, power differentials should be considered and managed. This meant that I ensured that research participants were treated as the experts rather than considering my role as dominant and authoritative (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I also ensured that I was sensitive to the possible stigmas and stereotypes that could inadvertently be embedded in interview questions by using Rubin and Rubin's Responsive Interview Model. This model is concerned with using phrases and verbiage in the interview questions that do not offend others. This approach also seeks to point the discussion away from the interviewee

when discussing sensitive topics. For example, a question might be phrased in the following manner: "How do you feel other people react to you and your partner expressing physical affection in public?" This question is directed away from the individual, allowing her to reflect using a phenomenological approach rather than to become defensive.

Methodology

The Research Participants

I interviewed 10 African American women who, previously in heterosexual relationships, currently were over the age of 40 and are currently in same-sex relationships. Bates's (2010) research on African American women focused on those who were both lesbians and married. Her sample was comprised of 12 participants. In addition to establishing a baseline for a sample size, Bates (2010) also corroborates that additional research is warranted for this population. Specifically, her research focused on African American women and their gender roles, identity culture, sexuality, self-awareness, and bisexualism.

The suggested number of individuals for a phenomenological study is between three to ten participants (Janesick, 2011). According to Atwood and Stolorow (2014), a phenomenological research study generally utilizes a small number of research participants who have encountered a specific phenomenon. The interviewing process in

phenomenological research study can be long and intensive. Therefore, I sought to use 10

participants for data collection (Milton, 2014). Given that previous research has

determined that saturation can be reached using between 3 and 10 participants, I designed

my research based on these findings. I elected to choose the higher number in the range

to ensure that I achieved a satisfactory level of thick and rich descriptions from

participant data.

This data presented a complete picture of the phenomenon under study. It was

important that I aligned this study with phenomenological methods, which examine a

participant's holistic, day-to-day, life experiences. A demographic survey was used to

collect this data at the outset of the interview process after I received informed consent.

Each woman was informed that her profile would remain anonymous (Milton, 2014;

Patton, 2002). INIH, ensured that I guarded all participants' names by using pseudonyms.

Sampling Strategy

I used purposive sampling techniques, which is a non-probability sampling known

as judgmental and selective sampling (Lucas, 2014). I also used a homogeneous sampling

technique to select the participants (Lucas, 2014; Maxwell, 2014). This approach assured

that individuals shared similar backgrounds, characteristics, or traits such as age, gender,

or race (D'Emilio,1983; Lucas, 2014). A homogeneous sample allowed me to identify

groups of women with similar characteristics (based on the demographic survey), which

ensured that I had a means of identifying the shared experiences among similar women with similar experiences. The shared characteristics were women over 40 who self-identified as African American or Black American and who were in same-sex or lesbian relationships but were previously in heterosexual or opposite-sex relationships.

Prospective Organizations for Recruitment

I drew my sample from LGBT groups identified in the New York City area by placing recruitment flyers in group meeting places (e.g. library bulletin boards). I also advertised my study on social media sites after receiving permission from site administrators for both physical and internet sites.

I contacted several organizations such as GLADD (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation), National Black Justice Coalition, Elixher.com, Circle of Voices, African Ancestral Lesbians United for Societal Change (AALUSC), and lesbians-over-40.meetup.com; all of these organizations are a part of the LGBTQ community. I sent letters of introduction to organization leaders, asking permission to disseminate my research flyers or letters of invitation. Through the distribution of these flyers, each prospective participant was asked to contact me directly via email or by phone. The research study used snowball sampling as well (Miles & Huberman, 2014; 1994). This technique was carried out using letters of invitation (see Appendix B).

Snowball Sampling

Snowball sampling includes using an alternative version of the research flyers as a letter of invitation. Snowball sampling is concerned with sharing information about the study with others who may know someone who meets the study's inclusion criteria. After I received approval from Walden's IRB, letters of invitation were distributed to others who might know someone who qualified for this study. Once interested people responded to the flyers, I informed them about the research, using the informed consent to give highlights about the study and also to convey the risks and benefits. If respondents indicated that they were interested in participating, I scheduled interviews by appointment (Maxwell, 2014). Each individual who chose to participate was able to contact me by cellular phone and/or text message. At that time, I answered any questions specific to the study, informed consent, confidentiality, and other concerns (Moustakas, 1994). A record of each participant's contact was maintained under lock and key until the interview had been conducted. The names were redacted from this log once follow-ups were conducted.

Inclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria for this study were based upon two factors. First, I drew upon the aforementioned Bates's (2010) study, which indicated a need exists to further explore African American women who are in lesbian relationships. Secondly, I identified with the

Bates's study that indicated African American women in same-sex relationships might suffer from psychosocial distress and other implications as a result of their relationship status. Taken together, the inclusion criteria entailed the following items:

1. Each woman had been in a same-sex relationship and had previously been in a heterosexual relationship for at least 5 years;

2. Each woman self-identified as being in a committed same-sex relationship at the time of the interview;

3. Each woman resided in the Northeastern part of United States; and

4. Each woman was 40 years of age or older.

This sample was drawn from social and professional organizations that are from women's groups such as lesbians or women in same-sex relationships or bisexual women. All IRB protocol for data collection, informed consent, and research fliers were contained in these inclusion criteria, so that prospective participants clearly knew if they met the requirements for this study.

To avoid inadvertent discrimination, I allowed participants to self-select and tell me if they met the inclusion criteria. I continued to recruit participants until I reached the point of saturation of 10 participants. I considered the saturation point was when no new information was learned from the research collected from the 10 participants.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation used for the interviews was semi-structured, comprised of open-ended questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; 2005). Probing questions were used to garner more information should the interview questions not capture the essence of the women's experiences. Interview questions were designed to be open whereby I sought to understand how the women's relationships affected their lives (Maxwell, 2013). According to Charmaz and Belgrave's (2012) guidance, my interview questions were designed to understand participants' behaviors, values, and concepts. At the conclusion of the interview, I read a debriefing script to each participant to explain what would happen after the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I explained in lay terms how the audio interviews would be translated and converted to summarize themes (Cook, 2012). I reminded participants that they were welcome to see the final, summarized results of the report/study. I also provided each woman with a mental health resource listing (see Appendix D), in the event she would feel any stress from the interview.

I listed all interview questions in an interview guide that was comprised of the demographic study, the informed consent form, the interview questions, and the debriefing script (see Appendix C). According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), interview questions are a derivative of the research questions, designed to narrow the scope to identify specific information required to address this study's research problem. As with

phenomenological research, the research questions were open-ended. Following the

structure identified by Miles and Huberman (1994), the primary interview questions used

were the following (see also the full interview guide in Appendix C):

1. As an African American woman, how, if at all, does being in a same-sex
   relationship affect your social experiences after being in a heterosexual
   relationship?

2. As an African American woman in a same-sex relationship, how, if at all,
   does this affect your emotional experiences after being in a heterosexual
   relationship?

3. As an African American woman in a same-sex relationship, how, if at all,
   does your experience after leaving a heterosexual relationship affect your
   spiritual experiences?

4. As an African American woman, how, if at all, have your experiences of
   being in a same-sex relationship affected your interpersonal experiences after
   previously being in a heterosexual relationship?

Interviews were conducted in a private meeting room after setting up the

appointment by telephone. I ensured that others could not hear the interview discussion. I

audio taped each interview as indicated earlier. Additionally, I used Rubin and Rubin's

(2012) Responsive Interview Model to ensure that power differentials were managed.

Furthermore, I provided a resource listing of mental and medical health resources for each participant (see Appendix D).

As indicated, interviews were conducted in a secure, private meeting room in library meeting rooms or community meeting rooms, reserved for this research purpose. I ensured that participant interviews could not be overheard by others. During the interview, I collaborated with the participants to understand and uncover how they felt and thought about their relationships (Maxwell, 2014). I followed Moustakas's (1994) interviewing technique by not passing judgment. I was exclusively responsible for the audio recording, and I was the only person who interviewed the women (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Doyle, 2013). As indicated, the only people who were able to access the data were the committee and the IRB. Data will be retained for a five-year period, and the data has been stored in a locked, storm box. At the conclusion of the interviews, participants were informed that they could review the summary of this study upon request. I also asked participants if they would participate in a follow-up conversation, as a form of member checking. Member checking was a form of validating my interpretation of the data and themes developed (Rubin & Rubin, 2005**).** Each participant was given the opportunity to revise any errors and summarize the preliminary findings that were perceived as incorrect or a misinterpretation by the researcher (Rubin & Rubin, 2012**).** Member checking is a unique technique for establishing credibility; this technique was very crucial in this part

of the research process. This ensured that each participant was the expert on the topic as well as making sure that no information was missed.

Once I completed my interviews, I maintained a secure file of all field, observational, theoretical, and analytical notes, which was utilized to augment my data analysis for the study. This data was analyzed to establish the common themes (Groenewald, 2004; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). This part of the interviewing process was necessary in order to make sure that the researcher took all the proper steps to secure all information collected. Data analysis is one of the most important sections of the study after the interview and data collection. Securing all significant critical reflective abstracts pulled together the final fragments of my study.

Data Collection Process

To answer the previously mentioned research questions, a semi structured interview guide was used as the primary means to collect data, described below. Further, the data collection process is concerned with identifying and recruiting research participants as well as managing the interview process and the associated data. I identified the participants for the study by using inclusion criteria. The first step was the application to and approval by Walden's IRB. Once approval was received, I began recruiting participants using purposeful and snowball sampling approaches. The purposeful sampling involved recruitment from LGBT groups identified in the NYC

region. I placed research fliers in group meeting places (e.g. library bulletin boards). I

also advertised the study on social media sites after receiving permission from site

administrators for both physical and internet sites. Snowball sampling included

preparing an alternative version of the research flier as a letter of invitation. These letters

were distributed to others who might know someone who qualified for this study's

inclusion criteria. Once potential participants responded to the fliers, I informed them

about the research using the informed consent to give highlights about the study and also

to convey the risks and benefits. Once participants indicated that they were interested in

participating, I then set up a time to meet with them to start the process (Maxwell,

2014).

I anticipated that, based on the number of interview questions, each interview

would last between 45 and 60 minutes. I ensured that I allotted at least 20 minutes to

address any of the participant's questions specific to the study and informed consent. If

more time was needed from any participant, I addressed that issue as it was presented.

All of the women were made aware of their rights concerning the informed consent.

These procedures did not vary because of the need to follow the standard rules and

regulations established by Walden's IRB, associated with each research study.

Interviewing Process

As the researcher, I followed the research interviewing techniques as described in Rubin and Rubin (2012). These techniques included using a conversational approach, as well as using their Responsive Interviewing Model (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The Responsive Interview Model is designed to help the interviewer focus on the interviewee in a respectful manner. The use of semi-structured interviews is used to gain in-depth insights. Finally, the most important aspect of the model is establishing a respectful, but meaningful rapport with the interviewees. When interacting with each participant, I was nonjudgmental and continued to be aware of my nonverbal interactions with the participants; I was careful not to show any reactions that might be offensive to participants (Moustakas, 1994).

I employed interviewing techniques that included a holistic perspective, listening, note taking, observing, audio recording, and interpreting the meaning of each participant's sequence of events of their personal story (Rudestam & Newton, 2015; 2001). To ensure accuracy of the data and to allow for any technical problems with the audio recording, I used both recording and manual note taking (Chwalik, 2012; Rogge, Greenwald, & Golden, 2004).

I began each interview by expressing thanks to the women involved in allowing me to meet with them. I gave an explanation of my role as a researcher as well as a

Walden University doctoral student. I had the audio recorder set up, and I gave an overview of how it was used and noted that I would be the only one to operate the recorder. I offered each individual break time if it was needed in addition to the 45 to 60 minutes. Finally, I offered to provide a one-page summary of the research results to each participant once the research study was completed (Maxwell, 2014).

Additionally, I requested permission for follow-up as member checking to ensure that my interpretation of the data was correct. This also provided validation that my coding was accurate. Each participant was given a brief overview of what coding means in the beginning of the interviewing process, but my responsibility was to review this practice with them. Finally, I transcribed the digital tapes to ensure that I had the most accurate recall when listening to the tapes and incorporating field notes. The raw data was managed using appropriate record and data management practices. In addition, I met with each individual in person to make sure that the transcriptions were correct. If an individual could not meet with me, I asked for their permission to email the information to them to make sure the material was accurate. If a participant did not agree to meet in person or to review the data by email, I suggested that we could Skype or talk over the telephone.

Data Management

Ensuring confidentiality and managing records of participant data efficiently is also of utmost importance. Therefore, all participant data has been stored securely, physically. I am the only one with access to the raw and translated data, with the exception of my dissertation committee. I also assigned unique identifiers to each of the interview guides to prevent the risk of any participant names being exposed. I transcribed interviews and placed this same unique identifier on all digital recording file names.

Data from this study will be retained for five years as required by Walden's IRB. After that time, I will destroy all electronic and physical documents. The entire drafted version of all the materials will be destroyed in the same manner. The noted materials will remain archived and secured; after the fifth year it will all be demolished by the researcher. This is the concluding stage of my research study.

The management of research data was my highest priority as I was the sole instrument/researcher conducting this study. Therefore, the following processes were followed to ensure that data is protected, secured, and that participant-related data remains confidential. Although, I did not plan to ask for health-related information, if participants inadvertently revealed health-related information, I redacted this information and/or masked it (Jalongo, Gerlach, & Yan, 2001, 2002). Secondly, I did the same for personal information (Jalongo, Gerlach & Yan, 2001, 2002). Each participant was

assigned unique numbers to identify their interview data and associated notes. I used

numbers for each participant rather than their names (Jalongo, Gerlach & Yan, 2001,

2002). When participants first made contact with me during the data collection process, I

explained each step that would be taken during the process. I kept a separate notebook in

which to log contact information in reference to participants and as a cross-reference to

the interview guides and raw data per each participant (Jalongo, Gerlach & Yan, 2001,

2002).

Bracketing and Reflection

Once the interviews were conducted, it was important for me to engage in

personal reflection (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This process was beneficial for two reasons.

First, it helped me to manage bias by acknowledging any judgmental thoughts,

otherwise known as bracketing (Maxwell, 2013). When judgmental thoughts are

acknowledged, they can be managed. Secondly, this reflection allowed me to jot down

any interpretive thoughts and analytical ideas on emerging themes aligned with the

phenomenon of inquiry (Maxwell, 2013).

This process is aligned with Husserl's realization that phenomenological

reflection also involves the researcher playing a central role in finding the truth of one's

practical life (Linsenmayer, 2011). This process entails understanding an ethical-

existential dimension as the norm of a life form, which means that the subject pursues

full self-understanding and self-justification of his or her life (Cai, 2012). As a

researcher, my responsibility was to remain neutral yet cognizant of any power

differentials that might occur between the research subject and me as the researcher.

Power differentials sometimes arise when individuals have been previously

marginalized or oppressed (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). To manage these possible power

differentials during data collection, I ensured that the participants understood that I value

them as the subject matter experts of their lived experiences (Cook, 2012). This allowed

them the esteem of being in the expert role, rather than for me to be viewed as the

authoritative figure.

The reflections of the participants' life experiences were the key elements to

understanding each individual's personal experiences from the existential,

phenomenological perspective (Cai, 2013). According to Berg (2007), self-disclosure

gives each individual participant a certain freedom to convey their unique experiences,

yet the researcher may glean the commonalities of the experiences shared by the group.

The reflective process is also aligned with the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

Phenomenological researchers have successfully used Colaizzi's (1978) 7 step

strategy to ensure rigor and efficient data analysis. I followed this 7-step approach

diligently as described below:

1. After the interviews were transcribed, I read each thoroughly, several times to become familiar with them;

2. I highlighted significant statements made by each participant. These significant statements were related to the identified concepts, stated earlier in this chapter as they related to my research problem;

3. I extrapolated meaning from each of the aforementioned statements;

4. Next, I looked for like and similar statements and sorted them in clusters and categories to form themes;

5. I began to draft descriptive narratives of the findings;

6. I then looked for the framework and structure of the phenomenon;

7. Finally, I validated the findings through member checking and follow-up with participants.

Trustworthiness

To maintain trustworthiness, I followed ethical parameters, ensuring the prescribed NIH protocol of beneficence, justice, and respect for subjects. Additionally, the informed consent process also ensured that informed consent was followed as detailed below. Finally, credibility and dependability added trustworthiness to this study.

Ethical Parameters

The ethical parameters that drove my study were based on Walden's IRB protocol and approved procedure as outlined in my informed consent form. This signed form gave approval and authorization to use informed consent documentation, the interview guide, and a demographic questionnaire, as well as any other required documentation for this study (Walden, 2012). As indicated earlier, the informed consent form included information specific to confidentiality, procedures for audio recording, as well as an outline of the research, risks, and benefits. To ensure participant protection, each person was able to ask questions as well as decline participation in this study (Walden, 2012). Each woman was given the contact information for the Walden University Ph.D. Human Services Department and the dissertation chair, Dr. Pamela Denning. Finally, each participant received a copy of her signed consent form, which included significant contact material (Walden, 2012).

Beneficence, Justice, and Respect for Subjects

The National Institute of Health (2014) requires researchers to follow the triad of beneficence, justice, and respect for research subjects as the highest priority for their projects. Beneficence is concerned with respecting all research participant's decisions, rights, and well-being. Justice is concerned with the legal aspect that protects each participant. Respect should also be displayed throughout the research process. In order to

make sure everyone is treated fairly, the NIH recommends that ethical standards be in place at all times. As a researcher, beneficence, justice, and respect for subjects were most important because they focus on the moral and ethical idea of fairness (NIH, 2014).

The NIH (2014) suggests that the general judgments that serve as a basic justification for the specific ethical perceptions and assessments of human action are components that give each researcher as well as participant the ability to deliver positive and productive outcomes. As a researcher, I strove to display equitability to produce beneficial results for all involved. The NIH defines "equitability" as the idea of treating everyone fairly and equally, treating each person the same. This element creates positive ethical standards on all levels. I used my professional NIH training to conduct my research.

Informed Consent

In essence, one of the highest forms of ethics is to protect the participant's rights as a contributor by providing informed consent (ACA, 2014). For that reason, my first step during data collection was to give explanation of the study through the informed consent process (see Appendix B). The participant was assured that as a participant, she would be fully informed of each part of the process and that clear language would be used, as required by the Walden University IRB Consent Form. Moreover, this form also presented an outline of the study's potential benefits, as well as any predictable risks.

No compensation was offered for my study; this was expressed during the opening of the interview and was also indicated on the consent form. The IRB approval number was listed and an internal Walden University agent name was also listed (See Informed Consent form, Appendix B). I made certain that no misunderstanding occurred after or during the interview procedure when it involved lack of payment from the researcher or Walden University. At the conclusion of the interview, each woman was asked again if she understood all aspects of the interviewing process. This gave total clarification to the purpose and details of the informed consent.

Credibility

Credibility is established through the documentation of detailed and rich qualitative descriptions. This documentation was captured to describe the phenomena of each participant's lived experience (Trochim, 2006). An audit trail was used to provide a system for retroactive assessment to give means to address any issues related to the severity of the research (Given, 2008). This gave dependability for the raw data that was collected, such as field notes, audiotape, and observation memos that were highlighted to make sure that the data collection and analysis were accurate (Koken et al., 2009). Each step of my processes was fully documented so that it could be conveyed in my study. I provided all the necessary descriptions of my study processes and data collection; confidential information was not disclosed.

In addition, during the interviews, when key concepts were formulated by the participant, I verified the meaning (member checking) by summarizing what the participant said. I also contacted the participants in person or by phone for a follow-up meeting to seek clarification and to serve as member checking.

All interviews were transcribed. My personal thoughts I kept in a dissertation journal, and I maintained a thorough audit trail of all information collected (Neuman, 2012). I maintained an exclusive research journal to make certain recoding notations as I conducted my data analysis and interpretation.

Participants who elected to have a summarized copy of this study were emailed such after the themes became evident, and I discussed the themes with each woman, as warranted. The confidentiality was maintained for each individual participant although cumulative data was shared with each participant (Federici & Kaplan, 2008).

Dependability

Colaizzi's (1978) 7-step strategy allowed me to manage, organize, and examine the transcribed data from audio tapes. In addition, an audit trail was used as a measure to ensure reliability. I documented how I evaluated each interview and the comments of each individual participant (Koden et al., 2009). This documentation of steps showed how I coded the data and moved from single, open coding to thematic coding. A thorough write-up of how I used the phenomenological approach has been provided.

Summary

This chapter reintroduced the problem statement and discussed the rationale for using existential phenomenological research design. I then provided the conceptual framework that drove and provided boundaries for this study. I provided the qualitative research tradition and discussed the specific approach that drove this study. My role as a researcher was discussed, followed by a detailed overview of the research methodology. I finished the chapter by discussing the data collection process and data analysis. I concluded with a discussion on this study's trustworthiness and credibility.

In Chapter 4, I discuss the research setting, participant demographics, and the data collection process that occurred. The chapter discovers the themes of the narrative for my research study. I implemented and ensured the trustworthiness and results of my study.

Chapter 4: Narrative

Introduction

The objective of this study was to present a descriptive examination of the life experiences of African American women in same-sex relationships who were previously in heterosexual relationships. Questions were included to research how these women's relationship styles affected them socially, professionally, and spiritually. In the study, I employed an existential, phenomenological method to give expressive meaning to the lives of each of these African American women in same-sex relationships who at one time were in a heterosexual relationship.

The overarching research central question leading the study was the following: What are the experiences of African American women age 40 and over who were previously in heterosexual relationships and are now in same-sex relationships? To understand the lived experiences of these women, the following sub questions were designed to support the primary research: (a) Do African American women who are age 40 and older who are now in same-sex relationships and were previously in heterosexual relationships identify any changes or challenges in their personal and social relationships? (b) Do African American women who are age 40 and older who are now in same-sex relationships and were previously in heterosexual relationships describe any changes in their professional relationships?

In the present study, each participant had her own unique experience. In this chapter, I give an overview of the study's results that relates to the researched and illustrated sample of these women. Additionally, this chapter is systematically organized into several segments, starting with a thorough description of the methods used in recruiting participants, the setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness. An informational extraction of the inclusive findings is accessible, trailed by five qualitative themes and one sub theme that materialized from the data analysis process.

The Research Setting

The research study was conducted in New York City (Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx, Staten Island, and Queens). The interview process was conducted from November 2015 through January 2016. Three methods of interview were offered to each participant: in-person, by Skype, or by telephone. The participant selected her preference for an interview style. Initially, the interviews were designed to be face-to-face, but some members requested to Skype or to interview by telephone because of time constraints due to their work schedule or misreading the research flyer. Therefore, an IRB Request for Change in Procedures form was submitted and approved (11-03-15-307193) for those participants who could not be interviewed face-to-face. I maintained a contact log for each participant; I recorded the participant interview by number and initial, such as PI-1,

and by contact information to safeguard each person's confidentially. As soon as a

participant approached me after seeing one of my research fliers (via snowball sampling),

we agreed on the time, date, and method of the interview. The face-to-face interviews

were conducted at The City College of New York Library's private rooms.

Recruitment

The fundamental recruiting techniques were snowball sampling and word of

mouth. Flyers were posted on bulletin boards at The City College of New York and

community agencies throughout the five boroughs of New York City. I also used social

media such as Facebook and several group pages within the Facebook formula. For

example, some of the groups were PhD Sisters, PhD Women's Network, CLAGS —The

Center for LGBTQS, Black Doctoral Network, Positive Connection for All Women,

Women Doctoral Student Support, *Elixher Magazine*, and Minority Doctoral Network,

Inc. The flyer for recruitment was posted on five Facebook groups. I received permission

from the organizer of the Facebook group's first because I am not a member of the

lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning/queer community. Five of the

participants were recruited as a result of these Facebook groups. I am a member of the

PhD Women's Network and PhD Sisters Group, and a few of my fellow members posted

the recruitment flyer on their Facebook pages. I contacted several organizations such as

Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), National Black Justice

Coalition, Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies (CLAGS), and Elixher.com. Kimberly

McLeod, the founder of Elixher.com, recommended that I get in touch with Circle of

Voices and African Ancestral Lesbians United for Societal Change (AALUSC), which

are in New York City. Each organization was emailed or faxed a copy of my recruitment

flyer. I also contacted the organizers of Meetup groups that met my research's

requirements for permission to post or distribute the flyer within their groups. All of my

participants were recruited as a result of snowball sampling or word of mouth, which was

very successful.

Demographics (Participant Profiles)

The demographic section of the research stipulates in its outline that respondents

are required to meet the study's decisive factors and be in agreement with the informed

consent. Pseudonym assignments allowed me to give initials and numbers as identifiers

to each woman to make her profile simple in this study as well as to protect participants'

identities. The women were identified by using the letter (P) for participant and the letter

(I) for interviewee, with a number from 1 through 10 (PI-1 to PI-10); no names were

used. Each profile provided a context and background for additional information in the

future. A personal demographic table (Table 1) was created in addition to each

respondent's profile and is summarized in the next section. The sample consisted of 10

self-identified African American women residing in the five boroughs of New York City

in the northeastern region of the United States. Table 1 displays the participants' demographic characteristics. In addition, each of the women acknowledged that she was African American or Black American. Their ages varied from 42 to 66 years of age. The respondents' partnership status at the time of the interview ranged from new to long-term to married. Four respondents reported being married, five respondents reported being in new relationships for less than 18 months, and one respondent conveyed that she had been in a long-term relationship for more than 3 years. The number of years each woman had been in her heterosexual relationship was reported. The women lived in four out of the five boroughs of New York City.

Seven out of 10 participants had completed at least one college degree; the other three were high school educated and had some type of professional certification. Even though this was not one of the questions, the information was important to the facts given by the participants while collecting data on their lived experiences. Comprehension was another factor I observed because some questions were understood differently than originally was attended; however, this was noted when coding.

Table 1

Summary of Participant Demographics

Participant(P) Interviewee(I)	Participant number	Age	Partnership status	Borough NYC	Years in heterosexual relationships
PI-1	1	43	Married	Brooklyn	5
PI-2	2	42	Married	Brooklyn	7
PI-3	3	50	Married	Queens	18
PI-4	4	51	New	Manhattan	20
PI-5	5	66	New	Manhattan	10
PI-6	6	46	Married	Queens	10
PI-7	7	55	New	Bronx	12

Table 1

Summary of Participant Demographics

Participant(P) Interviewee(I)	Participant number	Age	Partnership status	Borough NYC	Years in heterosexual relationships
PI-8	8	49	New	Manhattan	5
PI-9	9	48	New	Queens	7
PI-10	10	48	Long-term	Bronx	25

Note. Participant 10 was identified as having encountered unusual circumstances.

Respondent 1—PI-1

Respondent 1, identified as PI-1, was a 43-year-old woman who identified as an African American woman; she resided in Brooklyn. Her partnership status was married; she had been in the same relationship for 13 years and had been married for 9 years. She previously was in a heterosexual relationship for 6 years.

Respondent 2—PI-2

Respondent 2, identified as PI-2, was a 42-year-old woman who identified as a Black American woman and stated she that did not like the term *African American woman*; she resided in Brooklyn. Her partnership status was married; she had been in the same relationship for 13 years and had been married for 9 years. She had a few heterosexual relationships—the longest lasted 5 years, and the shortest lasted 1 year.

Respondent 3—PI-3

Respondent 3, identified as PI-3, was a 50-year-old woman who identified as an African American woman and resided in Queens. Her partnership status was married; she had been in the same relationship for 3 years and had been married to her current wife for 6 months. She was in heterosexual relationships for 18 years—one for 10 years and the other one for 8 years.

Respondent 4—PI-4

Respondent 4, identified as PI-4, was a 51-year-old woman who identified as an African American (Black) woman and lived in Manhattan. For her present partnership status, she reported that she in a 1 year, same-sex relationship. She was previously in the same heterosexual relationship for 20 years. She also was in a heterosexual relationship as a teenager with her first daughter's father; she had had four more children since then.

Respondent 5—PI-5

Respondent 5, identified as PI-5, was a 66-year-old woman who identified as a Black American gay woman; she lived in Manhattan. She did not understand or like the term *African American*. PI-5's partnership status was that she had been in a new relationship for the last 3 months. She had just left a long-term, 7 year relationship in the summer of 2015.

Respondent 6—PI-6

Respondent 6, identified as PI-6, was a 46-year-old woman who identified as an American Black woman of African descent; she resided in Queens. Her partnership status was married, and she had been in the same relationship for 3 years and had been married since August 2015. She was in a heterosexual relationship for 10 years and was married for 7 years to her daughter's father.

Respondent 7—PI-7

Respondent 7, identified as PI-7, was a 55-year-old woman who identified as an African American woman; she resided in the Bronx. PI-7's current partnership status was that she had been in a new relationship for 6 weeks after being in a same-sex relationship for 10 years. She was in a heterosexual relationship for 12.5 years.

Respondent 8—PI-8

Respondent 8, identified as PI-8, was a 49-year-old woman who identified as either an African American or a Black American woman but preferred being called a Black American lesbian woman; she lived in Manhattan. Her partnership status was that she was now in a "beautiful, one-year relationship." She was previously in a 5 year heterosexual relationship.

Respondent 9—PI-9

Respondent 9, identified as PI-9, is a 48-year-old woman who identified as an African American woman; she resided in Queens. For her partnership status, she reported that she was now in a new relationship as of 9 months. She was previously in a heterosexual relationship for 7 years.

Respondent 10—PI-10

Respondent 10, identified as PI-10, was a 48-year-old woman who identified as a Black American woman and lived in the Bronx. Her partnership status was that she was currently in a 7-year same-sex relationship. She was previously in a 15-year heterosexual relationship with her son's father, who died in a car accident.

Data Collection

The study's data collection process was directed by semi structured, in-depth interviews from a qualitative inquiry approach pooled with a phenomenological

approach. The interviews lasted between 60 minutes and 3 hours. I used the specifically designed research and interview questions (Appendix C) to recapture the lived experiences of each participant as well as to tie the conceptual framework to specific key components. Each woman was advised to feel free to share her story, making sure that any pending issues or concerns she felt were important were expressed.

At first, all 10 participants agreed to face-to-face interviews, but due to working schedules and other personal issues, I was required to use Skype and the telephone along with the original interviewing method; this process was used for debriefing as well. All interviews conducted were in a private meeting space such as one of The City College of New York Library's private rooms. The informed consent form was sent before the interview session by email for electronic consent or written signature, making sure that each participant had an understanding of the study before the interview process began. All consent forms were collected before the interviews. I had five face-to-face interviews, two Skype interviews, and three telephone interviews.

Interview sessions were recorded with an audio voice recorder, and field notes were taken throughout the process. Each interview was transcribed after I completed the overall interviews with participants. All transcripts were printed and locked in a secure box within my home. All transcriptions were copied to a flash or thumb drive, which was secured with the original transcripts. Previous information that was given during the

verification process was eliminated so that each participant's identification would be protected. At the start of each interview session, I presented pertinent information about my background. I felt that it was very important for each of the women to know that I am heterosexual and have never been in a same-sex relationship. Nevertheless, I do identify as an African American or Black American, and I am in the same age group of 40 and over.

Each woman had a unique story of her personal experience as she left her heterosexual relationship to enter a same-sex relationship. All of the participants shared the mutual links of race and culture. Moreover, each participant was crystal clear, straightforward, and sincere, supplying new, impending awareness of the phenomenology of African American women in same-sex relationships who were previously in heterosexual relationship and who are 40 years and older. One of the important factors was the background of each participant. Due to the importance of confidentiality, the participants' names were replaced by pseudonyms, each of which took the form of the initials "PI" followed by a number.

Data Analysis

As the researcher, my chief goal concerning the data analysis process was to make sure that I managed to understand the raw data in order to specifically put these data into categories and themes that would provide the construction of substantive theory (Miles,

Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Saldana, 2015). The codes were established by the

outcomes of the participants' responses. When a code is taken directly from what the

respondent says and is put inside quotation marks, this is known as *in vivo code* (Saldana,

2014). All of the interview responses were transcribed by me. I then processed the raw

data into a practicable dataset when coding and categorizing and using in vivo coding, as

well as identifying the themes that were repetitious. In vivo coding is applying assigned

labels to a section of data and facts, such as an interview transcript, using similar wording

or short phrases taken from a segment of data collected (Saldana, 2015). Additional

factors were based on building the theories from identified processes and associations,

and the results were recognized in the data. To achieve this, I used first, second, and cycle

color coding. These techniques were more aligned with Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step

strategy to ensure thorough and effective data analysis comparing this strategy with

Saldana's codes methods (Moustakas, 1994; Saldana, 2015).

After the participants returned the transcribed data, I started the next step of the

transcription process. Using color codes, I highlighted and outlined similar wording. This

measure was used to identify specific patterns and themes. This procedure was consistent

with Colazzi's methods; the theoretical constructs and findings "filtered and cleaned the

lens" so that I could analyze the data (Moustakas, 1994). Nine overarching themes

emerged from the primary (holistic) coding. Each of these themes was categorized and

labeled. The coding process is displayed in the next section to give a clear overview of steps taken.

Coding

  Holistic coding. When completing each interview, I introduced and transcribed each participant's interview in order to conduct holistic coding. Specified codes label data and facts which are most useful when retrieving the measureable material (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Meaningful segments are compacted by coding and identifying large volumes of data (Creswell, 2013; Saldana, 2015). Holistic coding is an initial procedure of breaking apart data to frame an overall indication of the concepts before piloting an in-depth review (Saldana, 2015). Another specific process is known as "chunking" data when sorting information into various topics (Saldana, 2015). This procedure was used as I collected and processed the data from all of the respondents.

  Open initial coding. I manually coded the results after examining the raw data for a third time. Throughout this course of action, I read and translated the transcripts verbatim and conducted open coding using highlights to distinguish the concepts. I identified key words to code the participants' statements used in their responses (Saldana, 2015). I selected phrases closely associated to the conception of the described data (Creswell, 2012; Miles et al., 2014; Saldana, 2015). In addition, recurring words which had comparable or parallel meanings were identified.

Pattern coding. Subsequently, I categorized the codes produced during open and in vivo coding into groupings based on their similarity to one another (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2011). Saldana (2015) points out that pattern coding is a process of aligning like codes into categories. Categories are typically expansive and operate as holders to sort figures and facts for analysis (Maxwell, 2013). Additionally, the researcher must ensure that the field notes and other information pertaining to the interview process are supported as well as grouped by code into categories (Creswell, 2013; Saldana, 2015).

A categorized label such as early age attractiveness (attractions) was based on codes like "childhood crushes," "primary years," "before adolescence," "teenage years," "early childhood" and "early adulthood" because this represented the age by which most of the women noticed their attraction to the same-sex. The majority of the participants expressed their concerns of what others would think about their attractions to the same sex: "People could have had the tendencies for years and never acted on it due to social/family pressure" (PI-1). Respondent PI-3 noted, "I have been attracted to women since I was 7 years old but knew at an early age it was not acceptable to like girls. I was told, 'You are only supposed to like boys' by my mother and father." PI-5 reported, "I have always loved the way women look. As a little girl I loved beautiful women, which is why looking young and beautiful is so important to me. I am proud of my looks." PI-7 shared, "I have been attracted to the same sex since I was 10 years old."

As a result of coding within the categories, nine themes materialized. I then reduced the themes to five and one subtheme which aided in the alignment with the central research question (Miles et al., 2014). In qualitative analysis, Patton (2011) suggests that each theme be broken down until it meets saturation (Patton, 2011). Displayed below is Figure 1 which demonstrates the inductive process of the data I used to shift from interviews to themes.

Interview
- Audio recorded the interview of each subject, took field notes, and composed memorandums.

Transcribe
- Each audio recording was transcribed and then the transcriptions were compared to the recordings for accurateness.

Coding

Holistic coding: preparatatory process of coding of passages.

Intial coding: reading each transcript word by word and code key statements of subjects called *In vivo coding*.

Pattern coding:grouping of similar codes (Categorization)

Themes
- Linking relationships of codes that formed within the categories.

Figure 1. Inductive processing of data.

I continued to analyze by using separate pages with new coloring to introduce the third cycle of coding. The previously identified five themes received improved descriptions of both the primary and subsequent themes. This process gave an enhanced illustration of the concepts and limited the repetition within the chart. I placed the information on a new page and arranged it by different colors and codes; continuous assessment permitted a more refined observation of the pronounced advancement of the five coded themes. I used a combination of visualization and mind mapping to give me an overall idea to identify materialized themes.

I reviewed my field notes from each respondent. I noted remarks written during my observations, and I created a new visual chart to make sure that my new and enhanced changes had no inconsistencies (Moustakas, 1994). I incorporated the symbolic illustrations into more recognized, branded themes. As with the implementation of the third cycle of labeling and categorizing, I reflected on the connection of each component thus far to make sure every element connected congruently with previous information concerning themes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). In addition, I reviewed each theme to ensure I had caught the accurate significance of each respondent's answers.

The five overriding themes and sub-theme I discovered were (a) early age attractiveness (attraction), (b) acknowledged coping behaviors and adjustments, (c) financial stability, (d) adjusting to relationships, (e) spiritual acceptance, and 1 subtheme of relief of stress and anxiety when changing relationship styles. In the section on thematic outcomes, each theme and sub-theme is illustrated to give an overview of the participants' stories of their lived experiences.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

I ensured trustworthiness and qualitative accuracy by systematically following the recognized research examination code of behavior outlined in my proposal and my IRB application. This process integrated employing manuscript organizational practices; bracketing my preconceived notions; engaging in vast field work by conducting 10 interviews; using numerous data resources such as Rubin and Rubin (2005, 2012), Creswell, (2013), Maxwell, (2013), and Janesick, (2011); performing member checking; and obtaining advice and support from my dissertation chairperson, committee member, and peers. When member checking, I contacted the participants to ensure all of the pieces of information I retrieved from the interviews were exact answers once I had analyzed the data for accuracy. I used memorandums to document my expressions and ideas as an instrument of bracketing any preconceived notions. I was engaged in my fieldwork process for three months (November, December, and January). Member checking was

achieved in two ways: first, I rephrased the participant's reactions and recapped their statements during our interview process to guarantee truthfulness of my interpretation, and then I did follow-up appointments with all of the participants. Furthermore, I checked in with my dissertation chairperson during different segments of the coding and analysis to extract responses.

Transferability, Dependability and Confirmability

To accomplish transferability, I formed detailed explanations of participant descriptions, sustaining the development of the theoretical narrative and my explanations of the facts. The data was assembled predominantly from the information researched on interview practices by Rubin and Rubin (2005, 2012). To safeguard respondents' implications as much as possible, I used in vivo coding to preserve the participants' expressions. Maxwell (2013) indicated member checking operates as a supplementary level of excellence assurance in addition to dependability in a qualitative study. Dependability is frequently concerned with a self-supporting assessment of the research. I administered this procedure by utilizing my dissertation team's supervision. In addition, I confirmed my code project with all respondents to guarantee the correct application of codes and confirmation of their meanings. Moreover, I shared my coding with my dissertation chair during the coding process. Conclusively, to attain confirmability, I left

an audit trail by following the steps summarized in my IRB data collection steps and

research study practice, as well as in established research protocol.

Results

This study was designed to examine the life experiences of African American

women in same-sex relationships who previously were in a heterosexual relationship.

The 10 participants in the study conversed about their experiences and shared their

journeys about moving from a heterosexual to a same-sex relationship. However, one

participant (PI-10) had to be eliminated from the study because she misunderstood the

requirements and did not meet the criteria for the study. The data collected created five

central themes and one subtheme which are Early Age Attractiveness (Attractions),

Acknowledged Coping Behaviors and Adjustments, Stability within Oneself, Adjusting

to Relationships, Spiritual Acceptance, and Relief of Stress and Anxiety when Changing

Relationship Styles (sub theme).

Thematic Outcomes

Theme 1: Early age attractiveness (attractions) Nine out of the 10 participants

were attracted to the same sex before adulthood; 6 out of the 10 were attracted to the

same sex in their early childhood (ages 3 to 10). Three out of 10 were teenagers when

they were first attracted to the same sex between the ages of 14 and 16. Only 1 participant

was as old as 23 years and in her last year of undergraduate school when she noticed a

same-sex attraction.

"I feel that I have always been attracted to the same sex all my life." (PI1)

"At the age of seven is when I first starting liking girls." (PI3)

"I liked girls at a very young age, but I did not understand why." (PI5)

"I can remember as far back as 6th grade and having a crush on my student

teacher. Throughout high school, there were a few girls that I was attracted to, but

I didn't understand what I was feeling. I was 19 when I began to think about my

feelings, but I didn't go any further because there was no one that I could open up

to about what was going on with me." (PI6)

Theme 2: Acknowledged coping behaviors and adjustments. Eight out of the

10 participants agreed that they needed some type of psychological therapy and

supportive group therapy. Two of the 10 participants did not think that any type of

therapy was necessary. Formal, professional therapeutic services are needed. Their views

on this topic are reflected in the following comments:

"Not really because I don't feel people who move from hetero to homo is a

medical or psychological issue. People could have had the tendencies for years

and never acted on [them] due to social/family pressure." (PI1)

"There are many factors that keep women like me in heterosexual relationships. The reasons include children, family, and religion. It's very difficult to live two lives, and when you finally get the courage to live truthfully, the transition can be devastating. There will be people who will drop out of your life and those people include family and friends. Losing respect from people just because you are gay can be detrimental, and with all of these factors, counseling and a strong support system is necessary." (PI6)

"There is a great need for professional therapy for those who require help with understanding certain feelings; I went to a professional therapist because I did not understand where these feeling were coming from. This was one of the hardest things I had to deal with in my life because I never was attracted to women; I only liked men. So, it was very overwhelming to me. I felt as if I was losing my mind. I felt this was unnatural to be attracted to the same sex. It took many sessions before coming to terms with my sexuality." (PI2)

"I feel it is always a need for psychological/professional counseling and other therapy. I am a Relationship Coach and National Licensed Professional Counselor (NLPC); I work directly with teenagers as well as adults who have left heterosexual relationships and are now in a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer relationship. I believe everyone should feel supported and have some type

of support services either professional or nonprofessional; it depends on the

individual." (PI3)

"I feel there is a great need for psychological therapy, group therapy, and support

networks for African American women who are now in same-sex relationships

after being in heterosexual relationships as well as [for] their children." (PI4)

Theme 3: Financial stability. Seven out of the 10 participants were not

financially affected when leaving their heterosexual relationships. Two participants were

affected because they were not educated at the time of leaving the relationship and were

depending on their male partners.

"I was not financially affected by the relationship ending with my male partner

because I was young and still away in college. At the time I was being supported

by my parents and [my] self." (PI1)

"I was not financially affected when I left my heterosexual relationship as I was

working and living on campus at the university." (PI2)

"I am a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) and Certified Substance Abuse

Counselor (CSAC), and I am currently working on my PhD. I have always taken

care of myself and my children. My last husband was not a good family provider;

this is one of the reasons I am no longer with him." (PI4)

"I was not affected financially after I left my husband because I was always financially stable. We both were in the military for 12 years, and I currently work at the Post Office as a manager and was employed there when my relationship with my husband ended." (PI6)

"I was not affected financially by leaving my heterosexual relationship. I was still in college living on campus at the time when I ended my relationship." (PI8)

Subtheme 1: Relief of stress and anxiety when changing relationship styles Nine out of 10 participants expressed the importance of receiving assistance when coping with the stress of changing relationship styles. All 9 participants stated that they needed the support from their family, their friends, and their church. This was most important.

"First, it's not a lifestyle. It is who we are. I think online groups are great because there is a certain amount of privacy in which a person could talk with other people who are going through or have gone through the same thing. I would suggest finding an affirming church to attend. I say that because religion is probably a big reason why African Americans don't come out. Telling someone that God loves them is oftentimes not enough, especially if you have heard the opposite for the majority of your life. I would suggest that they find a place that teaches the truth about the so-called "clobber" Scriptures. Truth is what sets a person free. The

local LGBT community centers could be more visible as well so that people will

know that they are a resource or a means of support." (PI6)

"More support groups and support by the African American churches [is

needed]." (PI7)

"A support group that took their age and culture into consideration--one that

acknowledges the damage that the black church does to African American, same-

gender, loving individuals [is important]." (PI3)

"Respondents agree that more therapy is need[ed] with counselors that are in the

same life-style and group therapy with others who may share similar

experiences." (PI2)

Theme 4: Adjusting to relationships Seven out of the 10 participants had at

least 5 or more same-sex relationships. The remaining have experienced between 2 to 4

same-sex relationships. Eight out of 10 participants had no regrets after leaving their

heterosexual relationships.

"I made a decision to be truthful about whom I am, and I will never regret making

that choice." (PI6)

 "[I] regret getting involved with women just to get the support I wasn't receiving

from my family at the time. These relationships caused misunderstandings and

negative energy that was not needed, but because I made the decision to leave my

heterosexual relationship for same-sex was unfair to those women. I have no

regret now at 55 living my life the way I want it, loving women only." (PI7)

"I have never had any regrets for being myself and living my life." (PI8)

"I have no regrets of my current relationship and past relationships with women."

(PI5)

"I do not have any regrets for leaving my heterosexual relationship and

connecting with confident women." (PI9)

Seven out of 10 participants left heterosexual relationships before the age of 30. Two left

their heterosexual relationships after 30 years of age: one was 31 and the other was 36.

One had a same-sex relationship at age 28 but went back to the children's father off and

on until 3 years ago at age 48.

"I was 36 when I decided that I would no longer date men. I had one relationship

after I got divorced." (PI6)

"After coming to terms with my sexuality, I have been in 7 same-sex

relationships, and I was in 7 long-term relationships overall, heterosexual or

same-sex." (PI2)

"At the age of 48 I decided I am living my life the way I want to regardless of

what people think; I am living my life for me." (PI4)

Theme 5: Spiritual acceptance No change in religious affiliation was seen after a change in relationship styles. Seven out of the ten participants did not change their religious beliefs; however, one of the seven left the church for a while but returned to the same religion and church years later. In addition, two of the participants have never had a religious affiliation since childhood. The other one changed religions, but it was not because of her sexual orientation.

"Well, I left the church but not God for 5 years. It was the best thing that I could have done for myself, because during that time, I found my own personal relationship with God. Now I am a preacher and teacher of God's Holy Word in a church which accepts my wife and me. Teaching spirituality has nothing to do with sexuality. 'Our Father in Heaven made us in His image'; therefore, we are as we are supposed to be in His eyesight." (PI6)

"I did not change my religious affiliation, but I fellowshipped at different churches within the same denomination. The church is a personal vessel which helps you know where you want to go within your life. It can be very constructive and encouraging as well as unclear when it comes to certain ideas of what God wants from us as people." (PI3)

"I was in the same religion for many years [and] just changed in the last five years to Buddhism, but it was not because of my sexual orientation or life choices. I

found within Buddhism I could totally be me with no judgment when it came to what I believe or who I want to love; Buddhism makes me feel free." (PI5)

"I am still in the same religion as I was as a girl. I changed churches a few times, but I am still a Catholic. The Catholic Church does not really mess with you about your sexuality. I never had a problem within the churches I attended, ever. I love it, and I will always be a part of this beautiful organization. I love God and the Catholic Church." (PI8)

The questions that guided the study were intended to give a true understanding of who these women are in this society. The central question that remains is "What are the experiences of African American women age 40 and over who, previously in heterosexual relationships, are now in same-sex relationships?" The additional interview questions which are referenced in Appendix C provide an awareness and comprehension of the phenomena of African American women in same-sex relationships.

Summary

The purpose of this existential phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American women in same-sex relationships age 40 and over who were previously in a heterosexual relationship. The recruitment was based in the five boroughs of New York City in the northeastern part of the United States. Semi-structured yet thorough interviews were performed to collect and assemble information about each

woman's journey thus far of her experiences in moving from a heterosexual lifestyle to a same-sex relationship. The interviews were conducted by meeting face-to-face, by Skype, and by telephone, using a digital audio recording device and accurate transcription. A notated journal was sustained during research procedures to describe rising observations, perceptions, and understandings. The central question guiding the study is "What are the experiences of African American women age 40 and over who were previously in heterosexual relationships and are now in same-sex relationships?" The transcripts and field notes were examined following Colazzi's 7-step, qualitative data analysis, and using various codes and categories. I integrated holistic, initial, and pattern coding in the analysis and 5 themes materialized from the data. The 5 key themes were early age attractiveness (attractions), acknowledged coping behaviors and adjustments, financial stability, adjusting to relationships, and spiritual acceptance.

Additionally, themes were defined and expressed when describing the spirit and soul of each woman's lived experiences using quoted passages from transcribed interviews. Theme 1 is related to the participants' detection of the significance which is associated directly to the primary theme that focuses on the central research question. Findings indicate that participants reported early age attractions to the same sex. In Chapter 5, additional information is given on the participants' life experiences; I will give

interpretations, recommendations, and comprehensive suggestions for social change, as well as a conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of African

American women in same-sex relationships who were previously in heterosexual

relationships. Distinctively, each woman was impacted when moving from a heterosexual

to a same-sex relationship, and this experience affected her personal life. In my study, I

used an existential phenomenological design to conduct a tailored description of

Colaizzi's 7 Steps to analyze the data. The literature review uncovered significant

research gaps concerning African American women age 40 and older who are currently

in same-sex relationships but were previously in heterosexual relationships. The study

was conducted to assist professional therapists in generating new therapeutic techniques,

as well as improving interventions already in place for this population. Further, my

study's conclusions may produce positive and productive social change by intensifying

the knowledge base of professional counselors and other human services practitioners

who are interested in developing culturally relevant interventions for this underserved

population.

As a result of the study, 5 themes emerged from the data: (a) early age

attractiveness (attraction), (b) acknowledged coping behavior adjustments, (c) financial

stability, (d) adjusting to relationships, and (e) spiritual acceptance. Additionally, one

subtheme emerged: relief of stress and anxiety when changing relationship styles. In the study, I found that most of the participants stayed in the same religion before and after they moved from a heterosexual partnership to a same-sex relationship. The majority of the women who indicated that they had been interested in the same sex since childhood did not act on this attraction until later in their lives because it was considered unacceptable for a variety of cultural and faith-based reasons. Furthermore, most participants agreed that professional therapy and support groups are needed as a positive resource for coping with stress and other issues that occur on a day-to-day basis.

Interpretation of the Findings

Overall, the findings of this study revealed key implications concerning the lived experiences of African American women who are currently in same-sex relationships but who were previously in heterosexual relationships. Facts presented in Chapter 4 reflected the data received from each individual woman's experiences and how the central research question was addressed in relation to the study's collected answers. The findings interpret the participants' answers to the questions below, which extend the knowledge of what was found in Chapter 2.

RQ 1: What are the experiences of African American women age 40 and over who were previously in heterosexual relationships and are now in same-sex relationships?

In previous literature on women in same-sex relationships, the African American woman was not discussed by most authors. Bates's (2010) article on African American bisexual women who were married was the most recent relevant study that was found. The majority of studies written about women in same-sex relationships who had been in heterosexual relationships did not exclude African American women, but African American women were not the focal point of these other research studies. Even though studies were limited, Boon and Alderson (2009) researched older women who had previously been in heterosexual relationships but were currently in same-sex relationships, thereby addressing one of the components of the present study's central research question. This research was valuable to this study because it included women age 40 and over. The study conducted by Thompson, Forsyth, and Langley (2009) noted that women in same-sex relationships have many things to consider when leaving heterosexual relationships, such as finances and social and sexual stigmas, which are emotionally involved issues with women being the main breadwinner. Same-sex relationships are currently growing in acceptability, but social support systems are not as prevalent (Reeves & Horne, 2009). Composing the right questions to link back to the central question was important to ensure that the voice of each participant in the study was heard. The limited literature on African American women in same-sex relationships who previously were in heterosexual relationships gave a different perspective on a

newly refined group of women. Consequently, an assortment of occurrences became recognizable when focusing directly on the women's lived experiences when interviewing each one.

Each woman openly told about her life story before moving to her same-sex relationship after leaving her heterosexual relationship. The participants' attraction to the same sex affected their lives because, in the African American community, many do not accept the idea of women loving women; dealing with this has been a struggle for most of the participants (Niles, 2013). In the African American community, same-sex relationships are negative entities; many African Americans have a built-in phobia concerning the idea of LGBTQ relationships (Niles, 2013). Even though each woman had her own experiences,there were similar characteristics existed in the areas of early attractions to the same sex and the need for essential support on a professional and personal level.

Findings indicated that a majority of the participants had an early attraction to the same sex. PI4 stated she had "always liked girl because of their beauty but never acted on it until the last 5 years." She was in her second same-sex relationship at age 51; she loved "the freedom of being who I am now opposed to before." PI7 said that she noticed her "interest in girls at age 10"; she was in the fifth grade. She stated that she had "always loved the smell of women" when she was a young girl. PI8 stated that she had noticed

herself developing feelings for women when she was 16 years old and on the basketball team but was "already in a relationship with the father of my two children, who was also on the basketball team. Everyone thought we were a match made in heaven, both of our families and our friends." PI9 stated that she enjoyed playing with boys as a child but had loved looking at how pretty girls were since she was 6 years old. At 21 years of age, she said, "No more men for me. I am going to live my life, not caring what my parents or other family members think of me."

In the conclusive answers, findings indicated that acknowledged coping behaviors and adjustments are tools to use to modify what society says are rights or wrongs. Formal professional therapy and untraditional therapy are needed for African American women in same-sex relationships. A high percentage of the participants in the study stated that a great need for such services was present in their lives. PI5 stated, "Therapy is the key to healing oneself, going beyond sexuality but[to] the bottom of the soul. The Lord God knows you before you know yourself." African American women in same-sex relationships need more support groups. She said that many seniors "do not understanding the new lesbians. Bi-curious, bisexual women are not having protective sex, and this causes other issues." PI2 agreed that a great need for psychological services within the LGBTQ community exists. She did not realize her attraction to women until she was in her last semester of college and thought she was losing her mind. She said, "I always

loved being with men," so this was very overwhelming to her, and one of older sisters

took her to be evaluated. It took her a few years to come to terms with her new identity.

However, she did feel that the best therapists would be those "from the LGBTQ

community for most same-sex individuals as well as couples; it is important to relate."

When interviewing the participants about the subtheme, relief of stress and

anxiety when changing relationship styles, a key element was noted involving coping

mechanisms that go beyond therapy such as having supportive family, friends, social

groups, and religion. The majority agreed that they had to find ways to cope with their

lifestyle changes as well as other matters in life. These findings were similar to another

finding entitled *adjusting to relationships*, which included the need for therapy, either

traditional or nontraditional. In addition, 90% of participants felt the need for formal and

informal therapeutic professional services. Coping with oneself was important for each of

the women in the study. PI3 noted, "There is great need for resource assistance designed

for African American women in same-sex relationships to cope with the stress factors of

changing relationship styles. These assistances should include support groups for their age

groups and culture considerations and a group that would acknowledge how religion plays

a role." PI4's suggestion to each woman who has moved from one relationship to another

was "to find and put encouraging and confident support systems in place to cope with her

personal stresses. Groups and constructive networking are helpful as well as church and

reading." PI7 noted that "constructive assistance for individuals which are experiencing stressfulness while coping with changing lifestyles would be more support groups and support by the African American churches." PI6 stated, "There should be conclusive aid for individuals who are experiencing stressfulness while coping with changing lifestyles; there is need for more support groups and more support from the African American churches."

The implications of findings for financial stability indicate less stress in this area. Eighty percent of the participants were not affected financially when leaving their heterosexual relationships. PI1 stated that she was 21 years old and in college, living on campus and still receiving support from her parents; she was not affected in any way financially when leaving her heterosexual relationship. PI2 continued to take money from her boyfriend after she left the relationship because he continued to give it to her to win her back. He thought her lifestyle change and dating women were part of a phase she was going through and expected that they would be back together soon. After almost 20 years, he still gives to her, loves her, and is friends with her wife; they own a house together. PI2 could "always take care of myself," she stated. She always had a job while in undergraduate school that paid well, her family owned their own business, and she came "from an upper middle class family." PI3 said that she always took care of herself at a young age. She worked at her college and at a clothing store while in undergraduate

school; then she got married to her first husband, and they had a daughter. She went on to

graduate school and met her second husband; they had a son. Once she left her last

husband, she was already a licensed, professional counselor, so she was stable financially.

PI6 was in the military along with her husband; she was stable financially when she

divorced him and moved on to her same-sex relationship.

Adjusting to relationships was another significant finding, which included the

number of relationships in which each participant had engaged before her current one.

Ninety percent had been in their current same-sex relationships for 5 or more years.

Nevertheless, findings showed that 80% of the participants had been in some kind of long-

term relationship for less than 5 years, either same-sex or heterosexual. Ninety percent of

the participants had no regrets in leaving their heterosexual relationships. PI4 stated that

she had "been in two same-sex relationships"; she had had two long-term relationships,

both with men. She had no regrets with her new life choice, especially because her two

youngest children (boys) "understand that they have two mothers to support them,

regardless if their fathers are there or not." PI6 was in 2 same-sex relationships that she

considered relationships. She had 6 long-term relationships, which included both

heterosexual and same-sex relationships. She made a decision to be truthful about who she

is, and she said that she "will never regret making that choice." PI7 noted that she had

been in 10 same-sex relationships and had been in three long-term relationships thus far.

She regretted that she became involved with women "just to get the support I was not getting from my family at the time."

Spiritual acceptance was a critical and vital finding. Eighty percent of the participants had remained in the same religion since childhood, even after moving from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship. PI2 had been in the same church since she was born. Her wife was in the same religion, and they were from the same mother church in Charlotte, North Carolina; this was where they met. "I never shout out about my lifestyle. I just live my life. I know God loves me for me. He created me, and I am the Lord's child first and foremost." PI8 reported, "I have been in the same church with my first husband and second husband and now with my wife-to-be. I love my church. No one asked me any questions, so I give no answers. I am happy in my church—I've been there for over 30 years." PI3 said, "I am in the same religion, but because I work on assignment all over the world, my home church is in New York City. This is not my original church, but it is similar to my childhood church. I am still a Christian and a Baptist." The overall findings gave an overview of each participant's story of her lived experiences.

After I interpreted the findings, more detailed information emerged about African American women in same-sex relationships, aged 40 and over, who previously were in heterosexual relationships. In the literature review in Chapter 2, I presented information

from other authors who were interested in studying women in same-sex relationships who previously had been in opposite-sex relationships, but a study with a direct focus on African American women age 40 and over was missing. This study has given an overview of these women's lived experiences.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was queer theory and social identity theory. Some crucial findings surfaced from the framework supporting this study as well as another theory. Queer theory provided an overview of the participants' life experiences. This theory evolved from gay/lesbian studies, which emerged out of feminist studies and feminist theory (Elund, 2012; Lauretis, 1990). Social identity theory gave a concrete perspective on who each woman was as a person and how she identified socially after changing from a heterosexual lifestyle to a same-sex lifestyle. All of the participants in the study were in possession of an explanation and interpretation of their lived experiences (Cripps, 2011).

In this study, participants expressed their versions of how they were affected by issues of coping with some of the negative stigmas that come along with being in same-sex relationships and how professional therapy could impact and enhance their lives, as well as those of other individuals who have experienced the same need for supportive networking. Both theories were culled from the findings because of the identifications

that occurred as participants changed or moved from one type of relationship to another. This created new choices for each individual woman in her lived experience.

Queer theory goes beyond how numerous people interpret it; this theory provides new ideas relating to the LGBT community as the members of this population sexually identify with their personal life choices (Elund, 2012). With personal self-expression of her sexual orientation, each woman offered a summary of who she was as an African American woman who had experienced the stigma of being interested in the same sex (Elund, 2012). According to James (2011), a Black feminist theorist, queer theory established new paths, including religious beliefs that were now unguarded and opened new avenues in the field of sexual orientation. Social identity theory also provides additional insight concerning how those in society perceive same-sex relationships because of the misunderstanding of the terms used when referring to these individuals; therefore, social identity theory was important to use in this study (James, 2011). An additional conceptual or theoretical framework that could have been used was intersectionality.

Intersectionality involves a view beyond the outlines of gender, race, and class, which merge when one is researching the feminist movement. Practical studies have revealed that there was a great impact on how Intersectionality can relates to a new study with similar participants (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013). The

connection of the concept with the other theories can attach all of the findings, mapping the same developments as when using the noted conceptual and theoretical frameworks (Browne & Ferreira, 2016). According to Lane (2016), intersectionality gives an examination in theoretical and empirical studies of sexualized space that, in turn, deals with the concepts of gender, race, and class that have equally created and generated both sexuality and social space. This concept would have given an additional dimension to the study with the same findings, albeit using only one framework with the same abstracted ideas.

Limitations of the Study

Snowball sampling techniques were used to recruit individuals for my study. My study was a qualitative design and was not generalizable. Limitations existed in my study concerning African American women 40 years and older in same-sex relationships who reside in New York City, New York. The outcome of using a younger age group would have been different. The snowball sampling method connected me with numerous African American women in same-sex relationships, but they did not all meet the requirements for the study. I wanted 10 women for my study, but I received applications from over 20 interested women. I interviewed 10 women, so I did not have to use more than 10 participants. Further, in recruiting, one of the core factors was age. Many who contacted me were individuals in their 30s. A few people from the LGBT center were

African American males, and three were Caucasian females who were currently in same-sex relationships with African American women. These individuals did not meet the criteria for my study. Nevertheless, these individuals might need the same formal professional psychological assistance that the participants in my study were seeking.

To prevail over the limitations, I followed Moustakas's (1994), making sure I understood certain restrictions and constraints were in place in order to use a phenomenological approach. Rubin and Rubin's (2012) qualitative interviewing techniques guided me through the process to make sure I captured the essence of each participant's lived experiences and to also make sure each participant was comfortable with the interviewing process, another key component when following Rubin and Rubin's (2005, 2012) directions on interviewing.

Another limitation, for the most part, was that a good number of participants did not want to do the debriefing with me. Once they completed the interviewing process, that was all they wanted to do for the majority of the participants. A few stated they trusted me and did not need to go any further. Janesick (2011), who provided an overview of the interviewing techniques process, as well as Rubin and Rubin (2005, 2012), suggested that member checking is a part of the process. I convinced nearly everyone to participate with me via Skype, telephone, or in person just to make sure my interpretation of the interview

answers was accurate. After reviewing the limitations, future research is needed about African American women in same-sex relationships from a different perspective.

Recommendations

In this study, a qualitative existential phenomenological approach described the contributing aspects to the essence of the lived experiences of African American women in same-sex relationships who were previously in a heterosexual relationship. The conclusive findings recognized a number of combinations which revealed the life experiences of these women. The overall conjecture specified African American women in same-sex relationships who were at one time in a heterosexual relationship yet who chose to change their relationship style to be who they really are. As mentioned in Chapter 2, same-sex attraction is associated with a negative stereotype which reduces an individual's identity to their sexual behavior rather than looking at the individual as a whole (APA, 2010). Nevertheless, a considerable gap exists in the qualitative, researched literature concerning the life experiences of African American women over 60 in same-sex relationships. I recommend this population be studied. Only one of my participants was over 60, and she pointed out different concerns for her age group who are now seniors. She suggested more education on sexually transmitted diseases, more support groups on fear, and more discussion on facts and issues which relate to living in New York City.

The next recommendation is for a quantitative study on American women of African descent and the perception of their identities. When collecting data, several women did not want to be recognized or identified as African American, but Black American and vice-versa. I found this fact to be worthy of additional research because it highlights different ideas on what individuals think about their race and culture, as well as who they are as women of color.

Future research actions must delve into the scope of African American women who were in same-sex relationships but decide to return to heterosexual relationships and how it affects the lives of their children. When interviewing with participants, several women talked about how having children can be overwhelming when leaving a heterosexual relationship, so many women go back to transitional relationships to satisfy their families. To understand how the children, as well as women, are affected by these back and forth changes is important. I concur with Bates's (2010) study on African American women who were bisexual while married, and the recommendations that more research be done on African American women in same-sex relationships overall, as well as more research on bisexual, African American women and the obstacles faced within the LGBTQ community.

Research is pending on how homophobia has affected the African American community and African American women in same-sex relationships throughout history.

The whole idea of same-sex relationships has always been prohibited and seen as a real taboo from the coming out stage to other lived experiences of these women. A qualitative methodology using a case study approach would be most useful to get an idea of the complex phenomena within the contexts which relate to the participants' experiences. The subject of homophobia and same-sex relationships among African American women is highly recommended for research. Many of the women in the study spoke about how coming out was difficult, not only in their homes but in their whole community, on a personal, professional, and spiritual level.

Finally, additional research is also needed on African American women in same-sex relationships and how their religious beliefs have hindered them from being open about their current relationship style. Ninety percent of the participants in the study I conducted stated they did not change their religious affiliation after moving from a heterosexual relationship to a same-sex relationship which was very positive, but the taboos and other biases are very strong concerning religion and same-sex relationships. In African American communities, homophobia and other phobias are at the top of the list about individuals in same-sex relationships. Therefore, a quantitative methodology would be useful to get a different perspective on this group of people; many more people would be able to participate. Furthermore, such a study would add to the current theories,

and using another distinctive theory such as intersectionality to connect the variables to a new set of questions could give another impression of the same population.

Implications for Positive Social Change

The aim of the study is to give shared, life experiences of African American women in same-sex relationships who previously were in heterosexual relationships. The implication for positive social change would be the enhancement of techniques for psychological therapists which would involve new psychosocial opportunities to assist practitioners and clinicians and other formal professionals. My study provided an overview of the needs of the participants which included interventions such as support groups with their peers. Non-traditional services are also needed, such as life coaches and relationship coaches. When analyzing my data from the study, I found the majority of my participants felt psychological therapy, group therapy, and support groups were a component needed for African American women in same-sex relationships. Some women were aware of the organizations that provide services for LGBTQ communities; however, an overwhelming amount of respondents stated that African American women need additional services. These responses were the overpowering reasons why such a need exists for positive social change among the population. One participant stated that not only does a need exist for psychological therapy, but a greater need exists for therapists who are African American, in a same-sex relationship, or identify as lesbian; this

provides other women in the same type of dynamic with comfortable settings regardless of whether they were in relationships with men in the past or not.

Even though the law was passed in 2015 in the United States which allows individuals of the same-sex to be married in all 50 states, the mindset in the religious world, especially in the African American communities, remains set against same-sex relationships. Numerous churches will not marry same-sex couples, regardless of what the U.S. Supreme Court says, nor will they accept same-sex individuals. Many African American churches have not come to terms with the whole idea of same-sex individuals or relationships as a holy or spiritual inspiration or an image of God's teachings within the Christian interpretations of the New and Old Testaments. A great need is present in our society to implement positive social change by creating new avenues which include spiritual guidance through therapy which will link individuals in different religions concerning same-sex relationships. Even though in my study most of the women said they were still in the same religious affiliation they had been in since childhood, this response was a very interesting finding in my research. I thought most would have changed affiliations because of the stigmas of the African American Christian churches about homosexuality and biases that the African American community has about this group. In my professional life, I have met several same-sex individuals who changed their religion to Buddhism or other nontraditional African American religious

associations after coming out. The main components needed are enhanced help to assist individuals to tap the powers within themselves to go forward in whatever life choices they make and formal professional therapy, as well as nontraditional therapeutic methods to meet the needs of the people.

Conclusion

This existential phenomenological study perceptively maps the life journeys of 9 African American women who are in same-sex relationships who were previously in heterosexual relationships. Each participant was unique even though they had some similarities; no two women were the same. This study was an awesome experience for me, as a researcher, to meet positive and productive people who believe in who they are. The majority of the women maintain the struggles within themselves because society says it is wrong, and the churches say it is wrong to love the same gender, but love has a mind of its own. Overwhelming grief and pain occurred when these women were introduced to homophobia, which has been passed down throughout the African American community for generations. These elements made it complicated for many of these women to come out before they took on male partners; most of them really did not want male partners in the first place. Several participants felt a great need for counseling, therapy, and positive support systems for themselves and other African American women who love other women. My participants face personal, professional, and spiritual obstacles, but they still

stay true to themselves by doing what their hearts have told them to do. After leaving heterosexual relationships which society said was the right way to live, each woman made a conscious decision to live in the world of the forbidden. The findings from my study confirmed that African American women, even when they decided to follow their heart, still stayed with their religious affiliations because of the faith they had in God. In addition to keeping within their spiritual selves regardless of what others might have said, each woman continues to practice her religion in spite of the negative viewpoints of society.

Quite a few amazing strides have happened since I started this study; all same-sex couples can celebrate marriages in this country. Each person can now marry the person they love with no more hoping and praying they can openly tell the world they love someone of the same sex (Johnson & Summers, 2014). As of 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court approved the Marriage Act to include same-sex couples (Summers, 2015). Many others avenues need to be explored concerning same-sex relationships; however, this study was big in scope. The participants in the study have shown that regardless of negative ideologies which were present in their pasts, they have jumped each hurdle one by one to live their lives the way they have seen fit. As a human services practitioner, to *meet each individual where they are* is important, helping them to meet their goals. Furthermore, psychological therapy is needed. When clinicians and other practitioners

develop new techniques, this will promote positive social change for everyone who is

willing to seek services. African American women are just like other women: they want

to love and be loved by someone regardless of the gender of their mates. The bottom line

is that each woman merely desires to be free to be herself.

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Appendix A: Demographic Survey

Participant Age	Participant Race	Partnership status
In what Borough of New York City, NY does participant live?	**Length in Partnership/Relationship (Same-sex) (Approximate years/months)**	**Length in Previous Relationship**
Location/Site		

Other Notes:

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Researcher: Patricia Lynn Smith

You are invited to take part in a research study of the experiences of African American women in same-sex relationships who were previously in heterosexual relationships. This researcher is inviting African American women age 40 and over who are presently in a same-sex relationship, who were previously in a heterosexual relationship for at least 7 years and who live in one of the 5 boroughs of New York City, New York to be in this study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. This study is being conducted by Patricia Lynn Smith, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information: The Purpose of this Study is to explore the lived experiences of African American women age 40 and over who have previously been in heterosexual relationships and who are now in same-sex relationships.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in an audio tape recorded individual interview at one of the approved private locations of your choice or in a Skype interview or in a telephone

interview which can be conducted at the same, approved, private location. The interview session will last for about 45 to 60 minutes.

- Participate in member checking (respondent validation) to ensure accuracy of data obtained during the interview process. This means I will share a copy of my initial interpretations of the interviews with each participant to confirm that I have accurately captured what she meant to say.

Here are some sample questions:

1. What are your emotional experiences as an African American woman in a same-sex relationship after being in heterosexual relationships?

2. As an African American woman, how if at all, have your experiences of being in a same-sex relationship affected your spiritual experiences?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This research study is voluntary. I will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. There is no penalty for not taking part in this study. The information gathered from you will be confidential and limited only to this researcher. If you decide to participate in the study now, you can still change your mind later. You can end your participation at any given time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Participating in this study would not pose any risk to your safety or well-being. The

potential benefit of participating in this study may come in the form of supportive

services in the future for others.

- Some questions may spark memories. These memories could be unpleasant. Your

  thoughts may make you emotional, or you may feel stressed. If this discomfort

  takes place, we can stop the interview at any time. Risks may include these

  feelings of discomfort or unpleasant memories. I will provide you with a resource

  list of mental health and community health service organizations if needed. Some

  of these services are free and other requires a fee. The researcher will give each

  individual participant a copy of these organizations along with the consent form

  for personal privacy at the time of consent.

- The potential benefits of this research may include sharing your understanding

  about the effects of your experiences and your personal insights. Each of these

  insights gained from this study may provide helping professionals and other

  researchers with an understanding of what is needed to develop better programs

  and services to support women who face similar experiences.

Payment:

There will be no money or payment for taking part in this study.

Privacy:

Any information during this study that you provide will be kept confidential. This researcher will make sure that your personal information will not be used for any purposes outside of this research study. In addition, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by the researcher, Patricia Lynn Smith, on UBS drives at her private residence in a locked security safe box; only the researcher has access to all of the study data. Records will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by Walden University.

Contacts and Questions:

- If you have concerns, you may ask any questions you have now or later, you may contact the researcher via phone at or you may email Patricia.Smith7@waldenu.edu.

- If you want to talk privately about your rights and concerns as a volunteer, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you.

- Walden University's approval number for this study is _____. The date it expires is _____.

<center>**Statement of Consent**</center>

I have read the above information. I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below "I consent to this study," I understand that I agree to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant_____

Date of consent   _____

Participant's Signature_____

Researcher's Signature_____

Appendix C: Interview Questions and Debrief Script

The following are the

GMHC Team 119

119 West 24th Street, 4th Floor

New York, NY 10011

212.367.1296 [Bob]

robertor@gmhc.org

Hetrick-Martin Institute open-ended interview questions:

1. How long have you been in your current relationship?

2. How many years were you in a heterosexual relationship?

3. At what time in your life did you feel that you were attracted to the same-sex?

4. How many same-sex relationships how you been in?

5. How many long-term relationships have you been in, heterosexual or same-sex?

6. Do you feel that there is need for more services (such as psychological therapy, group therapy, or support groups) for African American women who have moved from a heterosexual to a same-sex relationship?

7. How long ago did you leave your heterosexual relationships?

8. At what age were you when you left your heterosexual relationship?

9. Do you feel that after leaving your heterosexual relationship that you were affected financially?

10. After leaving your heterosexual relationship and entering into a same-sex relationship, did you change religious affiliation or are you currently in the same one?

11. What would be some assistance that you think would be helpful to other African American women to cope with the stresses of changing lifestyles?

12. Do you have any regrets concerning your relationship life choice?

Debriefing steps:

- You may be contacted as a follow-up if you provide permission;

- You can request a copy of a summarization of this research study.

- I have transcribed the interview contents, but your name has not been included.

Appendix D: Resource Listing

2 Astor Place, 3rd Floor

New York, NY 10003

212.674.2400

212.674.8695 (TTY)

The Supportive Services Department provides group, family, and individual counseling

for LGBT youth and families.

www.hmi.org

info@hmi.org

The Institute for Human Identity

322 Eighth Avenue, Suite 802

New York, NY 10001

212.243.2830

Counseling and psychotherapy services for LGBT individuals, couples, families; short- or

long-term services, group therapy, and consultations available. Services provided on a

sliding-scale basis when there is no health insurance coverage.

www.ihi-therapycenter.org

ihi-lgbt@juno.com

Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services

LGBT Counseling Unit

Manhattan West/Greenberg Center Manhattan North

120 West 57th Street & 549 West 180th Street

NY, NY 10019 & NY, NY 10033

212.632.4482 & 212.795.9888

LGBT-affirmative psychotherapy by specially trained therapists

www.jbfcs.org

dferguson@jbfcs.org

Services and Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Elders (SAGE)

305 7th Ave., 15th Floor

New York, NY 10001

212.741.2247

www.sageusa.org

Brooklyn Community Pride Center

310 Atlantic Ave.

Brooklyn, NY 11201

347.889.7719

www.lgbtbrooklyn.org

Good Shepherd Services (Safe Homes)

Administrative Offices

305 7th Ave., 9th Floor

New York, NY 10001

212.243.7070

www.goodshepherds.org

Identity House

208 W. 13th Street

New York, NY 10011

212.243.8181

www.identityhouse.org

Lambda Legal

120 Wall Street, 19th Floor

New York, NY 10005

212.809.8585

www.lambdalegal.org

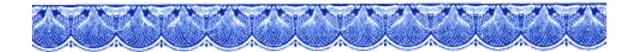Appendix E: NIH Certification

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that

Patricia Smith successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting

Human Research Participants."

Date of completion: 12/16/2014

Certification Number: 1636900

Appendix F: Doctoral Research Study

African American Women in Same-Sex Relationships who were previously in

Heterosexual Relationships

Are you or someone you know an African American woman with a current same-sex

relationship who has previously be in a long-term, heterosexual relationship? If

so, please consider a confidential interview to share your experiences –in a

private, confidential manner.

Participants: This study has examined the lived experience African American Women in

a current same-sex relationship but who have been in a long-term heterosexual

relationship.

All participants have been provided an informed consent.

Confidential, 60-90 minute, in-person interviews will be conducted at a private location.

We have met at an agreed upon location, such as a library or private office space.

Share your experiences and knowledge about your life experiences (emotional, social,

physical, and spiritual).

Note: This involves voluntary Participation; No compensation will be given.

No names will be used in the study.

VOLUNTEER PARTICIPANTS ARE NEEDED FOR AN INTERVIEW.

Participants are asked:

Do you meet the criteria for this study?

What are the experiences of African American Women in same-sex relationships, who

were previously in long-term, heterosexual relationships?

Contact the Researcher if you meet the following criteria:

Participant must be a self-identified, English speaking, African American woman aged 40

and over.

Participant must live in the New York City Metropolitan area.

Participant must self-identify as being in a same-sex relationship but having been in a

heterosexual relationship (long-term) in the past.

The venue where this flyer has been placed is *not* affiliated with this study.

- If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr.

 Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this

 with you.

 Contact Researcher:

Patricia Lynn Smith

Walden University

Appendix G: Member Checking and Reviewing a Copy of the Results

I can provide you with a written copy of the typed results of the recorded interview if you would like to review it for correctness and completeness.	If changes are needed, you may tell me at that time.	This step is called member checking.
You may also request to see a copy of the final study summary, once it is complete.	I can provide you with these results by email or regular mail.	If you would like to see either document, I will need your address or email to notify you.

Member Check Process