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Lisa Lynelle Moore
The Applicability of William E.
Cross's Model of Black Identity
Development and Vivienne
Cass's Model of Lesbian/Gay
Identity Formation to the
Experience of Black Lesbians

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to explore the applicability of William E. Cross' Black identity development model and Vivienne Cass' model of lesbian/gay identity formation to the experience of Black lesbians. Through evaluating their applicability the experience of identity integration was addressed in the experience of Black lesbians whose intersections of identity may conflict within a predominately heterosexual Black community and in the visible lesbian community which is often perceived as predominately White.

Through using an interview guide comprised of ten open-ended questions developed by the researcher, sixteen women between the ages of nineteen and forty-nine participated in sixty-minute individual interviews. Questions were based upon themes of assimilation, isolation, experiences with discrimination, family impact/influence, identity awareness and identity integration, which are found in the models and studies of Cross and Cass.

This study found that though portions of these models are applicable, neither address the process of identity integration or confront the impact of rejection from the primary reference group which may effect the process of identity development. In response to these findings a model was proposed by this researcher which addresses the experience of identity integration.

THE APPLICABILITY OF WILLIAM E. CROSS'S MODEL
OF BLACK IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND
VIVIENNE CASS'S MODEL OF LESBIAN/GAY IDENTITY
FORMATION TO THE EXPERIENCE OF BLACK LESBIANS

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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1998

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Individuals who encompass multiple identities often challenge traditional notions of how identity is developed and affirmed. Traditionally much of the research on multiple identities had been done on individuals who identify with more than one racial or ethnic group. There have been few studies which have focused exclusively on racial identity and evaluated the experience of those individuals developing a lesbian/gay identity. Though the concept of multiple identities is presently being discussed and researched more often, there continues to be a dearth of research on the specific experiences encountered by individuals of particular racial and ethnic groups who encompass these identities. The study of identity development presents clinicians and researchers with the opportunity to gain understanding of the psychosocial factors which effect the process of identity formation. This research has provided us with insight into the various ways in which we consider dual identity development, but there continues to be little written on the experience of forming a Black Lesbian identity.

A Black lesbian identity is one that encompasses multiple identities which have been significantly disenfranchised, Black, Woman, and Lesbian. When reviewing various models of Black identity formation and

Homosexual identity formation it is not clear how applicable the models are to the experience of Black Lesbians. Due to societal factors which impact individuals who are Black, can one assume that the formation of a Lesbian identity will occur in the same way that is proposed in homosexual identity development models, which have been based predominately on the experiences of white lesbians and Gays? Certainly we cannot make that assumption, based on the racism, sexism, and classism in our society which significantly effects the experience of Blacks in the United States. Clearly, we should not readily apply these models without further investigating the experiences of Black lesbians. Through considering these experiences and the saliency of a Black and lesbian identity to women one can explore the nuances in developing multiple identities. The experience of encompassing more than one identity for Black lesbians has often resulted in profound isolation from the Black community, which for many is or was the primary community of group membership and the visible lesbian community, which is predominately white (Mays & Cochran, 1992). The experience of homophobia in one community and racism in the other, results in the possibility of a Black lesbian being rejected from both communities.

The model of Black identity development created by William E. Cross (1971) is a five stage model which asserts that a Black person's racial identity is developed through five distinct psychological stages, Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization. Progression through these stages for a Black individual results in a final identity which is self -

confident of their racial identity and at the same time is able to be open to a more pluralistic perspective (Cross, 1978). Vivienne Cass's model of Homosexual identity formation is a six stage model which was influenced by Cross, but was developed within the framework of interpersonal congruency theory (Cass, 1979; Secord & Backman, 1961). Cass's six stages of Lesbian/Gay identity development are: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity awareness, identity acceptance, and identity pride (1978). These six stages occur dependent upon the congruency or incongruency of the individuals interpersonal interactions, which determines their progression (Cass, 1978).

The models of Black identity development and lesbian identity development each assert that it is in the last stages that one begins to participate in group activities which result in "successful" completion of the model stages, which are often repeated throughout life (Cass, 1978, Cross, 1971). It is not clear how these models are fully applicable if one cannot complete the stages due to rejection from the group with which they identify. If one does not experience rejection, how do the models address the integration of the two identities? There has been little research which has addressed the convergence of Cass's model which was influenced by Cross's and examined the validity of the two models to Black Lesbians .

Purpose and Design of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the applicability of the models developed by Cass and Cross and to explore how the two models,

which are essentially the basis for latter models on Black identity development and lesbian/gay identity development apply to a Black lesbian experience. These models are also the two most often cited in the literature of Black identity development and lesbian/gay identity development. Through determining the applicability of Cass and Cross through sixty minute individual interviews and one optional focus group with a minimum of seven Black lesbians, a model which will address the formation of a Black lesbian identity will be proposed. This model will address the integrative aspects of Black lesbian experiences and focus on the strengths in the formation of this identity. Discussing the development of this identity will inform clinicians of some characteristics in efforts to avoid the pathologizing of behavior. In addition, the work will address issues of saliency in a Black lesbian experience and examine values of identifying with certain groups at certain times.

Given the dearth of empirical research specifically on Black lesbians the work which has been located by this researcher will be of importance given that it explores the relationships of Black lesbians and begins to answer some of the questions posed. Empirical studies done by Dr. Vicki Mays and Dr. Susan Cochran of UCLA have evaluated the importance of participation in family networks to Black lesbians and gays (1998), relationships of Black lesbians (1988), and the influence of perceived discrimination on the intimate relationships of Black lesbians (Mays, Cochran, and Rhue, 1993). The MSW thesis of Darryl Loiacano (1988) from the University of Pennsylvania, on the

identity formation of Black Gays and Lesbians is of great significance due to its qualitative evaluation of identity development using Coleman's (1982) model of Lesbian/Gay identity formation.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical basis for assessing the identity development of Black lesbians, independent of the models is relational theory. This framework has been used by Beverly Tatum in her work to connect racial identity development with the experience of Black women in predominately white communities to illustrate the effects of isolation on perceptions of self (Tatum, 1992). Though, Tatum's study is focused on Black women in predominately white communities, relational theory as a base provides a strong framework to explain the experience of women and connectedness. Relational theory addresses the development of self through the relationships and emotional bonds developed between women and others in their environment (Tatum, 1992). The strength of applying this theory to the developmental aspects of Black lesbian experience is that it offers a framework to describe the internal processing which is occurring while one is attempting to make emotional connections (Tatum, 1992).

Assumptions of Research

This researcher assumes that her identity as a Black lesbian will impact the course of this research, which is why a piece of self-analysis has been included. The author also is aware that the personal experience of identifying as a Black lesbian will present issues in regard to bias, but in the process of

undertaking the research, will ideally present unique insight into the development of this identity. In addition, the premise of this study is that the impact of racism and homophobia effect the individual development of identity and perceptions of self. Overall, this research assumes that identity development of multiple identities is a conscious and subconscious process which can be studied by words, experiences and actions shared by interview participants.

Limitations of Research

This study cannot evaluate the experience of Bisexuality within the Black lesbian experience given the narrow focus of the models being used in the study. The existing models do not address the formation of a Bisexual identity. This research is not evaluating the experience of Black Gay men because to do a study which would include their experience would necessitate a great deal more time, which this researcher is not afforded. The work by Loiacano (1988) is a good attempt at addressing the two, but given the unique experience of each identity, Lesbian and Gay, this researcher finds it important to devote the study exclusively to Black lesbians, an identity that has been rarely explored in the field of identity development.

Justification: Why study only Black lesbians?

The consequence of not exploring the development of Black lesbian identity formation is a continuance of the dearth of knowledge available in the field of clinical social work, psychology, and specifically in the field of identity development. Understanding how existing models apply to the

experience of Black lesbians allows professionals to gain stronger insight into the variations of identity formation experienced. Though there are current studies being conducted on the development of identity formation for racial and ethnic lesbians, few are being done or have been done by identified lesbians of color. Although this study is narrow in that its focus is on one specific sub-population within the Black and lesbian communities, it provides the opportunity to link the work of Black female theorists in the exploration of identity in the context of clinical social work. Hopefully the findings of this study, in conjunction with thorough exploration of existing work will present an opportunity for the expansion of knowledge.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is divided into two parts, the first being focused on the theory of identity development and models of Black and Lesbian identity formation. The concentration of the second part is on the literature and empirical research on Black lesbians and Black Women. Through examination of non-fictional, coming out stories, and Black feminist theorists, themes present will be demonstrated. There will also be the inclusion of empirical studies which illustrate the experiences of Black lesbians.

I. Theories of Identity Development

What constitutes the study of identity? Who has traditionally determined what constitutes identity? Some social constructionists would argue that the study of lesbianism is a study of the "account" of being lesbian and not of an individual's psychology (Kitzinger, 1987). The study of being Black on the other hand is often a study of the individual's perceptions of the meaning of their racial identity in their daily functioning and development of self. Kitzinger (1987), asserts in her work that previous studies (Seeman, 1958; Rogers and Buffalo, 1974; Sarnoff, 1951; Nobles, 1973) of identity accounts from oppressed and socially marginalized racial and ethnic groups

reveal direct acceptance of the majority definition of their identity's deviance. These studies reflected the stereotypical definitions inherent in the researchers and participants mode of thinking about identity as it pertains to the individual who is not part of the Caucasian population. The acceptance of stereotypes within researchers have been the basis by which the construction of traditional definitions of race, ethnicity, and lesbianism have been derived. The study of identity acquisition has been rooted in theories and research which are continually evolving as time progresses. The consistent thread in models and theory of identity has been the importance of interactions with individuals and groups that share similar perceptions of the world (Cross, 1971; Cass, 1983; Eliason, 1996; McCarn, 1996; Troiden, 1989).

Interpersonal Congruency Theory

Interpersonal congruency theory, developed by Paul Secord and Carl Backman (1964), reflects the pattern of development individuals are to engage in when establishing a peer network which will be supportive of that individuals determination of self (Secord & Backman, 1964). Interpersonal congruency is, "... a state existing when perceived self and self as ego imagines he is perceived by alter are congruent," (Secord & Backman, 1964).

Secord & Backman (1964) tested the relevancy of this theory by conducting a study of one-hundred and fifty-two individuals and their best friends of the same sex and having them describe the best friend on scales for social needs. One hundred of the self-friend dyads which demonstrated a different need pair combination were evaluated to determine if interpersonal

congruency or perceived similarity were associated with friendship. The purpose of the study was to determine whether the correlates of interpersonal attraction were perceived similarity and interpersonal congruency. According to the summary of their study:

Twenty-two of the pairs were found to yield significant results, most of them at a high level. Perceived similarity was the most prevalent explanation, characterizing 16 of the 22 pairs, and interpersonal congruency, 11 of the pairs (both principles may operate simultaneously). Thus both principles may be assumed to be important concomitants of friendship. (p. 127).

Their study illustrates the role of interpersonal relations and perception of likeness in the development of identity. The theoretical implications of Secord & Backman on the development of lesbian/gay identity formation is clearly explained in the development of Cass's model of lesbian/gay identity development, but does present one theoretical context, to consider the development of a Black identity as well.

Relational Theory

Relational Theory is a focus on the centrality of emotional connections experienced by women in the development of relationships and self (Gilligan, 1977, 1982;; Miller, 1981; Surrey, 1983; Jordan, 1984). Researchers from the Stone Center at Wellesley College formulated this theory in efforts to address the role of connections in the development of women which were not thoroughly considered by Freud's work which placed the importance of instinctual drives before relatedness (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, Surrey, 1991). The establishment of this theory was based upon observations and

research which demonstrate that women have an increased capacity for relatedness, emotional closeness, and emotional flexibility than many men (p. 53). In the work, *Women's Growth in Connection*, (Jordan et.al, 1991) discuss the evolution of the relational connection in the context of the formulation of a woman's self-development. The purpose of their work was not to dismiss existing models, but to note which portions of the works are relevant to the experience of women and the validity of a theoretical base which is focused solely on the formation of self through an individual experience, placing relationships as secondary. Similar to Interpersonal Congruency theory in that it places importance on the relationships of individuals, it provides a foundation for discussion of the role of relationships in the development self-perceptions and self-concept.

Relational theory asserts that, "...relationship and identity develop in synchrony" (Surrey, 1991, p. 63), according to the relational line of development for women. " Women's sense of self becomes very much organized around being able to make and then to maintain affiliation and relationship" (Miller, 1986, p. 83). Self is defined by Surrey (1991) as, "A construct useful in describing the organization of a person's experience and construction of reality that illuminates the purpose and directionality of her or his behavior" (p. 53). The applicability of relational theory to women of color has been evaluated in a study by Beverly Tatum (Jordan, 1997) (regarding the development of racial identity according to Cross's stage model and the role of relationships in the process of formation.) Tatum (1997)

appeared to have found the theory helpful in providing a construct to discuss the importance of relationships as a part of the development of self for Black women in a predominantly white environment. The definition of relationships is not consistent physical contact or presence, but rather the, "...inner awareness and responsiveness to the continuous existence of the other or others and the expectation of mutuality in this regard" (p. 61). The primary working characteristic which is illustrative of the ability of women to function from a relational perspective is the, "Capacity for empathy, consistently found to be more developed in women, can be seen as the central organizing concept in women's relational experience" (p. 53). This presents yet another theoretical framework to consider the development of one's racial and/or ethnic identity.

Black Racial Identity

Theories of Black Racial Identity present three assumptions according to Janet Helms (1990). These assumptions are a) racial identity development occurs through stages which can be assessed, b) racial identity is bidimensional such that attitudes about Blacks as well as Whites are incorporated into identity, and c) racial identity is relatively stable (Helms, 1990, p. 30). Helms (1990) presents two theoretical perspectives of Black Racial identity called the Client-As-Problem (CAP) and Nigrescence or Black racial identity models (NRID). CAP perspectives arose during the 1960's and early 1970's as a result of what Helms refers to as Whites equating Black assertion with Black aggression. The CAP perspectives are defined according to Helms

(1990) by, "...their focus on Black identity development as a consequence of societal pressures and their linking of clients' other directed negative reactions and behaviors to Black rather than assimilated identities or personality types." These perspectives were developed in efforts to pathologize the behavior of Black women and men who appeared to resist the predominately white "norms" of acceptability in behavior and perceptions. This perspective was especially geared toward those individuals who resisted assimilating to the dominant culture's mode of thinking.

NRID theorists presented their initial models and theory at a time when the melting pot phenomenon was the predominate mode of thinking about race in the United States (Hale, 1980; Helms, 1990). Their theories and models asserted that a psychologically healthy Black individual did not overidentify with White culture and Whiteness, which according to Akbar (1979) was a necessary development in order to survive in a racist culture (Helms, 1990). The ultimate outcome of a healthy Black individual according to the NRID theorists then and in the present is for the individual to progress through the least healthy stages of self perception, that which is White defined, to most healthy, that which is self defined racial transcendence (Cross, 1971; Akbar, 1979; Helms & Parham, 1983; Helms, 1990). Though some of the models were developed in the climate of the civil rights movement and during a period of intense political activism in the Black community many of their theories have been revisited and redefined within the last five years.

Helms, (1995) revisits the previously discussed theories and now argues, "... the construct of stages has been inadequate for describing the developmental processes surrounding issues of race for the following reasons:

"...a) An individual may exhibit attitudes, behaviors and emotions reflective of more than one stage; b) to many researchers, stage seems to imply a static place or condition that the person "reaches" rather than the dynamic interplay between cognitive and emotional processes that racial identity models purport to address; and c) neither theory nor measurement supports the notion of the various stages as mutually exclusive or "pure" constructs" (In Ponterotto, p. 183, 1995).

Helms' answer for resolving the semantics of using the word "stage" to describe the processes of racial identity is to use the word statuses, which she hopes will encourage a more complex analysis of racial identity. Though Helms argues against using the word stage, she contends that through using the word status she is able to retain the work of the developers of stage models and continue to utilize their research in the context in which the stages were meant to reflect, which she articulates, has not been done by current researchers (Helms, 1995). The word status affords the researcher the opportunity to continue to use the "stages" as presented by earlier models but allows for the acknowledgement of a continuous cycle of development which may involve the returning to previous stages. Status does not connote completion of development, which current researchers (McCarn, 1996; Eliason, 1997; Coleman, 1984) assert the word stage indicates a completed state.

This is an important difference to note in the current discussions of identity development and its expression in research.

II. Models of Identity Development

Black Identity Development

The connection of theory to models of Black identity development and Lesbian identity development are essential in the understanding of the framework in which the models were created. Cross's model of Black identity development, also referred to as the Psychology of Nigrescence (1995) and Cass's model of lesbian/gay identity formation are the two models of evaluation for this particular research. Though these are the two models of evaluation for this study, there are a variety of models on Black identity development and lesbian/gay identity development. This researcher located three models of lesbian identity development which were developed specifically for lesbians and at the time of this writing located no models of black lesbian/gay identity development, though there has been some research done in this area. Though there are numerous models, those referenced are those most quoted or referred to in the theoretical works previously discussed and located by this researcher.

Cross's Model of Black Identity Development and the Psychology of Nigrescence

Cross's five stage model of Black identity development, also known as Nigrescence was developed in 1970 during a time of intense political activism in the United States and represents a historical landmark given that it was

one of the first models of its kind. Cross's five stage model asserts that the Black individual experiences a process of "becoming Black" (Cross, 1971). These five stages are Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, Internalization, and Internalization-Commitment (Cross, 1971). What follows is a description of each stage and recent revisions Cross has made to the various stages.

Pre-encounter: Identifies with White culture, rejects or denies membership in Black culture. Has a strong dislike, self-hate for themselves. This is the stage which represents the old identity or identity to be changed. Progression from this stage may occur when the individual is confronted with a situation where they are personally effected by a racist act or behavior which literally changes their view of themselves in relation to the dominant culture (Cross, 1971).

In Cross's current revision (1995) he cites the work of Joseph Baldwin, Howard Stevenson, and Jerome Taylor for their research which illustrates the limitations of Nigrescence theory in the Pre-encounter stage and Internalization stage. "Contrary to the original pre-encounter stage individuals in this stage do experience fulfillment in other parts of their identity, such as their religion, profession or social status. The individuals in the revised model may actually not be self-hating, as inferred in the original model, but find mental health benefits from other group identity affiliations not necessarily connected to Black culture. What makes these individuals self-hating is their embracing of a worldview, value system or outlook on life that downplays race or Blackness, but rather their professional status, social class position or sexual orientation" (p. 115).

Encounter: Rejects previous identification with White culture, and seeks identification with Black culture (Cross, 1971; 1995). Individual has an experience which shatters the relevance of the person's current identity and simultaneously provides an indication of the direction the individual should follow to be resocialized and transformed (Cross, 1971; 1995). No revisions to this stage have been made.

Immersion-Emersion: Individual completely identifies with Black culture and denigrates White Culture (Cross, 1971; 1995). The individual at this point has made the decision to commit

him or herself to personal change. This change may occur through the reading of Black literature, involvement in groups which promote a positive Black identity and a more critical analysis of how Blacks are portrayed in the media (Cross, 1995).

Emersion: The second part of the Immersion-Emersion stage is the "emergence" from the emotionality and ideological aspects of the immersion experience (Cross, 1995: 110). This is the leveling off of emotions which occur during the Immersion process. When the individual finds disappointment or has a negative experience during this period it is possible that the person will experience regression and return to the Pre-encounter stage (Cross, 1995). No revisions to this stage have occurred.

Internalization: At this point the individual has begun to internalize the new identity and integrate it into their daily thinking. There is a high degree of saliency for the Black identity and the individual often begins to recognize the multiple saliencies in their self concept (Cross, 1971; 1995).

Cross cites the work of Bailey Jackson in his revision of the model which is now inclusive of the Jackson's view point that Internalization is the balancing and synthesis of Blackness with the other demands of one's personhood, such as one's sexual identity, occupational identity, spiritual or religious identity and various role identities which may be very race sensitive or race neutral (Cross, 1995: 116).

Internalization-Commitment: There is little difference between individuals in the Internalization stage and those in the fifth and final stage of Internalization Commitment except that these individuals devote an extended period of time, often a lifetime to find ways to translate their personal sense of Blackness into a plan of action (Cross, 1995: 121). No revisions to this stage have been made.

Cross's model of Nigrescence illustrates the progression of the formation of a Black identity which is applicable to a male or female. The recent revisions to the model provide more flexibility for the incorporation of the development a Black Lesbian identity in the construct of an adjustment to

the saliency level. Though Cross's model does illustrate how one's sexual orientation can remain a part of the individual's progression through Nigrescence it is not able to account for the development or redevelopment of a Black identity when one is not heterosexual. Cross also argues in his discussion of his five stage model of Nigrescence that it is a model in need of revision due to recent findings by Thomas Parham (1989) that individuals will revisit certain stages depending on their life circumstances (Cross, 1995). Cross also notes that Nigrescence was as much a historical phenomenon as one of psychological inquiry and in his current revision more discussion of saliency levels during the particular stages provides the opportunity for greater discussion to its applicability to the black lesbian experience. The discussion of identity saliency for the individual appears to be a greater part of the revision and its applicability to the individual. A further discussion of Cross's theory and its revision will be continued in this literature review.

Thomas's Model-Negromachy

Other models of Black identity development have been formulated using Cross's model as a base from which to work. Following Cross's model was that of Thomas, which was also formulated around the same time as Cross. The model of Thomas has five specific stages and prior to the presentation of stages is the definition of Negromachy, a poor sense of self worth, the individual depends on White society for self-definition (Thomas, 1971). What follows are five stages, numbered one through five, which directly correlate to those presented by Cross. The most significant difference

is that in the final stage instead of the individual making a commitment to working on causes to the Black community for an extended period of time and integrating their identity Thomas reports that Transcendence occurs and the individual no longer uses culture cues to judge others (Thomas, 1971). The individual no longer relies upon the White culture to define their perceptions of self.

B. Jackson's Four Stage Model

The model by B. Jackson (1975) is a four stage model of Black identity and its overall direction is the development of a positive perception of self. The four stages experienced are: Passive/acceptance, Active resistance, resistance against stereotypes and assumptions created by Whites, Redirection, a focus on concentrating more social and personal activities around the Black community and Internalization, the establishment of a strong self concept and perception as Black and of the Black community (Jackson, 1975). Once again the conclusion of this stage model is the development of a positive self perception in the context of integrating the healthy self perception into daily activity.

The models by Jackson, Thomas, and Cross all conclude slightly different, but the general theme is the formation of a positive self-perception of their Black identity.

Thomas Parham's Transformation of Black Consciousness Across the Life Cycle

Thomas Parham's model, Transformation of Black Consciousness Across the Life Cycle, supplements the model by Cross through his application of life stage development to the experience of forming a black identity (Parham, 1989). Parham contends that the development of racial identity is subject to continual change throughout the lifecycle (p. 156). Beginning with Middle-Adulthood, which is the period Parham cites as the time when individuals begin to integrate developmental tasks which are physical, psychological, and social in nature, he outlines the salient issues of the middle adulthood person. The five issues, which Parham (1989) obtains from Neugarten (1975) are: achieving a sense of self-utilization, increased awareness of physical vulnerability, modified time perspective, planning for further accomplishments in life, and taking stock, structuring and restructuring life experiences (p. 156). Cross references Parham's model in his current revision and for this reason a detailed presentation follows.

Pre-encounter: The middle adulthood Black person tends to be an individualistic achiever, measuring themselves according to the Eurocentric work ethic of, "rugged individualism" and may distance themselves from the Black community in efforts to gain approval of White colleagues and friends. This individual may be motivated by a parental need to protect children from the brutal reality of what it means to be Black in the United States.

The late adult-hood individual will likely reflect on their life successes in the contexts of a Eurocentric measure and criticize Blacks who did not assimilate and have not achieved as much as themselves.

Encounter: Often the person will encounter a situation in which they are passed over for a job promotion or are confronted by Black friends who question loyalty to the Black community and heritage. At this stage they once again may revisit or visit for the first time a new view of the world.

The late adult-hood individual will likely experience an intense emotional reaction as they reflect either in the context of the achievement of Blacks as a whole or according to individual experiences. This reflection may lead to a realization of the rejection at which point guilt, betrayal, and anxiety may propel the person to develop a strong sense of Blackness.

Immersion-Emersion: The overall theme of this stage is to initiate institutionalized change from those institutions in which they have previous affiliations, work, school, and church to maintain a strong Black presence.

In late adulthood the individual may experience this stage with the full intensity of emotions which accompany the stage-anger, frustration, hostility, and guilt. This individual may also blame racism as the result of any unachieved success and will likely withdraw into social isolation if all Black groups are not available for social interaction.

Internalization: The middle adulthood individual accomplishes internalization once feelings of guilt and anger have been resolved and there is a comfortability with self and there is more interaction with individuals from various ethnic groups and a more pluralistic worldview.

The late adulthood person, will likely reflect back on life positively in regards to their Blackness if they have been at this stage for a period of time. If the person has not, they will experience a similar internalization experience as those in middle adulthood.

Parham's model illustrates how Cross's model adjusts to the life stage of individuals and how Black individuals may revisit Nigrescence throughout their life.

Lesbian/Gay Identity Formation

The study of Lesbian identity development has been done largely in the context of Lesbian/Gay identity development. Though these models were formed within a Lesbian/Gay context and not exclusively Lesbian, they do present various forms of considering the development of a Lesbian identity. Four different models of Lesbian/Gay identity will be described, three of which are Lesbian specific.

Vivienne Cass's Six Stages of Lesbian/Gay Identity Formation

Vivienne Cass, developed her six stage model in 1979 and used various stage models of identity in her research (Cass, 1979). Cass's (1979) model is derived from the assumption that stability and change of identity are experienced in the context of the congruency or incongruency of the individuals interpersonal relationships. This assumption is rooted in Secord & Backman's (1961) interpersonal congruency theory, previously discussed in this review, that concludes that an individual's perception of self is determined in the context of their relationship with others. The experience of congruency will occur if the individual is in an environment where their perception of self and others perception of that individual are similar or rather, congruent (Secord & Backman, 1961). Cass's model assesses the formation of a positive Lesbian/Gay identity is achieved once the individual experiences a congruency of their Lesbian/Gay identity with other Lesbians and Gays. The interpersonal matrix of the relationship between the levels of perception are summarized by Cass in her model as the following:

- 1) P's own perception of some characteristic that P attributes to self (S) [self]
- 2) P's perception of P's own behavior directly the result of that characteristic (B) [behavior]
- 3) P's perception of another person's view of that characteristic (O) [other]

The six stages of Lesbian/Gay Identity formation are as follows:

- 1) Identity Confusion: Individual encounters information which they consider attributing to their behaviors and thoughts and define it as being called homosexual, this recognition is the beginning of incongruity in one's identity.
- 2) Identity Comparison: One accepts the possibility that identity may be Lesbian/Gay and begins movement from a heterosexual self-portrait to one of Lesbian/Gay. The incongruity begins to increase at this point between points 1 & 2 in the identity matrix. The individual may begin to realize the irrelevancy of guidelines which accompany a heterosexual identity to their experience and may seek counseling.
- 3) Identity Tolerance: Self image is further from a heterosexual perception and more towards a Lesbian/Gay recognition of self- "I am probably Lesbian/Gay". The consequences of this are that incongruity is heightened and P's perception of self and other's (heterosexual friends or family for example) begins to be more incongruent.
- 4) Identity Acceptance: More contacts with other Lesbian/Gay individuals occurs and at this point the individual begins to normalize their experience and accepts a Lesbian/Gay self image.
- 5) Identity Pride: The individual is fully aware of the incongruity between themselves and the predominate, heterosexual society. Often the individual will immerse themselves into Lesbian/Gay subculture and may begin to place themselves in situations where their Lesbian/Gay identity is known. More dichotomization between the heterosexual and Lesbian/Gay communities occurs.
- 6) Identity Synthesis: The dichotomization between heterosexuals and the Lesbian/Gay community no longer exists and the individual finds some heterosexuals are accepting of their identity which leads to an increased congruity.

The general theme present in Cass's stages is the development of identity as it relates to the individual's interaction with others. Cass's model of Lesbian/Gay identity formation has encountered a great deal of criticism by other researchers of Lesbian/Gay identity due to its stage framework, which others contend lend it to a linearity inappropriate to conceptualize the Lesbian identity (Eliason, 1996; McCarn, 1996; Troiden, 1989; Coleman, 1982).

Though Cass's model has received a significant amount of criticism, her model appears to be, from what this researcher could locate, the model which has been empirically tested the most with a statistically significant population. Cass's empirical study of her model required that individuals place themselves in one stage and respond to questions which addressed what constitutes the development of identity (Cass, 1984). From this data Cass found that 97% of her respondents could be classified, with no gender differences (Cass, 1984; Eliason, 1996). Kahn (1991) tested Cass's model and found that respondents did identify with certain stages but their development often did not necessarily occur in the linear fashion proposed by Cass. Despite the criticism of Cass's model, those following were formed by researchers in the context of responding to what in their opinion is missing from Cass (McCarn, 1996; Eliason, 1996; Troiden, 1989; Coleman, 1982).

Coleman's Five Stage Model

Coleman's stage model of sexual identity development superseded Cass and presents five stages of development (Coleman, 1982). These stages are not identical to Cass's but are similar. The expressive difference between Coleman and Cass is the revisiting of stages at different points according to the situation in Coleman's. The five stages of Coleman's model are:

Pre-coming Out: The individual is not fully conscious of their same-sex attractions.

Coming out: The individual begins to recognize and acknowledge attraction to others of the same sex.

Exploration: If the individual is an adult this stage is similar to the revisiting of adolescence as they develop social and sexual competence in the Lesbian/Gay community.

First Relationship: The individual is to learn how to function in a same-sex relationship and must overcome internalized homophobic beliefs.

Integration: An incorporation of identities throughout life begins to occur.

An interesting note about Coleman's model is that he assigns specific tasks which the individual needs to complete for progression to the other stages and success within the identified stage of formation (Coleman, 1982). Those models following Coleman and Cass are significantly different in approach given that they either focus exclusively on Lesbian identity or their inferred superiority due to the broader inclusive nature of their models, which is dependent upon the researchers interpretation.

Lesbian Specific Models

The models of Lesbian identity formation are that of Sophie, 1985, Eliason, 1996, and McCarn, 1996. Each model criticizes those preceding theirs for adhering to a linear format and not discussing the racial and ethnic salencies which exist. Though the intentions of these models are to be broader, non-linear, focus on reference group orientation, and inclusive of racial and ethnic identity, none appear to acknowledge the limitations of the application of their model to the experience to a Lesbian of color in the context of the environment in which they have developed their racial and/or ethnic identity. Despite this limitation they do provide a unique, social constructionist insight into the problems of existing models and their flaws.

Eliason's Life-Cycle Model

Eliason, McCarn, and Sophie's models of Lesbian identity development each present Lesbian identity independent of previous models which were Lesbian and Gay oriented. Eliason's model presents a cycle, instead of a stage model in efforts to present a non-linear approach to the conceptualization of identity (Eliason, 1996). Eliason cites the findings from Kahn's (1991) study, testing Cass's model as evidence that Lesbian/Gay identity does not happen linearly. Kahn (1991) found in her study that individuals do experience the stages Cass presents, not necessarily in any specific order and individuals seemed to revisit different stages. Eliason (1996) contends that the individual experiences changes in identity throughout life and the cycles she presents pre-identity, emerging identities, recognition of oppression or invalidation,

and re-evaluation/evolution of identities are not experienced in any specific order and are not necessarily completed. Individuals experience them in the context of the changing sociohistorical environment in which they live.

A unique component to Eliason's model is that it is designed to be applicable to the development of a multiplicity of identities, Lesbian, Gay, Black, and others. The attention paid to the intersecting of multiple identities by Eliason, in the context of a Lesbian identity offers an approach different than others.

McCarn's Phase Model

McCarn's model (1996) of Lesbian identity was developed with a similar motivation as Eliason. McCarn found the stage models of Cass to be too linear and inflexible with the individual's experience. McCarn also cites a significant problem with Cass's model is its wide usage in the United States, without discussion of the contextual differences given her sample base was Australian (McCarn, 1996). McCarn does note that Cass's model carries significance since it is one of very few which have been tested with a significant sample base. McCarn's theme throughout her discussion of her model is that it permits for more consideration of the individual and reference group awareness, thereby making it a model open to the differences in the experiences of Lesbians of color, who are not often included in many of the studies conducted which formulated models for Lesbian/Gay identity. McCarn's model is described as a phase model because it then lends itself to greater flexibility. For each phase she describes there is an individual and

reference group component. These phases are awareness, exploration, deepening/commitment, and internalization/synthesis (McCarn, 1996). Throughout each phase the description is similar to that of previous models discussed with the significant difference being that the reference group reaction or behavior is presented with the individual experience. Though this model does present yet another mode of considering identity development in Lesbians a similar theme is apparent in all the work and that similarity was influenced by the work of Cass and her predecessors in the field of identity development.

III. Empirical Research

Recent research on the relationships of Black lesbians and gays have contributed to clinical social work and psychology significantly. Studies by Drs. Vickie M. Mays and Susan Cochran at UCLA illustrate the various patterns in relationships and coming out experiences of Black lesbians and gays. The work of Beverly Greene demonstrates the importance of understanding treatment issues when working with Lesbians and Gays of color. The studies of Mays & Cochran are of special significance due to their large size, two studies obtained results from over one thousand one-hundred Black lesbians and gays, this researcher has located no other studies of this size. The findings of the research are relevant to the study of Black lesbian identity development in regards to their attention to the impact of family on

the individual, relationships, and sociological influences on the choices of individuals.

African American Families in Diversity: Gay Men and Lesbians as Participants in Family Networks, (Mays, Chatters, Cochran & Mackness, 1998)

In a recent study Mays, Chatters, Cochran, and Mackness, 1998, distributed questionnaires to five-hundred six Black lesbians and six hundred seventy-three Black gays who self-identified as lesbian or gay and have disclosed their sexual orientation to immediate and distant relatives to explore patterns of disclosure to family members. The research found that over seventy percent had disclosed to a mother or sister, compared to fifty-eight percent disclosing to their father's and sixty-eight percent disclosing to brothers (1998). The researchers attribute this finding to the possibility of a more positive affective relationship with mother's and sisters, "Given the pivotal role that women play in the development and maintenance of support networks with black families, confiding in one's mother and sister may serve the dual purpose of strengthening affective ties and assuring support" (p. 6). There were six categories assessed for disclosure, mother, father, sister, brother, other close relatives, and distant relatives. Of the six categories of which disclosure could occur thirty -two percent reported disclosing to half or more of the categories. The research also found that when individuals were cohabitating with their partners there was an increase in disclosure, as well as a tendency for women to have larger informal helper networks (1998). The role of women in the Black family also is reported to

play a significant part in the formation and maintenance of an assistance network (1998). Overall the study found that older individuals and individuals reporting having homosexual sexual activity at a younger age were more likely to disclose. In addition the study found that most had revealed their sexual orientation to their immediate family (1998).

A prior study done by Peplau, Cochran, & Mays in Greene (1997) on various correlates in the relationships of Black lesbians and gays revealed similar findings in regards to disclosure, but dealt more directly with relationships. For this study fourteen hundred active Black lesbians and gays were recruited across the United states to complete an anonymous questionnaire. In this study participants were asked to respond to questions regarding current serious, committed, and intimate lesbian or gay relationships. Their study found the following:

- Black lesbians and Black gay men appear to have significant demographic similarity to their partners

- One-third of the participants were in interracial relationships, thirty-percent of the women and forty-two percent of the men. "Interracial couples were no more or less satisfied, on average, than same-race couples" (p. 33).

- Most women who responded reported close and satisfying relationships

- More women than men reported having sexual relations with both women and men

- The majority of the women compared to the men chose their partners according to their inner attributes: Intelligence, personality, cultural sophistication and spriritual energy. (Peplau, Cochran, and Mays, in Greene, 1997, pgs. 11-35).

The role of relationships in the identity formation of Black lesbians is a consideration which cannot be overlooked when attempting to present how one develops as an individual. The impact of families and community on the relationship are variables which were not discussed in detail in this study, but in the previous study discussed it appears that a correlation between familial disclosure is connected with presence in a relationship. These varying group and relational memberships are inherent in the understanding of identity acquisition.

The negative encounters some individuals may experience from immediate family, also play a significant part in the process of developing a Black lesbian identity. The strong bonds of family are, for some, the ties which prevent rejection from the family since they are members, but instead results in a rejection of the lesbian orientation (Greene, 1994, p. 246). The acknowledged homophobia in the Black community does not deter Black lesbians and gays from claiming their Black identity as the primary identifier and often Black lesbians and gays seek others within their culture for identification (Greene, 1994). When treating Black lesbians, Greene notes in her discussion that, "Studies found a greater likelihood that African-American lesbians will experience tension and loneliness but are less likely to seek professional help. This may contribute to a delay in the seeking of help during a crisis or condition and may leave African American lesbians more vulnerable to negative psychological outcomes" (Greene, 1993, p. 400).

The exploratory study done by Darryl Loiacano (1989), confirms a great deal of the empirical findings discussed. Loiacano interviewed three women and found that their identity as Black women was a constant part of their identity development. Some women worried about the ramifications of their being “out” on their families living in Black communities, another feared isolation from the Black community, which she considered her primary reference group, another found that after coming out she gained new insight into the oppression perpetuated within the community (Loiacano, 1989). Consistently, the development of their lesbian identity was integrated into a desire to either protect or combine the lesbian identity with the Black identity. This desire to integrate identities was a theme throughout Loiacano’s interviews and appears to be a theme throughout a great deal of the literature addressing Black lesbians.

IV. Literature

This section of the chapter will focus the readers attention on the theoretical and non-fictional works by Black Women and self-identified Black Lesbians. The following is an introduction to literature which has had a significant impact on the development of many Black Lesbians and Women, including this researcher.

Black Feminist Thought

How does one begin to study the factors which contribute to the development of an identity, a consciousness in a historically oppressed population? Patricia Hill Collins, a professor of Afro-American studies and a

Black Feminist, presents two approaches which are commonly used. The first Collins explains, "One approach claims that subordinate groups identify with the powerful and have no valid independent interpretation of their own oppression. The second approach assumes that the oppressed are less human than their rulers and therefore, are less capable of articulating their own standpoint (Collins, 1989)." Collins continues this discussion to further explain that these approaches assume that the oppressed are inept to articulate themselves, construct active political movements, and have a consciousness which is flawed due to subordination (Collins, 1989). Throughout Collins' work, The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought (1989), she advocates for the validation of the Black woman's standpoint in research. Through using the words of Black women in her essay Collins illustrates how the words, metaphors, and stories Black women share express their perceptions of experiences, in addition to making a statement about ones philosophy on life. The perceptions conveyed by women in the essay in reference to their experience of being a Black woman are captured in the following statements (Collins, 1989):

Hannah Nelson, elderly domestic worker: "I have grown to womanhood in a world where the saner you are, the madder you are made to appear (p. 340)."

Carolyn Chase, inner city black woman, quoting a saying from her aunt : " A heap see, but a few know (p. 345)."

Zilpha Elaw, preacher from the mid-1800's: "The pride of a white skin is a bauble of great value with many in some parts of the United States, who readily sacrifice their intelligence to their prejudices, and possess more knowledge than wisdom (p. 346)."

The importance of using the words of Black women in the study of consciousness and development of identity are an essential part of the expansion of knowledge. The words expressed by the women in the essay and Collins herself are reflective of perceptions and a reality that significantly impact Black women in the United States.

While reviewing various works of the late Audre Lorde-mother, poet, activist and professor-it is her words which convey a great deal of her thoughts about society and her place within it. In an essay published in, The Black Scholar (1978), Lorde states, "For Black women as well as Black men, it is axiomatic that if we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others-for their use and to our detriment (1978)."

The constructing of the Black woman's identity within a context of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and homophobia is the challenge which face Black women in their efforts to re-define their role within a Black community and within all of society. Lorde presents her definitions of racism, sexism, heterosexim and homophobia as the following:

Racism: The belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance.

Sexism: The belief in the inherent superiority of one sex and thereby the right to dominance.

Heterosexism: The belief in the inherent superiority of one pattern of loving and thereby its right to dominance.

Homophobia: The fear of feelings of love for members of one's own sex and therefore the hatred of those feelings in others (Lorde, 1984, p. 45).

The appearance of sexism, heterosexism, and homophobia are all challenges to the development of a Black woman's self concept. "Black women are programmed to define ourselves within this male attention and to compete with each other for it rather than to recognize and move upon our common interests (p. 48)." Lorde does not advocate for Black women to work alone in the efforts for self definition, but rather presents the issues which are important for Black women and men to consider in regards to fostering stronger alliances and the importance of acknowledging the sexism, heterosexism, and homophobia experienced by Black women. Ultimately Black women must make strides to use their words and experiences to define themselves, this is a shared theme of many Black women thinkers, activists, mothers, and daughters discussed in this review.

The Combahee River Collective's, "A Black Feminist Statement", drafted in 1977 outlines the philosophy of the group and is commonly referenced in work by Black women. Although this statement was drafted as an expression of the group's philosophy it is demonstrative of the meaning of Black feminism and the importance of all women, not just those that are heterosexual, in the evolution of Black Feminism. This statement is defined by Clarke (1981; 1983) as a manifesto because, ..."it espouses 'struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression,' it has become a manifesto of radical feminist thought, action and practice" (p. 129).

The convergence of identity with the political shows the importance of the two for the women in the collective, and is reflected in the works of Lorde, 1984; Omosupe, 1991; and Collins, 1989. "The most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression" (Combahee River Collective, 1977). The numerous works by Black Women and Black Lesbians which refer to this statement are illustrative of the inseparability of the two within the construction of identity. The intermingling of multiple characteristics which have been significantly impacted by society are reflected when they state, "We also find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression in our lives because they are most often experienced simultaneously (Combahee River Collective, 1977)." The importance of acknowledging the intersection of multiple oppressions and identities in which they accompany illustrate the importance of considering ones experience through their multiple identifiers.

Cheryl Clarke elaborates on the experience of being a Black Lesbian in her work, "Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance." Clarke's essay discusses the historical oppression of Black women's self development and its impact on ones identity as a Black Lesbian. Clarke (1983) begins, "For a woman to be a lesbian in a male-supremacist, capitalist, misogynist, racist, homophobic, imperialist culture, such as that of North America, is an act of resistance (Clarke, 128)." Clarke considers that ones identity as lesbian is lesbian if she so defines it as that and finds that lesbianism and feminism are the two most

“women centered and powered ideologies, they break the silence and secrecy,” (p. 129). She illustrates clearly the importance of understanding the historical oppression of women and makes a strong link between that oppression and the oppression of the Black lesbian in multiple communities, institutions and ideologies. Clarke also confronts the homophobia within the Black political community, “While most political black lesbians do not give a damn if white America is negrophobic, it becomes deeply problematic when the contemporary black political community (another male dominated and male-identified institution) rejects us because of our commitment to women and women’s liberation,” (p. 130). The overall theme which Clarke conveys to readers is that to define oneself as Black Lesbian is to confront and resist the institutional structures and oppressions of a male dominated, racist, and heterosexist society. The ability to confront these institutions also involve confronting the Black community on its issues of sexism and homophobia in the efforts to resist oppression. In the process of coming out to friends and family in the Black community, a community that Clarke would expect to be more accepting given the historical experience of oppression is where Black Lesbians may begin to confront issues of rejection and isolation.

Personal Experiences and Coming Out Stories

Black Lesbians who have written on their personal experiences of developing their identity share with us important information about how their perceptions and perceptions of others effected the development of their identity. Anita Cornwell (1983) and Audre Lorde (1982) share with us their

experiences of not only developing their identity, but their experience of living as a Black Lesbian. The intermingling of a Black and Lesbian identity appears to be a consistent theme in the works of Cornwell and Lorde, as well as in other works (Clarke, 1993; Smith, 1982; and Omosupe, 1992). With the current publication of anthologies specifically focused on the “coming out” experience of African-American Lesbians and Gays, there is more information available which reveals the depth the effects of oppression has had on individuals perceptions of self and others.

Black Lesbian Identity: Separable or Inseparable?

The nuances of negotiating an identity which is clearly Black and Lesbian is articulated by Cornwell, throughout her autobiography, Black Lesbian in White America she presents us with her views on sexism and homophobia in the context of confronting them in society, as well as within the Black community. The threat of isolation and rejection which has been referred to repetitively in numerous works, including this research when discussing black lesbians are not clearly present in her work. This is not to say that she has not experienced isolation, but it appears to not be a central part of her discussion. Given her level of awareness of the societal and institutional roots of sexism, homophobia, and racism, some researchers (McCarn, 1996; Eliason, 1996) may argue that her concentration on the political in her discussion of self does not reflect an acceptance of her Black lesbian identity, but throughout her work it is clear that Cornwell effectively combines her acceptance of self as Black and as Lesbian. For example, when discussing the

challenges of Black Lesbians Cornwell states, "If Black Conservatism is one ogre that keeps the Black Lesbian forever wading in troubled waters, then white racism is the second demon waiting at the other end of the tunnel. For most of my life, I had always been reluctant to socialize with white people because I felt most of them really did not want to associate with Black people on a socially equal basis" (Cornwell, 1983, p. 10). The most consistent theme in her work is that "...patriarchy is the root cause of all the major ills in the world today, because as long as men are able to keep half the population in chains (us Sisters, that is), they're going to be forever trying to enslave most of the other half" (p. 107). Cornwell illustrates her contempt for patriarchal structures in another instance when discussing Women's Lib and the Civil Rights Movement, "Well, the womyn's lib movement is run by white middle-class womyn, and they don't understand our problems. There's much truth in that statement, yet those same Black womyn seem to think there's nothing odd about their belief that the Civil Rights Movement, which is controlled by middle class Black men is going to be their salvation" (Cornwell, 1983, p. 28).

In an interview with Anita Cornwell Audre Lorde expressed the thought that her identity as "black, woman, poet is synonomous and cannot be separated" (Cornwell, 1983, p.39). The concept of possessing multiple identities which are experienced synonomously is a pattern present in the work of Lorde and Omosupe. Cornwell, acknowledges her multiple identities, but is clear about the expression of her identity when speaking to a

group of Black lesbians, "No matter what our sexual preferences may be or what the color of our skins, we are first and foremost womyn. And in a male-dominated society all womyn are relegated to an inferior position. and in a white racist society, those womyn who are not white have an added burden to bear" (p. 27). Though Cornwell presents a saliency which may be considered more woman identified by some in this statement it is also clear that Cornwell's committment to advocating against a racist patriarchal society cannot be separated from her committment to lesbians.

Omosupe's work, *Black/Lesbian/Bulldagger* demonstrates the inseparability of a Black lesbian identity, when she writes, " The term "lesbian" without racial specificity, focuses on and refers to white lesbian culture. White lesbian culture, or the white lesbian, has become the quintessential representation of lesbian experience, of the very concept "lesbian" (Omosupe, 1991, p. 108). The differences in subjective experiences and presumptions of similarity in experiences based solely on sexual orientation, as presented by Omosupe, are essential factors in the discussion of what is "lesbian culture", "lesbian community." The experience of racism within the lesbian and gay community at large is often not a part of the discussion of "lesbian community and culture", this leaves out many lesbians of color and others who may have had a different experience than their white counterparts. Lorde summarizes the experience in a paper, "As a forty-nine year old Black lesbian feminist socialist mother of two, including one boy, and a member of an inter-racial couple, I usually find myself a part of some group

defined as other, deviant, inferior, or just plain wrong" (Lorde, 1984, p. 114).

Lorde's statement demonstrates the constancy of living with multiple oppressed identities and the negativity placed on an individual's identities when they are not those of the European descent.

Experiences of Black Lesbians

The current literature by Black lesbians is growing and the availability of anthologies by and about Black lesbian experiences are becoming more accessible, especially to individuals in cities with women's bookstores. Audre Lorde's biomythography, Zami, published in 1982 was one of the first complete accounts of a Black lesbian experience forming a Black identity and progressing to the development of a lesbian identity. Lorde's book presents the various events which impacted her Caribbean immigrant family and herself in the United States in the nineteen forties-fifties, through the sixties. In 1997 Lisa C. Moore (no relation to the researcher) published the anthology, "does your mama know?", exclusively featuring Black lesbian coming out experiences. The purpose of this researchers work is to look at how the experience of developing a Black lesbian identity does or does not fit into a specific model. Looking at various stories of Black lesbian coming out are indicative of individual experiences of coming out in a variety of communities. The stories by the women in these anthologies reflect some similar patterns of difficulty as expressed by women in those anthologies with a predominately white or european contributorship. The coming out stories of Black lesbians reflect the cultural variables which are distinct from others.

Black lesbian coming out experiences do not follow a homogeneous pattern given that within the Black lesbian community there are numerous socioeconomic and cultural variables within this community. These variables are present Moore's collection, as well as in other anthologies and books used in this research.

Audre Lorde's book, Zami: A Biomythography (1982), is Lorde's combining of a biography and mythology in the accounting of her experience coming out and living as a Black lesbian. Zami is a book referenced by many women within the Black lesbian community as a book which aided them during their coming out experience, as is the case for this researcher. In Zami, Lorde shares with the reader her insights and perceptions of the world as she experiences them from the standpoint of a Barbadian girl to her development into a woman claiming a lesbian identity. Throughout her work Lorde confronts issues of racism, classism, sexism, homophobia and heterosexism within all parts of society. The work begins with a steady progression of Lorde's formation of a Black identity in the context of New York City in the late nineteen forties and fifties, through the sixties. This progression eventually weaves into her development of a Black lesbian identity. She expresses the sentiment, "I remember how being young and Black and gay and lonely felt. A lot of it was fine, feeling I had the truth and the light and the key, but a lot of it was purely hell" (p. 176). The challenges of being Black, lesbian, and a student attempting to fit into various groups she describes the feeling as the following, "Downtown in the gay bars I was a closet student and

an invisible Black. Uptown at Hunter I was a closet dyke and a general intruder" (p. 179). The feeling of isolation was consistent for Lorde in her efforts to socialize in arenas where she found lesbians, but rarely found lesbians that were Black, "But when I, a Black woman, saw no reflection in any of the faces there week after week, I knew perfectly well that being an outsider in the Bagatelle had everything to do with being Black" (p. 220).

The stories in Moore's anthology are diverse and reflect a wide variety of Black lesbian coming out experiences. Most importantly the anthology reflects the diversity within the Black lesbian community and the cultural variables which effect the experience. In Makeda Silvera's story, "Man Royals and Sodomites: Some Thoughts on the Invisibility of Afro-Caribbean Lesbians," it is clear that the impact of the extended family on her experience coming out is as much a part of her coming out experience as coming out to her own mother. As important to consider is what Silvera writes regarding the role of religion, " The word 'sodomite' derives from the Old Testament. Its common use to describe lesbians (or any strong independent woman) is peculiar to Jamaica-a culture historically and strongly grounded in the Bible. Although Christian values have dominated the world, their effect in slave colonies is particular (Moore, 1997, p. 173)." Silvera goes on to explain that the accesibility to learning how to read and write was done so by learning to read the Bible. The multitude of variables: racism, colonization, sexism, heterosexism and homophobia continue to place Silvera, who nows resides in Toronto, Canada of confronting of her own identity within the Black

community. The assumptions within the Black and Afro-Caribbean community that one's lesbian orientation somehow negates a part of Silvera's experience as Afro-Caribbean illustrates the depth of ignorance which one must contend with from the community which she was raised (Moore, 1997).

The assumptions of partial identity negation when one claims a lesbian identity and all good, all bad perceptions by the heterosexual Black community experienced by some contributors is also a major piece of the coming out experience of women. In, "No Half Steppin' ", by Shilanda Woolridge a significant portion of her experience of learning about her lesbian identity occurred in Sunday school (Moore, 1997). Again, we are presented with the church in the evolvment of a lesbian identity.

Woolridge shares in her coming out story her attempts at being heterosexual to satisfy her family and the God she was raised to worship and believe.

Woolridge ends her account by sharing her thoughts and questions prior to entering a club, "As I walked to the club, my mind was swimming with questions. Does this mean that I'm sinning against God? Well, I didn't choose to feel the way I do. Have mercy, what would my family think when they find out? Where can I meet other African-American lesbians like myself?" (p. 228). The reconciling of religion and orientation for Woolridge and Silvera is different. For Woolridge the reconciliation is that she did not choose to feel the way she does for women, for Silvera it is a recognition of the forced context that Christianity was passed down to her family. Both women express a sense of oppression of their identity in the context of

religion, which may have left each with feelings of isolation from families who cling so tightly onto the belief.

The isolation from families of origin is another common theme in stories present in Moore's anthology. The isolation is experienced more profoundly for Sherece Taffe in her work, "The Making of an Orphan: the death of a daughter's place in the family: a healing in progress", the day of her daughter's fifth birthday (Moore, 1997). Taffe's isolation from her mother began when she came out and continued to intensify through the birth of her daughter. Taffe's piece comes to no finite resolution as she expresses her right to end the piece when she is ready to accept the losses she has suffered. In akhaji zakiya's piece, "notes to momma", a Caribbean lesbian shares a similar sadness of unacceptability by her mother in a letter she writes to her mother explaining the importance of her actions for her personal well-being. The note she writes expresses much in regards to why she makes the decision to wear her hair a certain way, take time away from university in efforts to determine what she wants to gain from school, and the challenges present in being one of a few Black women in science courses (1997).

The awkwardness of coming out in a predominately White lesbian community is dealt with in Hope Massiah's, "1985: Memories of My Coming Out Year" (Moore, 1997). "I am starting to move in a lesbian world and feel like I am a lesbian, but what does this white lesbian world have to do with me?" (p. 12), writes Massiah as she reflected on her experience of coming out. Massiah deals with the frustrations of being the only Black woman

participating in a women's organization which have numbers of lesbian participants and dealing with the expectation that she can explain to them why Black women do not participate in their efforts. Her profound commitment to the women and cause of the groups further isolate Massiah from Black women she desires to meet. Throughout Massiah's story it is clear that she is struggling with her coming out and seeking the acknowledgement of her Black identity within a lesbian community. It is not until Massiah, who is Barbadian and living in England, reads Audre Lorde's, Zami, that she finds an experience which is parallel to some extent, what she is feeling. "When I read Zami I know that home for me as a Black lesbian exists, and I know it is only a matter of time until I find it" (p. 15).

The effects of isolation, religion, and racism on the coming out experience of the women discussed here and others in the anthology are different and varying. For some, the effects have meant living for a period of time lying to others in efforts to please, for others the effect has been feelings of disconnection from families of origin and establishment of family in the context of close friends who now function as their family. The end result for many who come to embracing their lesbian identity is expressed by Donna Allegra in her piece, *Lavender in the Fold*, "I've never been tormented by my lesbianness. In fact, it's a favorite part of me, as Goddess-given as being Black. What I have been tormented by is people's homophobia-their deliberate ignorance concerning my affectional orientation, their active offenses against

me because of my sexuality. I am not the problem here: homophobes are” (Moore, 1997, p. 149).

Summation of Literature

The literature presented in part four of this literature review expresses the various means of exploration of Black lesbian identity. The significance of incorporating Black feminist thought, autobiography, and empirical studies illustrates the different areas that are a part of the construction of Black lesbian identity. A major part of understanding a Black lesbian identity in the context of a predominately white environment is to evaluate the experience of Black lesbians who are writing from the standpoint. Though there is a dearth of studies available addressing Black lesbians specifically, what the studies which do exist demonstrate are the importance of families and relationships in the process of acceptance and comfort with self. The coming out stories presented a small portion of the diversity within the Black lesbian community. The challenges faced by the women with regard to relationships with mothers to questioning religious beliefs all illustrate the degrees of “risk” taken in being open in regards to their lesbian identity. The irony of including Black lesbians in this study who are out and political is that their identity as lesbian may be questioned by those in the field who find their political activity as unusual (McCarn, 1996; Eliason, 1997). This researcher does not find this to be the case for the works by Black lesbians and other women presented within this literature review. The works of all the women

reveals the struggles of juggling strong identities which cannot be compromised for others without compromising the self.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Design

The purpose of this study was to explore the applicability of models of Cross's model of Nigrescence, also referred to as Black identity development, and that of Vivienne Cross's six stages of homosexual identity formation to the experience of Black lesbians. The methodology used to investigate the applicability was a flexible design, which was exploratory in nature. The benefits of using such a design in the study of a population, which has a dearth of literature available was its flexibility in the analysis of individual experience. The words and thoughts of participants has directly informed the research conducted. The disadvantages of using such a design was the level of deduction which was needed in the analysis, but given that this study focused on the assessment of the applicability of pre-existing models, which have been empirically tested there is a standard from which to begin the examination of findings. The researcher also included a piece of self-analysis in the research to further evaluate and discuss any bias present in the study.

Sample

Black lesbians from the age of 18 years old and up were recruited directly by the researcher and indirectly through associates of the researcher

and public advertisements. Twenty-one women were contacted by the researcher after demonstrating interest in the study. Five women were approached directly by the researcher for interviews, seven women were referred to the researcher through other professionals, two learned of the study in a semi-national Black lesbian publication and two had heard it announced at a Black lesbian gathering. Women who were referred to the researcher through colleagues were called by this researcher and if the individual was referred to the study by peers or previous participants individuals called the researcher directly. Two women who were referred to the researcher were approached through a telephone contact but declined to participate, the remaining three who were referred did not return phone calls demonstrating interest. Individuals who did participate were asked not to discuss the details of their interviews with their referrals.

Publications and organizations received letters of permission from the researcher outlining intent, purpose of study, and procedures for protecting participants (See Appendix B and C for recruitment materials). The announcements and contacts made regarding the study were made directly by the researcher, with word of mouth contacts being made by individuals who knew the researcher directly. The importance of direct contact with individuals was a valuable asset in the recruitment of interviewees and established significant trust between the researcher and the individuals.

Data Collection

Sixteen women were interviewed between the ages of 19-49, from across the country, in hour long audio taped interviews. Five of the sixteen interviews were done over the telephone and the remaining occurred in person. The instrument used to collect data was developed by the researcher. The instrument used for the individual interviews consisted of an interview guide (see Appendix D). The guide was comprised of ten open-ended questions addressing six variables which effect identity formation. These variables were assimilation, isolation, discrimination, family support/impact, identity awareness and identity integration, all but family support/impact correlate with those established in Cross and Cass's model. Women were also asked to provide general demographic information which included their age, occupation, geographic location, and years of education completed.

Individuals who participated were informed that their identities were to remain anonymous and participation in the focus group was optional. The purpose of such an optional group format was to provide the opportunity for women to have the confidentiality to discuss details of their lives which they do not feel comfortable sharing in a group. The option of meeting in the group format, in addition to the interviews was to permit the researcher to discuss with the women their experiences of participating in the interviews. The group format also had the potential to be a venue for women to meet each other, become aware of others who identify similarly in

their community, and ask the researcher any questions about the findings of the research. Unfortunately, due to numerous scheduling conflicts the focus group was not held and participants in need of additional support or references were given contact names of women and groups in their area who could assist them.

Data Analysis

Following interviews audio tapes were replayed and responses to questions were evaluated using the characteristics of stages presented in the models by Cross and Cass as the basis for evaluation. Though these characteristics were used to assess whether or not an individual experienced a certain phase of development, those that did not fit to the descriptions presented in the models were not considered to be lacking or incomplete by the researcher, but illustrated the variance of experience in development. The six themes used in the evaluation which correlated to the characteristics of the models were assimilation, isolation, discrimination, identity awareness, family support/impact, and identity integration. Though the theme of family support was not explicitly assessed in the models and research on Cross's and Cass's models, it is included in this study and patterns of familial assimilation, support, and family structure were evaluated. The purpose of assessing family influences was to inform the researcher of any additional influences from childhood in the process of identity development. Additional themes not accounted for in the models of Cross and Cass were coded according to characteristics defined by the researcher.

This study attempted to assess identity integration, which this researcher defines as the ability of the individual with multiple identities to receive affirmation of identities from self and others on a regular basis, which constitutes interaction with individuals or groups at least once a week or according to a defined time of interaction.

Self Analysis

The purpose of including a piece of self-analysis in this research was for the researcher to evaluate with a clinician of African descent the impact of her own experience of identity development on the research. The interviewer was provided with the models of identity development being used as the focus of the study, the same interview guide used for previous interviews, and one and a half hour to complete the interview. Specific probes were made by the interviewer regarding the researchers interpretations and definitions of questions and terms, as well as discussion on how these interpretations may effect the researchers perception of responses. The interviewer used was not a previous interviewee and was recommended by peers of the researcher.

Protection of Human Subjects

A significant risk to participants in this study is the relatively small size of the black lesbian community and the possibility of certain incidents being recognizable, though the identities and geographical locations were concealed. During the interviews all participants were asked to give consent to participate and to have their information recorded (see Appendix E). All

individuals who agreed to participate in this research were reminded of this reality verbally by the interviewer. The researcher has taken appropriate steps to protect the identity of participants and all tapes of interviews were destroyed following transcription.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the applicability of two models, Cross's model of Black identity development and Cass's model of lesbian/gay identity formation to the experiences of Black lesbians. A specific focus of this research was to evaluate the process by which women have integrated their multiple identities, more specifically their Black and lesbian identities into their self perceptions and the factors which effect the process of integration.

I. Participant Demographics

A total of sixteen women were interviewed with this researchers interview also being included in these findings. The women who participated reflected a variety of backgrounds which reflect the differences and similarity within the community.

Age

The women who were interviewed range in age from nineteen to forty-nine. Two women were between the ages of nineteen and twenty-three, six women were between the ages of twenty-four and thirty-five, seven women were between the ages of thirty-six and forty-five, and one woman was forty-nine years of age.

Geographical Area

Women interviewed were from a variety of geographical areas in the United States. One woman was from the mid-west (OH), two women were from the south (DC), thirteen women from the west (CA, TX, AZ), with three of the thirteen spending the majority of their lives in the northeast and one in the south prior to moving to west.

Relationship Status

Half of the women were partnered for six months or more with the remaining half being single, of the women partnered three had children from previous marriages to men and one single woman had a child from a previous marriage.

Religious Affiliation

Six women cited current affiliation with religious organizations and the remaining ten reported no present participation in organized religion, though three did acknowledge interest and participation in nurturing their spirituality.

Professions and Education

There were four categories of professions which women were currently active: six in social services (social workers, teachers, program directors), three community activists/advocates, four in the service industry, and three students, one undergraduate, three graduate. Participants had a variety of educational backgrounds as well, five were high school graduates, three were college graduates and the remaining eight have completed graduate

programs. It is important to note that five of the sixteen women were enlisted in the military as well.

II. Six Themes of Identity Development

The themes of assimilation, isolation, discrimination, family influence/impact, identity awareness and identity integration each can be used to gather insight into the internal processes experienced by women. Women reported experiencing these themes during their development in some capacity. Using these broad themes, which correlate to the characteristics of Cross and Cass's models, the experiences of negotiating an identity can be evaluated and discussed. It is also important to note that though these themes may appear to suggest a compromise of identity, it is the resiliency and development of individual identities regardless of these themes which illustrate how participants are living their lives.

Assimilation

Question number one of the interview guide (Did you ever feel that you were assimilated, that is living to standards of a group or society that made you feel a need to deny all or part of yourself?) was designed to assess whether women had experienced assimilation. Twelve of the sixteen women interviewed felt that they had experienced assimilation in some capacity. For nine of the women the pressure to conform to the standards of a eurocentrically focused society was a predominate experience and for three women the pressure of conforming to a heterosexual environment and not expressing their attractions to women was their experience of assimilation.

The women who were interviewed were quick to point out that their experiences of assimilation into a white culture often were encouraged by a desire to not feel isolated, yet once attempts to conform were made isolation was often experienced. The nine women who experienced a need to attempt to assimilate were often supported by families who had adopted the standards of measuring success and appropriateness from a white middle class model of acceptability. For example Toni, a forty-nine year old, mother of three and a school teacher recalls vividly her experience of assimilation and illustrates the isolation which occurs in the process of assimilation:

“ I definitely assimilated and I still feel that way. In terms of my Black identity my mother hated being Black and wouldn't let me socialize with Black people. As a result I don't feel comfortable around Blacks who have a strong Black identity because I'm scared they're going to reject me and say I act white. I've always felt I was too Black to be White, too White to be Black.”

Though not all women interviewed had such overt experiences to share, others expressed their experiences of assimilation similar to Sonya, a twenty-six year old woman who grew up in a small, predominately white mid-western town:

“I was being held to standards of white females mentally, physically, and emotionally, all those standards, and it always felt very foreign to me and unfair because it was like someone created these standards and did not have me in mind. I do remember feeling very much like a freak.”

The women who cited experiences of having to put aside their Black identity do not dismiss the experience of feeling different and like an outsider from others based upon their sexual orientation, but rather this researcher

found that the length of time between awareness of identity difference, be that Black or lesbian is correlated with the experience of assimilation of the women interviewed for this study. The longer one is aware of identity difference the more likely they are to put forth effort to assimilate when difference is not supported as a positive trait by family, friends, and institutions at a young age for the individual. For the nine women who cited experiences of assimilating with a white culture, their lesbian identity awareness did not occur until they were in high school, college, or married. Within two years of this awareness individuals were either in first relationships with women or in the process leaving their husbands to continue relationships with women. Regardless of the family support these nine women did not continue to assimilate to a heterosexual standard, possibly as a result of the individuation which has occurred and the access to communities supportive of their development of a lesbian identity .

Three of the twelve women cited their experience growing up under the assumption that they were heterosexual being a significant experience of assimilation. These three women all cited positive experiences of growing up as Black, living in predominately Black neighborhoods, two attended predominately Black schools, and each reported growing up in families who were strongly connected to activities and organizations in the Black community. Though these three women did not experience pre-encounter as described by Cross in their adulthood, it is clear that a positive Black identity was a consistent part of their experience. All of these women also cited

knowing they were attracted to other girls, women, for most of their lives. Although they did not have the label to define their feelings all felt that it was something to be ashamed of and each could recall experiences of consciously dating men to hide their attractions and try to blend with the predominately heterosexual environments in which they lived. Linda a thirty-eight year old, single woman, in a large western city described her experience of assimilating in the following way,

“I’ve always had crushes on girls and there was a period, until graduate school when I was involved with men and I was doing it because my friends were doing it. Growing up in the South when segregation was still input meant that I lived around Blacks, went to a predominately Black church, I was surrounded by my community. I never associated being Black with anything negative.”

Leslie, a forty-year old Pentecostal woman, in a partnered relationship, living in a small western city experienced support surrounding her Black identity from family, friends, and the church, but remembers the experience of suppressing her feelings towards other women for most of her life,

“ I remember as far back as seven or eight years old fantasizing about girls and women. When I was fourteen or fifteen I had my first experience with a woman and I knew then that I was a lesbian, but I still married a man hoping that I could change my feelings and I knew immediately that we weren’t compatible.”

The experiences of Linda and Leslie both illustrate an experience of assimilation which impacted the process of their lesbian identity development. The development of a Black identity for the three women who felt pressure to assimilate their sexual orientation, seems to have been present throughout their lives and applying Cross’s model of Nigrescence

onto their experiences is not clearly applicable to their adult experience given an increased saliency of their lesbian identity which we will later discuss, was a part of their process of further developing their Black identity.

There were four women who reported that they did not experience assimilation. One of the four, Tasha, a thirty-one year old advocate, living in a large western city, explained her experience of assimilation as the following, " I don't know if I ever assimilated, but I felt pressure to assimilate and I think culture would have preferred for me to suppress all or part of myself." Two women reported feeling supported by their families of who they were regardless of their sexual orientation or race. Tracy remembers her family being supportive of her as an individual, "My family told me that I could be whoever I wanted to be, I don't think I ever felt like I had to be like anyone else." When she disclosed her lesbian identity in high school, during her first relationship with a woman, her family continued supporting her thereby not isolating her identity as something of shame. Consistently the women who did not feel assimilated were either supported by family surrounding their identities or were perceived by family and self as being outsiders. Although these women reported no experience of assimilation, this does not indicate that they did not encounter situations in which they felt isolated or different. These women appear to have experienced these situations at some point in their lives, but simply do not recall feeling a need to assimilate their identity.

Isolation

Question three (What was your first experience of feeling like an outsider within a community?) explored the feelings of isolation. Fourteen of the sixteen women reported various experiences of feeling outside of a community, group, or family. Six reported feelings of isolation from a community due to their sexual orientation, while seven reported feelings of isolation based upon their racial identity. Three of the seven who reported feelings of isolation based upon their racial identity cited these experiences of isolation while exploring their lesbian identity in a predominately white lesbian environment. Situations such as sitting in discussion groups and not having anything in common with participants who, unless the group was specifically for lesbians of color, were predominately white were cited. Three women who had been married and had children all cited experiences of attending lesbian mother's groups and being one of a few women of color in the group and being one of the few women who had a child from a relationship with a man. When these women learned of groups for Black lesbian mothers, they found other women with whom they shared more experiences. The significance of identifying with a lesbian community which is reflective of their racial identity may not have been an immediate concern for some of the women, but for fourteen of the women being able to identify with other Black lesbians led to a decrease in feelings of isolation.

Two women reported that they never felt like outsiders in their life. One woman reported that her family has consistently been supportive of her identity and her friends and never felt like she was separate from them. The other woman reported that although her family did not accept her lesbian identity, she reports that she did not feel like an outsider while experiencing this due to the support of her friends and past girlfriend.

Experience of Discrimination

Question five (When do you recall your first experience of being discriminated against based on your race? Based on your lesbian identity?) examined how discrimination was experienced by women. Fourteen women reported some experience of discrimination which they could remember. These women discussed a variety of situations where individuals treated them differently based upon their race or sexual orientation. Twelve reported experiencing discrimination specifically based upon their race and two reported poor treatment based upon their lesbian identity. There also appeared to be geographical variations among the women interviewed regarding the ages discrimination was experienced.

This researcher found a consistent pattern in the sample among women born and raised in California regarding the age discrimination was first experienced. Regardless of socioeconomic status and the racial/ethnic composition of schools attended, the eight women born and raised in California recalled their first incidents of discrimination when in young adulthood. Two women from California, one a nineteen year old and one of

twenty-six years of age could not recall an incident, but do not negate the possibility that they may have been unaware of the discrimination which occurred. Tamekia, a nineteen year old student explains her lack of encounters of discrimination, "...it is like I have blinders on about discrimination being exclusively because I'm Black, I often think perhaps it is because I am young or a woman, I cannot recall experiencing overt discrimination, maybe subtle things have happened, but I haven't noticed them." It is not clear what variables are different for these women, some women reported that discrimination is often subtle in the areas in which they reside, and it was not until they grew older that they became more sensitive to the difference in treatment.

Though the majority of women interviewed were from western portions of the United States, four of the twelve were raised in other locations prior to moving west. Tasha who grew up in a large eastern city and now lives in the west was cognizant of discrimination occurring when in third grade:

"When white flight began happening I took the departure of the people personally. I went to school one day and I looked around and I suddenly noticed that all the White kids were gone and it was just us, by third grade they were all gone."

Mia, a thirty-six year old doctoral student remembered a painful incident when she was picking up a foster child,

"Seven years ago I went to pick up my partner's foster child from school and he wouldn't come to me when I called him. I found out later that he was embarrassed to come with me because I was Black."

Consistently women were able to cite multiple situations in which they experienced discrimination. When coming out some women remembered the discomfort of exploring the lesbian community and as a result of previous experiences of discrimination not feeling comfortable exploring their identity in predominately white lesbian communities. Tanya, a forty-four year old teacher in the mid-west remembers coming out and expressed her sentiments regarding some of the white lesbians she has encountered , “On my own I was already aware of my blackness. I haven’t felt too safe exploring my lesbian identity in this community, it is too white.” Tamekia who was discussed earlier in this research, reports not being aware of discrimination, but while in school does not feel that her Black identity can be a part of her experience of participating in lesbian activities, “I’ve been forced to separate my identities at school because I’m the only one (Black), they don’t see my color so I can’t fully integrate my identities.” Tamekia and Tanya both are in situations where they do not have other lesbians of color to support their identity, which is having an effect on the process of their identity development.

These situations and others in the research reflect a connection between the experience of discrimination and the process of being aware of lesbian identity. The experience of discrimination reflects the external encounter with the awareness of others who negatively express their perceptions of difference which may further impact the initiative to express difference of sexual orientation with members in broader communities. Experiencing discrimination is not directly correlated with the amount of

time it takes for an individual to acknowledge a lesbian identity but it seems to be connected, with this sample of women, to the process of developing relationships which support and affirm a lesbian identity.

Family Support and Family Influence

Throughout the interviews this researcher used probes regarding the impact of their families on their experience of development. Question eight (Did you experience strong support from the lesbian/gay community? From the heterosexual Black community? If neither, who would you define as your supportive community?) which was used to gather information regarding perceptions and experience of support from reference groups was also used as an opportunity to further discuss the support offered by family and the factors which impacted their family's perceptions of being Black and of lesbians and gays. When discussing experiences of assimilation, women who did not report feeling assimilated did report that their families had adopted standards of success which were reflective of white middle class values. Fifteen of the sixteen women reported this experience. Several of the women reported that though their families are committed to causes and organizations in the Black community it seemed that the only difference between organizations they were in and those of Whites were the color of their skin. The women did not speak of their family's values and morals as being wrong or bad, but that they were reflecting what was appropriate and "right" for the time they were being raised. It is important to note in this discussion that there have been many changes which have occurred for most of these women from the time they

were being raised to the present. The adoption of morals and beliefs from a predominate culture were made for many families in an effort to obtain success, and for many this seemed to be the only way in which success could be attained or measured.

When discussing the support of families during the coming out experience, that is the process in which an individual acknowledges to self and possibly others that they are attracted to an individual of the same sex, the impact of family and/or religion was overwhelmingly significant for all sixteen women interviewed. All women reported having some idea regarding their parent's views on lesbians and gays before coming out, eleven reported learning of these feelings following sermons at church or in the context of discussing religious beliefs at home. The remaining five learned of their parent's views due to their reaction to other family members who were lesbian or gay, individual's they saw on the street and suspected to be lesbian or gay, and/or when questioning parents about their views. Although many of the women did learn of their parent's positions on lesbians and gays prior to coming out, it did not appear to prevent individual's from coming out to family members and of the sixteen interviews all have come out to members of their families of origin.

III. Themes of Identity

The ability of one to be aware of their difference and then proceed to integrating this awareness of difference into the multiplicity of parts which constitute an individual's perception of self were the focus of this work.

Evaluating the first experiences women were able to recall being aware of their lesbian identity and integrating this identity with their Black identity are the two areas of concentration in the final evaluation of themes.

Identity Awareness

Question two (When were you first aware that your feelings toward other women could be labeled as lesbian?) was formulated to encourage women to consider their initial experiences of labeling their feelings as lesbian. There were approximately eight women who reported their first awareness of same sex attraction under the age of eighteen, three of the eight reported awareness of their attraction under the age of thirteen. The other eight women reported first awareness of their attraction to other women occurring at eighteen years of age or over, five became aware during college and three during marriage. All women reported experiencing doubt about being attracted to women and of the sixteen women interviewed all but three reported taking some sort of action to explore their lesbian identity within two years of the initial realization.

Question five (When do you recall identifying that your feelings toward other women were definitely lesbian? What kind of support did you have when you made this realization?) was included to learn from women when they felt no doubt that their feelings were lesbian. Thirteen of the sixteen women acknowledged their attractions toward other women were definitely lesbian over the age of eighteen, while the remaining three acknowledged their feelings were definitely lesbian under eighteen. All but

one woman reported affirmation of their attraction to other women could be labeled as lesbian during their first relationships. This woman described knowing she was a lesbian, but didn't learn the meaning of the word until high school, but found understanding of how to describe herself from another relative. Tamara, a twenty-two year old, in a partnered relationship of two years remembered being aware that she was not interested in men, before having the word for it, "I didn't know what the lesbian word meant until I was a teenager, but I knew about being gay, my uncle was gay."

When the women in this study began to seek support of their lesbian identity when first disclosing to self and others, twelve reported support from other Black lesbians, two reported support from the broader lesbian community, and two expressed support from family members. Although, as will be discussed in more detail further in this chapter, the majority of the women in this study reported feeling support from the Black lesbian community when coming out, it was apparent when discussing the experience of isolation that it was not uncommon for the women in this study to share feelings of isolation in the process of seeking a lesbian community which was reflective of their multiple identities. The early experiences of establishing relationships with other lesbians was not easily accomplished for twelve of the sixteen women, until they found other Black lesbians with whom to establish friendships or relationships. Two of the women reported that their first contact with a lesbian community was within a Black lesbian network. The remaining two women in this study reported

experiencing distance from the Black lesbian community for specific reasons. For Mia, thirty-six and living in a western city, distance from the broader Black lesbian community is a result of negative experiences of unacceptability of interracial relationships, but still cites close friendships with Black lesbians as a primary support. The situation for Chris who is thirty-six, single, and living in a large western city, the experience of forming a lesbian identity is occurring in a predominately white lesbian community for a reason, " I haven't made the step to the 'other side' yet, I'm still trying to deal with the lesbian part. It's been predominately white lesbians because of my own fear of who I will see." These findings reflect the importance of relationships in the process of developing a lesbian identity which is affirmed and the role of other lesbians who are racially similar or dissimilar in the experience of development. It also reflects the importance of maintaining affiliation with a racially similar reference group for affirmation and support.

Identity Integration

The final question (Do you feel that your Black and lesbian identities are integrated with one another? How do you define the integration of your identity, for example, through community activities, social groups, spiritual/religious practice?) asked of women was designed to evaluate if a sense of identity integration was a part of how women perceived themselves and how integration has been supported. The process of merging multiple identities for the women in the sample reflected the various comfortabilities of some women in presenting all parts of themselves in multiple settings.

The findings also reflected the impact of environment on the ability of women to merge their identities. Eleven of the sixteen women stated that their Black and lesbian identities were integrated and each individual affirmed their identities through participation in organizations, friendships, and in their relationships which reflected the multiple identities. The importance of relationships is illustrative of the relevance of external affirmation of self to the acceptance and pride of ones identity as a Black lesbian. Tamekia, the nineteen year old student discussed earlier is one example of how meeting other Black lesbians did not only impact her development of her lesbian identity, but of her Black identity as well, "...if I hadn't met other Black lesbians I'd still harbor anger towards African Americans in general, they affirmed my Black identity and I met others who felt similar isolation within the Black community for similar reasons or because they're lesbians." Tamekia's experience within the broader Black community had been negative because she had been accused of "sounding white" and her father was very light skinned and not always accepted by the community. It has only been recently that she has been able to fully explore her Black identity in the context of a community which embraces all parts of her identity. Tasha provides a good summary of the sentiments many women expressed regarding the defining of an integrated identity,

"The two identities are integrated with one another, I can't separate them. I'm very much attracted to Black women. I won't date a White woman unless I have to is the operative clause, it's a possibility, but if there are sisters around I'll go out of my way to be with one of them because they're my preference. The fact I want them to be both is the

embodiment of my identity. The integration of my two identities is reflected within who I date, through reading, and going to films which affirm who I am.”

Some of the women have had the opportunity to fully immerse themselves in a Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender environment and are conscious of their separation from the broader, heterosexual Black community.

“I feel like I’m completely in the Black lesbian/gay community, I can do most of my day to day stuff and not deal with people who aren’t Black lesbian, gays, bisexual, or transgender. I know the stores and restaurants, at my job and home, it is total immersion. It has been healthy for me, but it is time to branch out a bit and I’d like too. I don’t feel comfortable in the larger Black community, I hope to change that though.”

Though the most of the women interviewed felt their identities were integrated, the five who felt their identities were not integrated provided insight into the necessary factors which may be needed to experience identity integration. Tanya, the forty-four year old teacher from the midwest does not feel her identities are integrated as a result of the environment in which she must live.

“I don’t think they (black and lesbian identities) go hand in hand. I think I don’t want them to go hand in hand right now. I don’t think it will until I’m comfortable, likely in another city where there are more Black lesbians.”

Tanya reports that she does have a few Black lesbian friends, but does not feel that the city in which she resides has a Black lesbian community in the way experienced by other women interviewed. There are no local organizations or groups of Black lesbians that are present to offer support and reflect a

community pride as experienced by others in this research. Leslie, a forty-year old road maintenance worker explains that her identities are beginning to be integrated, but they have yet to fully integrate with each other,

“I’m beginning to integrate the levels of my life and it seems that the religion and personal side are coming together too. I don’t outright reject identities. I feel that I can still be a good Christian.”

The comments reflected by these two women are reflective of the two lines of development of the women who do not consider their identities to be integrated. Environment is not conducive or supportive of a merging of their identities or the individual is struggling with putting together the multiple identities for her own self definition. The process has either not been fully experienced externally or internally, both of which seem to be ingredients necessary to feel an integration of identity.

IV. Religion, Identity Saliency, and Additional Themes

Additional Themes

Although most of the women did not report having a present religious affiliation, eleven reported that religion played a role in how their families acceptability of lesbian, gays, bisexual, and transgender individuals. Though most are not presently affiliated to traditional religious institutions, four did report continued participation in some form of Christian worship and most recalled some experience of attending church while growing up. Though not asked specifically, it does seem that for several of the women once they departed the communities where their families of origin reside their connection and participation to the religious institutions were discontinued.

Most women cited their discontinuation with churches were due to their positions on homosexuality and the treatment of women in their doctrine. The four individuals who are presently affiliated with religious institutions either live close to families or have children, which may reflect a connection to a church in efforts to maintain contact with family or community, but it is difficult to assess given the small sample and lack of focus to this issue. Those who do continue to participate in religious institutions are members of congregations which are predominately lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) or LGBT friendly.

The impact of twelve step programs also is a clear indicator of the importance of the support women gain from these groups. Three women cited their primary support being from individuals in twelve step programs, all three women were also former military, another potential correlation, which cannot be determined to be a significant finding given the small sample size.

This research also found that four women interviewed who were mothers all had their children during relationships with men. A fifth woman reported having children, but had informally adopted the children of her partner. Though these four women cannot be representative of the methods through which Black lesbians become mothers, it is an area for further research and discussion.

Identity Saliency

The saliency of identities is thoroughly discussed throughout Cross's work Shades of Black (1995) and addresses the reality that individuals depending upon their backgrounds and environments will reflect a varying level of insight in regards to their racial identity depending upon other identities which may have an impact on their life experience. The saliency of Black identity and lesbian identity for the women in this study varies according to individual backgrounds and experience. A generalization regarding the saliency of a Black or lesbian identity to Black lesbians cannot be made due to varying environmental factors of the women interviewed. It does appear that the women in this study who have experienced an integration of their identity appear to have a high saliency of their Black lesbian identity, but one identity cannot be chosen over the other. The women who are presently in areas or situations that present difficulty for them to integrate their identities may possibly have a higher saliency for one identity over another, but even in these cases, as illustrated in the findings presented, it is often not by choice. Furthermore, the women appear to be conscious of the regular splitting of their identities, often for the purpose of not risking their jobs, avoidance of rejection from an already sparse community, or as in the case of Chris because they are struggling with the development of an identity.

V. Relevance of Findings to Models of Identity Development

Although Cross's revision of his final stages of internalization, internalization commitment (see page 17) is inclusive of sexual identity as a component recommended by Jackson, it does not assess the experience of potential rejection, feelings of isolation from the broader Black community which is not always as readily accepting, as are many communities in general, of individuals and groups which are representative of lesbian, gays, bisexual, and transgendered people. Unlike religion, which has been a significant foundation within the broader Black community and is an acceptable identity to have, being a lesbian does not carry a similar status.

In Cass's model the identity synthesis occurs for individuals who find a congruency between their identity and heterosexuals. Like Cross and Jackson, who include sexual identity with a religious or occupational identity, Cass does not consider the separation, which has been illustrated by this sample, of the possibility that though congruency may occur for an individual between those who are lesbian and those who are heterosexual, she too does not consider the impact of a long, for some permanent separation from a portion of the heterosexual community in an effort to protect self from anticipated rejection or the role that the isolation from the heterosexual community plays in the further development of what some may consider to be a regression of identity.

The findings of this research support the notion that characteristics of both models are relevant to the lives of Black lesbians and as discussed in

previous studies presented in the literature review, these characteristics and experiences do not always happen in the order in which presented by Cross and Cass. The results do seem to illustrate that the stages of Cross may be more easily applicable to the experiences of Black lesbians given recent revisions and due to what appears to be from the group of women interviewed the physical appearance of difference with regards to race. Although it is important to note that this is not the experience of all the women interviewed, some articulated clearly that they are treated differently due to their physical appearance which may not reflect a traditional perception of how individuals perceive women to look.

VI. Conclusion

The findings of this research illustrate the experience of identity development for sixteen women who identify themselves as Black lesbians. These women shared their life stories of experiencing six central themes this researcher gathered through asking them ten open ended questions. The findings illustrate the impact of assimilation, isolation, identity awareness, discrimination, family influences and impact, and identity integration on the development of a Black lesbian identity. The results show that for the sixteen women interviewed the formation of their Black lesbian identities were impacted by the six themes assessed and four additional themes were also present: religion, military service, twelve step programs, and motherhood. The research found that though the models of identity development by Cross and Cass have characteristics which are applicable, they cannot be exclusively

used to describe the identity development of Black lesbians. Regardless of the stage or situation, the separation of identities at some point in development has been a reality for all the women interviewed. The women whose identities are not integrated are representative of the intricacies of negotiating an integration of multiple characteristics which constitute a person that are impacted by external interactions. Consideration of the effects of relationships and perceptions of individuals and communities in regards to their Black and lesbian identities is essential for complete understanding of the integration and development of a healthy perception of multiple identities.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Recognizing the impact of the external environment on the awareness of internalized feelings which lead to a conscious recognition of ones difference leads to an integration of multiple identities when the multiplicity of identities are affirmed. The sixteen women who were interviewed for this study reflect the impact families, heterosexual society, and communities have had on their development of a Black lesbian identity. These factors do not only effect the development of a Black and lesbian identity separate from each other, but effect the ability of women to integrate these identities.

Perceptions, stereotypes, and assumptions in the Black community and lesbian community of what defines a person as “Black enough” or “lesbian enough” rarely consider the diversity within the community, thereby each group has been unable to fully affirm the experiences of many Black lesbians. It is the lack of inclusion of Black lesbian experiences and experiences of lesbians of color in current social work research which led to the development of this study. Though this research is not the first or only work which addresses the developmental experience of Black lesbians, it is one of few which does so exclusively in the field of clinical social work. There is a need for further exploration of lesbians of color in social work.

I. Impact of the External on the Internal

What do you have to do with how I see myself?

Interpersonal congruency theory and relational theory are able to reflect the importance of relationships to the individual's perception of self. When considering the various encounters of women it is clear that though many have achieved a sense of balance in regards to how they perceive themselves the balance has been achieved through significant internalization of both identities. Though an internalization of both identities has occurred it is the external environment which appears to determine the extent of the identity integration. Though some women do not consider their identities to be integrated, when considering that the reason these women do not consider their identities to be integrated is due to environmental factors it was necessary to consider to what extent does environment impact the evaluation of what is considered an integrated identity. The reaction of heterosexual Blacks and predominately White lesbians has played a profound effect on the ways in which Black lesbians have been able to establish relationships in both communities.

Consistently women interviewed in this research reflected upon a need to align themselves with a particular community in an effort to gain and maintain affiliation to not feel isolated and expand relationships. The communities or groups women expressed affiliation often were responsible for affirming a person's sense of pride or comfort with their Black identity or lesbian identity. In the examples of women who felt pressure to assimilate

the effort or pressure was to fit in and affiliate with a way of relating which was not comfortable for their individual identities. When reviewing the coming out stories during the literature review the consistent theme of affiliation and relationship were present in all the stories. The acknowledgment of fifteen of the sixteen women interviewed that they were definitely lesbian during their first relationship attests to the significance of relationship to identity development.

II. Identity Integration

The current literature on Black identity development and lesbian identity development is predominately concentrated on the development of the singular identities with little attention paid to the effects of equally relevant identities to their development. The experience of constantly being asked by individuals from the Black community and lesbian community which identity is the most important was a major motivation of this researcher to share the concept of identity integration. Understanding the process by which an individual is able to perceive their multiple identities as a part of their individual identity seems to be a concept which is applicable to many individuals, but has been given little thought by those who ask the questions. As stated throughout this work, the integration of identities is considered the final stage of development by Cross and Cass and is the most elusive concept to many in the field of identity development. Identity integration is an important concept to understand to increase the body of knowledge relevant to the many individuals whose identities reflect an

intersection of cultures which individuals do not necessarily consider complimentary.

The idea that the Black community is less accepting than the White community of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals is likely based on the reality that the Black community has significant bonds with organized religion which has often been intolerant of the lesbian and gay community. Rarely did the women interviewed or this researcher consider one community more or less tolerant than the other, it was the potential rejection from the community that held such importance for identity affirmation, which is not easily retrievable that interfered with the development of identity. The Black community is not more or less tolerant of lesbians and gays than the White community, but rather it is the realization by many that the support of a Black identity from a White community, if an individual experiences rejection from the Black community, cannot be accomplished.

The thought placed upon proposing a model which expresses the process by which integration occurs is an attempt to demonstrate the importance of Black and lesbian identities to Black women who define themselves as Black lesbians.

A Proposed Model of Identity Integration

The process by which integration of identity occurs reflects the duality of self perception through an external and internal lens. Initially attempts were made to organize a model reflecting internalized perceptions. This was impossible to complete without illustrating the progression which happens

externally. The model begins with the notion that due to the clear presence of a person's Black identity, the process is reflective of an integration of ones lesbian identity with the Black identity, given that the awareness of lesbian identity occurred for all women following their awareness of difference based on race. Adopting Helms term "status" (1995) to describe the progression which is not finite and can be revisited depending upon life stage a three level description of the process of integration is presented. While addressing the external influences, reference group orientations, and internal processes an attempt was made to illustrate the impact of others on self perception. What follows are eight status' in a proposed model of how this researcher perceived the external and internal progression of an integration of Black and lesbian identities. This model is not finite and a status may be revisited depending upon individual experiences. More research and evaluation is necessary before applying this model to Black lesbians outside of this study.

Moore's Model of Identity Integration

Status One: Individual has an already established perception of their Black identity. This perception may reflect a saliency of Black identity that varies between high and low and was adopted and further developed based upon interactions with family, friends, school environment, churches and social groups.

Reference Group Orientation (RGO): Most, not all, women consider the Black community or a religious group as the primary group with whom they most strongly identify. It is important to note that even women who consider the religious group as their primary reference group, the church or temple likely affirms the Black identity.

Internally: Woman has an already established sense and self definition of the relevance of her Black identity in her perceptions of self and others

Status Two: Regardless of their Black identity saliency women are questioned by others about their behavior around women or women's internal unconscious attractions are brought into awareness by their reaction to the questions or individuals who initiate a relationship which supports an exploration of a lesbian identity.

Women who have become aware of their lesbian identity at very young ages, between five and twelve, had their identities brought into awareness in the process of parents and teachers defining to them the necessity of behaving according to specific roles for girls which brings into self awareness questions regarding their attractions to other girls.

Internally: Realization that attractions and feelings exist towards other women which is not congruent to societal, familial, and religious expectations (Black identity continues to be a part of self perception, but concentration on the singularity of this part of identity is lessened)

Status Three: Women experience their first relationship with a woman which in this research confirmed their belief that they can define themselves as lesbian

RGO: A shifting may begin to occur and for a period of time women may not have a strong connection to the Black community or lesbian community

Internally: Recognition of lesbian identity to self

Status Four: Women begin to attend events and activities which affirm lesbian identity. Often the community is predominately White and further development of a lesbian identity may be interrupted as an individual's awareness of singularity based upon race is reflected in activities attended and feelings being experienced during the establishment of a lesbian identity are not reflected in literature and conversations.

RGO: Connection to the Black community may continue and participation may increase in an effort to "prove" one's commitment to community OR Individual may feel comfortable with the predominately White lesbian community and continues to explore lesbian identity and decreases connection with Black community

Internally: Feelings of sameness and differentiation occur with Black community and lesbian community and isolation may intensify

Status Four, Part Two: Women who have easy access to a Black lesbian community in the process of establishing their lesbian identity and find support of both identities the development of lesbian identity an evolution of an integrated Black self concept is begun. There is then progression to Status Six or Status Seven.

RGO: Connection to the Black lesbian community increases and separation from the more general Black community and predominately White lesbian activities begins.

Internally: A sense of pride, aliveness, and "completion" of self is experienced. Most importantly affirmation of ones Black identity occurs which, depending on the individual saliency when entering integration, will encourage a more thorough exploration into issues and individuals who are Black and/or Black lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered. Consideration is given to sharing this identity with family members and friends.

Status Five: Individual discontinues participation in activities in the lesbian community and isolates self in the context of a relationship or in groups or activities not related to the lesbian community. Desire to find a Black lesbian community is brought into awareness.

RGO: Black community or isolation from all communities occurs

Internally: Awareness of difference in Black and lesbian community and feelings of isolation are present.

Status Six: Woman begins to seek activities and individuals who are reflective of her Black lesbian identity and can relate to her experiences. Once individuals and/or community is found the experiences of women in Status Four, Part Two are encountered.

Women who do not have easy access to a group of women or a Black lesbian community often will find literature, an individual, or if available internet chat rooms which are able to affirm and support both identities.

Status Seven: Depending upon environmental situation women will share their identities openly in all parts of their life (work, family, friends) OR may be forced to separate their internalized integrated identities for external appearances in efforts to maintain some sense of community which may not be easily accessible and leave their hometowns for events that support the

open expression of their multiple identities OR eventually make the decision to relocate in efforts to find affirmation of their identities.

Women who experience a rejection from the Black community or family when expressing their identity may develop their own fictive kin within the Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community.

RGO: Black lesbian community

Internally: Although some women are forced to separate their identities due to issues such as safety, job retention, or other circumstances a sense of inseparability to self perception is present signifying an integration of identity and a fluidity is achieved

Status Eight: This final status does not signify a completion of identity integration, since identity integration is constantly changing as identities evolve, but in this status a comfortable fluidity is experienced with interactions in all communities which reflect a Black lesbian identity

RGO: Black community and/or Black lesbian community, possibly more participation with the broader lesbian community, but depending upon experiences with White lesbians this contact may or may not occur.

Internally: Individual is able to further explore and re-evaluate their perceptions of self in the context of associations and affiliations with family, churches, and organizations. Individual is also able to more easily negotiate their multiple identity status's and not compromise self for the benefit of others and is aware of this change.

When considering this model within the framework of relational theory it is clear that the experience of integrating identities in this model, is dependent upon relationships. The relationships between women and the communities with whom they affiliate strongly effect their internal recognition of identity. The importance of recognizing these relationships is necessary for understanding how the changes which occur in relationships effect individual development. The significance of group identification is also a major piece to understanding the internal experience of women who

may experience various parts of this model. Fluidity which is considered one of the latter phases of development is not achieved until women feel a sense of comfort with relationships in multiple communities, which further illustrates the relevancy of relationships in the process of individual development.

Similar to Cross's revised stages of Black identity development which address the saliency of sexual orientation and religion, this model also accepts the concept that the multiple identities have varying significance to individuals. Although individuals have varying degrees of Black identity saliency, this model does assume that women who are Black have some conscious knowledge of how their Black identity effects their interactions of others and self. Unlike Cross's model which seems to recognize the multiple identities, but is unable to evaluate the integration of identities, this model attempts to demonstrate the process by which many individuals begin to incorporate all parts of their self perception. The focus is not on the process of developing a Black identity, because this model accepts most of the basic tenets of Cross's stages of nigrescence, but on the experience of incorporating their Black identity with their developing lesbian identity. Like Cross, who has made revisions to his model as more information and understanding of the groups and environment has become known, this model will likely need to consider the societal changes and environment which effect the process of developing certain identities in future interpretations.

Cass's model of lesbian and gay identity formation and this proposed model share a similar theoretical framework based upon relationships for understanding the relevancy of the external on the internal. The main difference between Cass's model and the proposed model is the attention paid to the cultural differences which are an inherent part of an individual's self perception and cannot be ignored when attempting to understand lesbian identity formation for Black women. The reality of unacceptance due to homophobia or discrimination within a Black or lesbian community is considered in this model and is an experience which has often been ignored in existing models of lesbian identity formation. The impact of these factors have clearly played a role in the identity development of women interviewed and have be ingtegrated into the understanding of Black lesbian identity development in this proposed model.

Implications for Social Work

The presence of a model which addresses the process by which integration is experienced by Black lesbians in social work research provides one perspective to consider the process by which a multiplicity of identity is experienced by an individual. Though for a great deal of time identities have been considered in clinical work as separate entities the tentative model designed by this researcher encourages clinicians to consider the varying identities as equally relevant in the process of developing a lesbian identity. The model presented is merely one way of considering the process by which an integration of identities occurs. Clearly, the importance of environment to

the individual experience impacts the process, but should not be assumed to remedy feelings of isolation and rejection if environment cannot affirm the multiple identities. Most importantly the multiple identities need spaces that are able to affirm all parts of the self externally for internal growth.

The influence of a clinician on this development is vital to supporting a positive self concept of a Black lesbian identity which is not necessarily able to be supported outside of the fifty-minute session. Social workers in a variety of capacities are in positions to significantly effect the experiences of Black lesbian women. Often, awareness of lesbian identity may not be easily recognizable to the social worker, but questioning a woman's isolation from her family, friends, and when relevant, religion, present an opportunity to further consider internalized conflicts which may interfere to development of an identity.

In the arena of gay affirmative therapy in social work practice, it is essential for social workers engaged in work with a predominately lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender population to fully understand the intersection of identities which may be occurring for Black lesbians. Although this model was designed for application for Black lesbians, it does present some of the various intersections between identities that apply for those who are multiply identified. Providing insightful therapy which is able to affirm ones lesbian identity and Black identity with awareness of their importance in relation to the clients self perception and that of a community or society is necessary for adequate support of Black lesbians.

III. Conclusion

This research was focused on exploring the applicability of Cross's model of Black identity development, Nigrescence, and Cass's model of lesbian identity formation to the experience of Black lesbians. This research found that portions of both models are applicable and relevant to the experience of Black lesbians, but neither fully explore the process of identity integration as it relates to the development of identity in Black lesbians. Although Cross's model has been revised and presents a more applicable model to the experience of Black lesbians, women who are developing a lesbian identity and are Black begin the process of integrating a lesbian identity into their self concept regardless of their current progression through Cross's stages.

The importance of recognizing the relevance of multiple identities to Black lesbians in social work research and practice is necessary to the growing body of knowledge that most individuals are comprised of many identities. The ability of Black lesbians and other lesbians of color to define in their words and through their experiences the development of their identities is necessary for informed understanding and appropriate clinical practice. Using the information from these experiences to inform already existing models and theories is necessary for an integrated clinical practice which advances social work practice and understanding of identity development.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

My name is Lisa Lynelle Moore and I am researching the applicability of Black and Lesbian/Gay Identity development models to the experience of Black Lesbians. Through conducting individual interviews, completing a questionnaire and optional participation in a focus group with other research participants I will compare your experiences of identity development to that of two models, one of black identity development, and other lesbian/gay model of identity development.

You are being asked to participate as an individual who identifies herself as a black lesbian. If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to complete a questionnaire prior to the interview and then engage in an optional focus group which will occur one month following the interview. Participation in the individual interview, including completing the questionnaire should be one hour of your time. The focus group will also be for one hour. There will be no financial compensation for your time or other compensation other than feeling that you have had the opportunity to share your experiences of living as a black lesbian in society.

Anonymity will be preserved through the use of different names and non specificity of location. All tapes, if you agree to have yourself recorded will be destroyed within 48 hours of the interview. If the material from this research is presented in presentations or publications it will be presented in a manner that will protect your identity. Information from interviews and tapes will be kept under lock and key and will be disclosed only with your permission. Be aware that the researcher is aware of the small community and will take appropriate steps to protect your identity.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask them. Your cooperation is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to answer individual questions. You may also change your mind and withdraw from the study up to 3 months following the interviews. If you decide to withdraw, all data describing you will immediately be destroyed.

Your signature indicates that you have agreed to participate, under the conditions which you have read above. If you decide to withdraw, you must do so within 3 months of the date of your interview. Please contact:

Date & Signature

Lisa Lynelle Moore
Phone:

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT LETTER

January 12, 1997

Gay Black Female Magazine (GBF)
6312 Hollywood Blvd., #23
Hollywood, CA 90028

Dear Editors:

My name is Lisa Lynelle Moore and I am a 26 year old Black Lesbian currently residing in _____ on internship at _____ through Smith College, School for Social Work, Masters in Social Work Program, based out of Northampton, MA.

Presently I am working on my Masters thesis which is exploring the experiences of developing and integrating ones Black Lesbian identity. I am writing to find out if it would be acceptable for me to place an advertisement or flyer recruiting women interested in being interviewed in a one hour anonymous individual interview in your publication for February. I am not clear as to costs or protocol for such a request, but would appreciate being informed at the below email address or mailing address listed below.

I am writing a detailed letter to assure you that my intentions, requests, and research are rooted in efforts to present to the social work community that much of current research in the field on Black women and Lesbians cannot be assumed to always be inclusive of the experiences of Black Lesbians. The importance of being aware of the multiple oppressions likely experienced by Black Lesbians, racism, sexism, homophobia and other individual variables are rarely part of the studies on Lesbians and Black women.

I have truly appreciated the access to the Black Lesbian community your publication has offered me in my development of my identity as a Black Lesbian. Upon my arrival to _____ I was pleased to discover your publication and have found it to be a good way for me to feel connected to a community which is familiar and comfortable.

Enclosed is the advertisement which I would like to submit for publication in G.B.F. and listed below is information needed to contact me.

APPENDIX C

ADVERTISEMENT

ATTENTION! GRADUATE STUDENT NEEDS HELP!!!!!!

My name is Lisa L. Moore and I am a social work student researching the applicability of Black and Lesbian/Gay Identity development models to the experience of Black Lesbians. Through conducting individual interviews, completing a questionnaire and optional participation in a focus group with other research participants I will compare your experiences of identity development to that of two models, one of black identity development, and other lesbian/gay model of identity development.

You are being asked to participate as an individual who identifies herself as a black lesbian. If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to complete a one hour interview and then engage in an optional focus group which will occur one month following the interview. Participation in the individual interview, should be one hour of your time. The focus group will also be for one hour. There will be no financial compensation for your time other than feeling that you have had the opportunity to share your experiences of living as a black lesbian in society.

Anonymity will be preserved through the use of different names and non specificity of location. All tapes, if you agree to have yourself recorded will be destroyed within 48 hours of the interview. If the material from this research is presented in presentations or publications it will be presented in a manner that will protect your identity. Information from interviews and tapes will be kept under lock and key and will be disclosed only with your permission. Be aware that the researcher is aware of the small community and will take appropriate steps to protect your identity.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask them. Your cooperation is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to answer individual questions. You may also change your mind and withdraw from the study up to 3 months following the interviews. If you decide to withdraw, all data describing you will immediately be destroyed.

If Interested PLEASE call me or email me ASAP!!!!!! All messages will be checked only by me, Lisa Lynelle Moore.

APPENDIX D

Individual Interview Guide Black Lesbian Identity

Age_____ Geographical Location_____

Single_____ Partnered Relationship_____ If yes, number of years _____

Children_____, If yes, number and ages _____

Profession/Career_____

Religious Background or Present Affiliation_____

Educational Status_____

Please review the questions below. These are the questions which we will discuss in our interview. The purpose of this guide is to assist myself, the interviewer during this process and to allow you to write down any thoughts you do not feel comfortable discussing.

- 1) Did you ever feel that you were assimilated, that is living to standards of a group or society that made you feel a need to deny all or part of yourself?

- 2) When were you first aware that your feelings toward other women could be labeled as lesbian?

- 3) What was your first experience of feeling like an outsider within a community?

- 4) When do you recall your first experience of being discriminated against based on your race? Based on your Lesbian identity?

Guide Cont.

5) When do you recall identifying that your feelings toward other women were definitely lesbian? What kind of support did you have when you made this realization?

6) Have you ever experienced an immersion of yourself into the culture or activities of the Black community or Lesbian/gay community, both? Was it ever more than the average person participates in activities? Was it ever more exclusive in one over the other?

7) Do you feel that your identity as black and lesbian can or cannot be separated? How do you affirm your identities?

8) Did you experience strong support from the lesbian/gay community? From the heterosexual Black community? If neither, who would you define as your supportive community?

9) What has been the role of the Black Lesbian community in your development?

10) Do you feel that your Black and Lesbian identities are integrated with one another? How do you define the integration of your identity, for example through community activities, social group, spiritual and/or religious practice?

APPENDIX E

HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW

Project Title: Black Lesbian Identity Development

Student Name: Lisa Lynelle Moore

Project Purpose and Design

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the applicability of William E. Cross's Black Identity Development model and Vivienne Cass's model of Lesbian/Gay Identity formation to the experience of Black lesbians. Through a minimum of seven, one hour long interviews and an optional one hour long focus group this researcher will evaluate Black Lesbian experience through analyzing themes and progression of development with the characteristics of models. Of specific interest will be whether Black Lesbians integrate their Black and Lesbian identities in their every day life, which is the bases of "completion" of the stages by Cross and Cass.

Describe the characteristics of the people who will participate

A minimum of seven women who identify themselves as Black Lesbians, 18 years of age and older in various geographical locations, with a strong recruitment of participants in the city of the researcher's residence will be asked to participate. These women may come from a variety of socioeconomic classes, educational backgrounds and may be single or partnered, with or without children.

Describe precisely the nature of the participation in research.

Women will be asked to participate in a one hour interview where they will be asked ten questions which have been formed by this researcher. Given the small size of the Black Lesbian community and individual's different levels of comfort, women will also be asked to participate in an optional focus group following the researchers completion of individual interviews, where women will be asked three questions regarding community from the individual interview guide for discussion purposes.

Discuss the potential RISKS and BENEFITS to subjects of participation in the research.

Women who agree to participate in this research who also participate in the focus group will have the opportunity to meet more women from their community, which may be helpful for some.

Human Subjects Review Cont..

Overall women who participate may benefit from having the opportunity to discuss their experiences, which may not be always available to them. This researcher will also inform women of local resources, according to their needs or requests. All women will be verbally informed about local Lesbian and Gay Community Centers and Black Lesbian resources if they are not aware of them. Given that some of these women are experiencing isolation they will benefit from meeting other Black Lesbians in their community if they participate in the focus group.

The greatest risk to participants will be for those who agree to participate in the optional focus group and have not come out and meet an individual who was not aware of their identity. Though women will be told that the information discussed in group is confidential and to be used only this researcher's project, the woman who did not want her identity discovered will be at risk. There is also a risk that women will discuss their experience of being interviewed with others who are being interviewed which could effect the information shared.

Describe the informed consent procedures to be used

Women will receive an informed consent form to be signed which outlines the purposes of the researcher, the protocol to be used by the researcher to protect their identity, and the period of time it will take to record the information.

What precautions will be taken to safeguard identifiable information about individuals?

Non-specificity of geographic locations will be essential in the protection of identifiable information. Given the small size of the Black Lesbian Community in many cities, it will also be important that all interviews focus specifically on the questions and individual experience. When unusual situations are discussed this researcher will reconfirm permission to use the data in the final thesis write up and in any research which may follow. Women who agree to participate will be informed of the risks and potential long-term uses of the data.

Student's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Advisor's Signature: _____ Date: _____