Reflections on Sameness and Difference:

Implications for Counselling Psychology and

Professional Practice

Ohemaa Nkansa-Dwamena

Professional Doctorate in Psychology (Dpsych)

City University

Department of Psychology

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Declaration

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Abstract

The portfolio explores the concepts of 'sameness' and 'difference' and their implications for the field of counselling psychology and professional practice. Consisting of an empirical research piece, a case study and a critical review of literature, each section of the portfolio examines the main theme against existing models, participant accounts and the perspective of experts in the various fields. The portfolio begins with a qualitative research study of ten Black British Lesbians and their experiences of negotiating their multiple identities. The second section consists of a case study which explores the role of similarity and dissimilarity in the therapeutic relationship. The portfolio ends with a critical literature review which comprises a consideration of studies of intra-racial discrimination in the Black community.

Section A

Preface

This portfolio covers the overarching theme of 'sameness and difference' and consists of a an empirical piece, a case study and a critical literature review which have all examined this theme in their presentation of issues which have implications for the field of counselling psychology and professional practice.

The concept of sameness and difference is one that has been explored extensively in many different areas of psychology. Researchers have explored how the concept pertains to gender identity and gender difference (Egan and Perry, 2001). It has also been explored in relation to sexual identity (Clarke, 2002) and racial identity (Gillem, Chon and Throne, 2001), research processes (Bhopal, 2001), insider-outsider status (Wilkinson and Kitzenger, 1996) and the role it plays in therapeutic encounters (Farsimadan, Lorenz and Ellis, 2007). Sameness and difference extends across many different areas in psychology and in the wider context of society, through equality, discrimination, human process, the way in which people think, exist and interact. In professional practice, the concept of sameness and difference can manifest in the relationship between client and therapist, the differences between client and therapist. It can have implications for therapeutic practice and for the advancement of a successful therapeutic relationship, but also plays a large role in determining the course of therapeutic interventions and outcomes (Sterling, Gottheil, Weinstein and Serota, 2001).

The three sections of this portfolio reflect various stages of professional practice and the way in which they have contributed to professional development and learning outcomes. Section B consists of an empirical research piece which explores the concept of identity

negotiation and conflict in a group which is underrepresented in the psychological literature. The qualitative research piece explores the experiences of Black British lesbians in negotiating their racial, sexual and gender identities. Research (e.g. Parks, Hughes and Matthews, 2004, Greene, 2000) has suggested that this population may experience difficulty in negotiating multiple identities because of confrontation with societal and community norms, conflicting racial, gender and sexual orientation values, and homophobia from their own community. As a result of these difficulties, this population may face psychological issues such as depression, low self esteem and substance abuse (Bridges, Selvidge and Matthews, 2003). However, there is a lack of research pertaining to Black British lesbians. This empirical piece attempts to address this imbalance by exploring the experiences of this unique group of women in the context of a Black British/British culture

The case study in section C consists of a representation of professional practice. Three cases which explore the impact of sameness and difference in a therapeutic session are presented. Literature in the area of therapist matching has suggested that patients may benefit from engaging in therapy with professionals who have a similar racial or cultural background, or are of the same gender (Atkinson, 1983). Contrasting research suggests that therapist matching does not have an effect on the outcome or progress of therapy, or can have a negative effect. Similarity and difference in the form of race, gender and sexuality were explored in this case study in an attempt to illustrate the way in which the concept can either adversely affect or aid the process and progress in a therapeutic relationship (Maramba and Hall, 2002).

Section D consists of a critical review of literature. It explores the issue of colourism (also termed intra-racial discrimination) in the Black community. Although often referred to as a homogenous ethnic group, differences exist in the Black community with regards to skin

colour and such difference has been shown to impact on Black individuals' sense of self worth, self esteem and perception of beauty and attractiveness. The critical literature review aims to present a review of the existing literature and critically assess the validity of the empirical research that has examined the phenomenon of intra-racial discrimination and its psychological implications.

Intertwining themes of Sameness and Difference

Critical Literature review

The review explores the relationship of sameness and difference in its relationship to perceived similarity within race. Although racial groups are classified under one term, it is important to acknowledge that within group differences that exist in the population. Within the Black community, shared experiences of racism, discrimination, cultural backgrounds and religious affiliations are indeed prevalent; however, differences in terms of skin colour, physical attributes, country or culture of origin also exist. Group discrimination - discrimination that may occur due to differences in a group who shares various similarities - has existed in the Black community for a long time. It can partly be attributed to slavery when lighter skinned Blacks were afforded more privileges because of their complexion. This was closer in similarity to White individuals and differentiated them from dark skinned Blacks who were associated with negative stereotypes. Current research shows that these issues of sameness and difference affect the ways in which Black individuals construct their racial identity and can have adverse effects on their self perception (Wade, 1996).

Case study

Similarity and difference in therapeutic encounters are well demonstrated in the psychological literature, with several researchers suggesting that individuals benefit from engaging in therapy with a therapist from a similar background, race, sexual orientation or gender. The underlying premise for this suggests that sameness between client and therapist may encourage comfort and a sense of understanding for the client (Sterling, Gotheil, Weinstein and Serota, 2001). There is also research to refute this stance, with researchers suggesting that equally, potential clients might benefit from a therapeutic encounter with practitioners of a different background as this might facilitate client disclosure (Maramba and Hall, 2002). One reason for this might be the perception that a therapist from a different background might be able to help the client develop a fresh perspective because of the lack of sameness with the client. Clients also cited fear of judgment and over-familiarity as some of the reasons that might compel them to seek therapy with therapists of a different background (Bryan et al 2004). The implications of similarity and difference on the therapeutic relationship are important to explore given the diversity of society and the increasing number of diverse clients who access therapy.

Empirical piece

Black British lesbians share similarities with other Black women by virtue of their gender and their race. Research has suggested that during the development of a racial and gender identity, Black lesbians develop a sense of sameness and belonging to the Black community due to shared racial and cultural ideals and the shared experience of racism (Boyd-Franklin, 1991). The assimilation of a sexual identity can trigger a sense of difference as Black lesbians become oppressed on multiple levels by virtue of their sex, gender and sexual orientation (Greene, 2000). They may experience homophobia as a result of their sexual

orientation, which may be considered as a violation of cultural norms and similarities. They may also be subjected to racism within the gay community because of a difference in skin colour. Finally, the lack of visibility of Black British lesbians within the wider society can also foster a sense of difference for a Black British lesbian who is trying to seek validation of their sexual identity (Greene, 1994).

Personal Reflection

My decision to explore the themes of sameness and difference stemmed from my several experiences over the course of professional training and practice. As a Black African counselling psychologist, professionally, I am often struck by the role that sameness and difference plays in my professional practice. I have worked with a myriad of clients of different races, backgrounds and genders, and I have had a different reaction from each client with regards to my race, gender, heterosexuality and cultural background. Some clients have seen these factors as an aid in their therapeutic journey and have cited my similarity with them as a positive component of this process. Others have described feelings of discomfort because of my similarity with or difference from them. As a Black British woman, I am acutely aware of the way in which the facets of sameness and difference touch upon many areas of my life; in my work, in the interactions with my colleagues, in interactions with family and friends and in my everyday encounters with other individuals. Throughout my training, I have realised that I am not colourless or genderless, and that who I am as a person does influence my professional practice. I wanted the opportunity to explore this further within different contexts, and the different components of this portfolio have allowed me to do this. It has further enhanced my knowledge of the different topic areas to which sameness and difference apply and has enhanced both my professional practice and my personal advancement as an individual.

Section B

Negotiating racial sexual and gender identities: An exploration of the experiences of

Black British Lesbians

Abstract

Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with ten British Black lesbian women were used to examine the experiences of simultaneously holding lesbian, female and Black identities. Participants were interviewed about their experiences of growing up as Black women, the development of their lesbian identity within a Black cultural context, the relationship between their Black identity, female and lesbian identities. They also discussed the social implications of holding these identities, and strategies for managing any difficulties associated with them. The data was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. All the participants reported experiences of conflict at various points in their lives which arose mainly from an inability or difficulty to reconcile Black, lesbian and female identities. Conflict was dependent on a number of factors and various strategies were employed to manage identity conflict. However a majority of the participants reported experiencing psychological problems at some point in their lives.

Introduction

Individuals are rarely defined by one aspect of their identity. In different stages of their lives, each unique aspect of their self identity is highlighted, prominent, or sometimes underlying. Put simply, identity is ever-changing, fluid and complex. The ways and means by which self identity comes to a point where all components have equal eminence may be gradual, or may not even happen for some. Taking this stance into consideration, it seems that the process of consolidating a Black female lesbian identity can be both complex and simple, however, the journey that these women embark on, albeit - a very individual one - highlights the complexity of 'identity'.

Black lesbian feminist, Audre Lorde demonstrates this concept. As a self-described 'Black lesbian, mother, warrior, poet' (Collins, 2000), Lorde's (1982) depiction of herself was one that encompassed all aspects of identity in terms of gender, race and sexuality. In adopting this stance, Lorde (1982) was able to successfully negotiate and integrate three important components of her personal identity into her overall identity structure, and attribute equal importance to each. However, it was not an easy identity to consolidate. Lorde (1982) experienced a journey of development in a society where racism was prevalent, in a culture where homosexuality was frowned upon, and in a world where sexism was commonplace. In her own words, "It is hard enough to be Black, to be Black and female, to Black female and Gay" (Lorde, 1982, p.224). Lorde's (1982) racial identity was largely developed through her experiences of living in a deeply racist and segregated society. It was one in which Lorde (1982) became acutely aware of her status as a Black person, evidenced by her inability to sit at an ice cream counter because of segregation laws. Her 'womaness' was the result of a gender identity that was very much shaped by her experiences as a young girl growing up in a Caribbean family. Her mother was a strong, powerful and unique woman whose "public air of

in charge competence was quiet and effective' and who carried herself with 'physical substance, presence and self-possession" (Lorde, 1982, p.226). The power that Lorde's (1982) mother exuded influenced Lorde's (1982) concept of herself as a woman, but this influence was strangely unhelpful when Lorde (1982) began to develop a lesbian identity. Whilst her mother instilled a sense of pride in being a woman and a strong sense of being Black, she did not instil the tools needed to assimilate a lesbian identity. Lorde's (1982) sexuality was a journey of self-discovery, largely devoid of any support from a community who did not understand or did not want to know about a Black woman who was Gay.

Lorde's (1982) struggle to consolidate her personal identity by assimilating a stigmatised sexual identity illustrates the premise that within a fluid identity structure, different components interact with each other, and sometimes this interaction can be problematic. In her case, the interaction of a dominant racial and gender identity with a developing sexual identity proved to be difficult because certain aspects of her racial identity conflicted with the stigmatised lesbian identity.

Greene (1994) states that Black lesbians have to negotiate "a dominant culture that devalues women, people of colour, and lesbians; the need to master and integrate cultural derivatives of one's own ethnic group…and the need to form a consolidated personal identity" (Greene, 1994, p. 400). In adopting a Black lesbian identity, these women are said to be oppressed on multiple levels because of their positions as minorities in terms of sex, race and sexual orientation. Furthermore, they may have difficulty in incorporating all these factors into their identity structure. For this reason, understanding the development of a sexual identity by lesbians of colour requires an evaluation of the identity structure at several levels, particularly with regards to the contexts and factors which may inform or impact on identity development. These factors and contexts include the impact of the dominant culture on these women's lives -

which in turn spawns issues of racism, sexism and attitudes toward sexual orientation and sexual preference - and the way in which Black women develop a gender identity. Equally important is the unique role that family and community play in the formation and establishment of a sexual identity. These may include perception of gender roles, family perceptions and attitudes, and the experience of being a Black woman. Additionally, racial identity development must also be examined because of its contribution to the makeup of the multiple identities that Black British lesbians hold.

Considering the complexity of consolidating a Black female lesbian identity, it is surprising the psychological literature which examines the experiences of ethnic minority lesbians - particularly Black lesbians - is sparse. Most of the academic literature explores issues surrounding ethnic minority lesbians and gay men concurrently, and that which does cover issues related to lesbians rarely includes Black lesbians as a dominant group. This is startling, considering the reported psychological issues that Black lesbians encounter, such as depression and alcoholism, (Greene, 1994) and the identity issues they face in their triple minority status as Black, lesbian and female.

This introduction will explore the gap in psychological literature with regards to this group of individuals by looking at the body of research pertaining to each identity component of the participants in this study; gender, racial and sexual identity. Existing literature and research which addresses issues pertaining to Black lesbians, particularly the understudied area of multiple identity formation will also be examined.

Identity

Identity is a concept which has been studied at various levels and from different perspectives over the years in the psychology field (Phinney, 1990; Cross, 2001; Diamond, 2000; Butler, 1993). The vast cannon of literature on identity examine many different components, theories and knowledge. It can therefore be purported identity is a complex, variable and fluid concept comprising multiple components which continuously interact to form an individual's self-definition and contributes to their self-concept (McAdams, 1995). Although widely studied, identity has proved to be a problematic due to its complexity. Research in modern years has explored and debated 'identity' from different standpoints. Theories, methods and priorities in each of these areas differ. Whilst of major value it is important to note that the exploration of identity is an ongoing process as few studies have been able to capture the theoretical concepts of maintenance and change.

In exploring identity, certain theories and models tend to dominate the discourse (Frable 1997) such as the works of Erikson (1968), Tajfel and Turner (1979), and Mead (1934), however all these contrast in the standpoint they take. In particular, Erikson's early theory focused on identity as a uniform unchanging sense of self which seemed to suggest a sequential stage process of identity formation. However, Erikson's (1968) theory suggests that each of the processes described in his model occur in some form across the life span. His theory therefore fits with the idea of fluidity of identity, although the phases he describes could be misinterpreted as linear stages. Erikson suggests that he emphasises certain phases as these seem to be the points where conflict might occur in identity development. In contrast, Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory places emphasis on social psychological processes of intergroup discrimination. In its turn, Mead's theory of self posits the subject for change lies in the individual. In exploring identity negotiation for Black British lesbians, it could be said that

Breakwell's (2001) Identity Process Theory might be applicable in attempting to explain the process individuals undertake in negotiating multiple identities, as it takes into consideration the dynamics and fluidity of the identity process.

Breakwell's Identity Process Theory (2000) suggests that the structure of identity is a "dynamic social product of the interaction of the capacities for memory, consciousness and organised with the physical and societal structure" and these "influence process which constitute the social contexts" (p.355). She goes on to emphasise that identity is "a subjective concept of oneself as a person and is therefore a form of representation" (p.340). However it is not constructed solely within the individual but emerges via the interaction of several processes. She suggests that the structure of identity should be described in terms of the content and the value/affect dimensions; the content dimension consists of the characteristics which define identity, i.e. those which define the individual as unique. It encompasses group membership, roles, social category labels as well as values, attitudes and cognitive style, but this is not an exhaustive list. Each element of this content dimension has a positive or negative affect attached to it; collectively, these values constitute the value/affect dimension of identity. This dimension of identity is consistently subject to revision, change and fluidity.

Breakwell (2001) further posits that the structure of identity is regulated by accommodation and assimilation. The former refers to the absorption of new components into the identity structure, while the latter refers to the adjustment which occurs in the existing structure in order to develop room for the new elements. The two processes interact to determine the fluidity and value of identity over time. Underlying all these processes are the principles which guide identity: continuity, distinctiveness, self efficacy and self esteem. They vary in their relative and absolute salience over time, developmentally and across situations.

Essentially, identity is nether simplistic or stagnant - it is created, modified, and assimilated over different social contexts in specific time periods. Its complexity means that any one social identity does not necessarily function in isolation from other identities in the overall identity structure. Rather, it exists in a definite position relative to other aspects of identity as well as the overall identity structure (Pittinsky et al, 1998). Thus, fluidity in identity is related to these interactions in the identity structure, and dependent on social context, environment and time. Certain components may take precedence in the identity structure. Furthermore, changes in social context, environment, interactions will initiate changes in the identity structure according to "their personal relevance, the immediacy of involvement in them, the amount of change demanded and how negative the change is deemed to be" (Breakwell, 2001, p. 357). Breakwell's (2001) ideas are important to consider when exploring the multiple identities of Black lesbians as it is possible that over the course of their sexual identity development, other social identities in the overall identity structure may be prominent or may regress. This may be due to the clash of content dimensions in each of these social identities.

Racial identity

Racial identity seems to be one of the foremost social identities that Black British lesbians accommodate into their identity structure, partially because of their environments, social attitudes, family and culture. Much like the concept of identity itself, race as component of racial identity is a neither simplistic nor absolute. Race can be defined as a division of humankind with similar characteristics and common ancestors (Mama, 1995), however belonging to a certain race does not determine the natural adoption of a racial title, and it may be imposed due to physical characteristics. Mama (1995) suggests that individuals develop a racialised subjectivity or position later on in life which may be influenced by historical

perspectives, cultural roots, community, ethnicity or environment. Therefore, the development of a racial identity is not linear and 'race' does not hold a stagnant position within the identity structure. Racialisation takes into consideration the psychological and social processes which may influence the fluid nature of racial identity construction (Murji and Solomos, 2005), and further highlights the notion that race becomes significant through cultural, psychological, social processes (Phoenix, 2005) and the interaction with other identity components.

The Black British community is made up of several different cultures, languages, ethnicities and is underpinned by a rich and diverse history which transcends decades. In order to best explain this diversity and the ways in which it contributes to the development of a Black identity, an examination of roots and history, and underlying racial identity theory will need to be examined.

Black British Culture and History: The Slave Trade

An examination of the experiences of Black British lesbians requires a careful consideration of the history and roots which may have contributed to the development of their converging identities. Black British individuals have their roots in Africa and the Caribbean, and so while they may share the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade and the experience of immigration to Britain, their common origins do not result in homogeneity.

Trying to describe and present the rich and varied characteristics of African and Caribbean culture would be impossible because of the different countries, indigenous cultures and sub-cultures, languages, ideals, values and people which it encompasses. Instead an attempt will be made to delineate the evolution of Black British individuals from the perspective of the slave trade and immigration, and examine the differences that exist between these two communities,

and how these in turn affect ideals and values. Wekker (1993) and Greene (1994) observe that prior to their departure from the African coast and Caribbean islands as slaves; Caribbean and African women were a heterogeneous group. Mixed pre-slavery lineages of African women and Caribbean women meant that they had "their membership in various tribes that spoke languages as well as having different systems of family values, family relations and tribal customs" (p. 242).

The presence of Black individuals in Britain dates back to the Roman occupation when they held positions of prominence in the Roman army (Walvin, 1994). The Black populace grew in Britain in the 17th and 18th centuries as Britain was establishing itself as a major world player through its involvement in international trade, the enslavement of Africans, and other historical activities. Black individuals arrived at British ports such as London, Bristol and Liverpool as enslaved property to be bought and sold at auctions (Christian, 1998). Some of these slaves remained in Britain as domestic servants while others were taken to British slave colonies in the Caribbean where they worked on plantations. These plantations were a great source of income for Britain, and in fact, the slave trade in itself became a very profitable venture for the British Empire until its abolition in 1807. The transatlantic slave trade also created the conditions for subsequent colonial conquest in Africa (Morgan 2007).

During the course of the slave trade, attempts were made to suppress or even eradicate African culture. However, slaves and their descendants retained indigenous skills and traditions in their destination countries. African literary traditions - particularly oral storytelling featuring the tortoise, hare, and spider - spread throughout the Caribbean, Latin America, the United States and Europe (Walvin, 1994). Additionally, African values, languages and traditions were maintained, as were the importance of kinship and family, which would later influence the origin and culture of Black Britain centuries. Within slave families in Britain and the

Caribbean, Walvin (2000) postulates that mothers and fathers passed on cultural attributes and values to their children. In the wider slave community, people met, shared stories and expressed their experiences through music. Family relations also took place within a much broader framework of ties within the slave community, as extended families became the framework for these communities. Walvin (2000) tells of occasions when older, established slaves took in and adopted newly arrived ones and kinsfolk rallied around in all life's trials and tribulations. The community (neighbours, friends and family) cared for the old, disabled, sick and young. Victims of the slave trade thrived in this family network and the broader network of kinfolk, a concept that exists today within the Black community, regardless of origin (Bush, 1990).

Morgan (2007) and Fryer (1993) both point out that while West Indian/Caribbean slave families adapted their values to the new world, the kinship ties and the values that they espoused from their various African homelands remained prevalent. Walvin (2000) describes how during these times, kinship and families were crucial for child rearing and socialisation, and the responsibility for raising children usually fell to the women. From this, the importance of motherhood, and the value of strength developed. In addition to looking after children, much more was demanded of women in slave families. "They were slaves to their masters, and yet had to fulfil all the demanding rituals of the household world and child rearing and often without the assistance of a resident spouse" (Walvin, 2000 p.183). Walvin (2000) also points out that because of the strength and tenacity demonstrated by womenfolk, slaves developed a lifelong commitment to and affection for mothers, grandmothers and the women who took on the role of 'community mother'. Socialisation helped the slave families forge a sense of identity from immediate family ties as well as relationships with other slaves. "They developed a fierce sense of attachment to that immediate community around them....to the sense of community which emerged from the huts and the yards" (Walvin, 2000, p.183). Slaves within

their families and communities developed a sense of collective strength and unity which fortified them against the tribulations of enslavement through the significant events of marriage, death and bereavement and offered companionship through the insignificant events such as cooking, nursing and relaxing after a day's work (Fryer, 1993; Horton& Horton, 2009). This is echoed by Walvin (2000) who suggests "despite everything, despite the slave trade, despite the brutality of slave labour...the slave family became the source of strength and resilience to slaves...In essence it was to form the basis for the structure of black life and society long after the process which had brought it into being-chattel slavery-had melted away" (Walvin, 2000, p. 184).

In spite of this unity, another form of oppression/racism was to develop within slave communities. Often termed 'colourism' or 'intra-racial discrimination', this concept - perpetrated by Slave masters who may have unknowingly (or knowingly) created a system of hierarchy amongst slave communities based on their skin colour - would remain in the Black community long after slavery had come to an end. Colourism stemmed from the preference and privileges which were afforded to light-skinned Blacks during this era and largely unavailable to dark-skinned slaves. Light-skinned slaves were allocated jobs within the household and were more likely to develop close relationships with their masters. Additionally, it is believed that African or Caribbean women who were favoured by slave masters were light-skinned. These women were afforded social, and to some extent, economic privileges that other enslaved Africans were not, particularly the darker skinned Africans (Okazawa-Rey, Robinson and Ward, 1986). Individuals with lighter skin were often freed from slavery and given formal and informal education and training for certain skilled jobs. The development of racial hierarchy amongst slave communities was predicated on prejudice and later had psychological implications for individuals of the Black community with regards to aesthetics, economic advancement and racial identity development.

The slave trade was abolished in Britain in 1807 and in its colonies between 1834 and 1838, and from then onwards, a different pattern of Black settlement emerged. Trading links were established between British ports with West African seamen employed as cheap labour (Fryer, 1993). This contributed to the growth and development of Black populations in Britain which later increased with the immigration of Black individuals from Africa and the Caribbean. However, their struggle with social oppression did not end with slavery but continued through racial discrimination following the influx of immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean (Morgan, 2007).

The values, ideals, experiences and identities of these individuals influenced Black communities who existed in Britain largely due to immigration, and helped to shape the creation of Black British identities. For some Black communities in Britain, a development of such an identity was affected by racism and discrimination, but also enriched by differences and idiosyncrasies of past generations who had endured the slave trade and whose identities carried the effects of this.

Black British Culture and History: Immigration

By 1953, the number of colonial subjects arriving in Britain even after the war ended escalated, and increased the White consciousness of Black Britain (Bush, 1999). Black Britain began to comprise of individuals of African descent and those from the West Indian islands. Each set differentiated in terms of the cultural ideals and identities they brought with them and each retained their culture and traditions as they tried to assimilate into British society. This is apparent in music, food, the concentration of particular ethnicities in areas of the country, through narratives, literature, carnivals, and through the cultural ideals, values and conceptions passed down through generations since the docking of the first cohort of immigrants in 1948 (Jones, 1985). Unfortunately, the arrival of these individuals on British shores was marred by

racism and identity conflict as they strove to establish a Black British Identity. Racism was deeply rooted in slavery and colonisation and continued as the Black population in Britain began to grow. According to Fryer (1993) immigration was racialised in order to curb the influx of Black individuals of African and Caribbean descent to Britain. Furthermore, Jones (1985) argues that Black immigrants also faced racism in the form of poor housing options, economic instability and unemployment, even though their roles as nurses, carpenters, seamen, etc, contributed greatly to the British economy. Fryer (1993) suggests that Black immigrants were deemed lazy and belligerent and a drain on the nation's resources. As such, they were denied places on training schemes, dismissed as unemployable and when in employment, they were overlooked for promotion. There was also a racialised view that shortage of housing and urban decay could be attributed to the growing Black population in Britain (Carter, Harris and Yoshi, 1993). Carter et al (1993) suggest that although racism was a product of imperial legacy, immigration perpetuated it, and even before immigrants had begun to arrive in Britain, immigration was racialised. Even though the Black community was not homogenous and the experience of immigration affected each individual differently, there was a shared bond of racism which unified Black immigrants and stimulated the development and formation of Black organisations (Bush, 1999). Additionally, Black immigrants insulated themselves from a seemingly hostile society by retreating into their communities and forming strong attachments to other Black individuals (Bush, 1999). Essentially, Black British racial identity was forged by the experience of slavery, immigration, racism, African cultural influences, Caribbean cultural influences (Alleyne, 2002).

Characteristics of Black British Culture: African and Caribbean influences

Many studies which have explored the experiences of Black British individuals have not made distinctions between Africans and Caribbeans (Reynolds 2001, 2002; Goulbourne and Solomos 2004; Reynolds 2006a). However, it is important to note that whilst Black individuals of Caribbean or African descent may share the experiences of slavery and colonisation, and appear to have similar spatial patterns to their Caribbean counterparts, they differ in terms of economic, social and cultural factors (Daley, 1998; Lam and Smith, 2008). This is reflected in a comment made by Reynolds (2004): "Similarly, in other official classification systems considering the question of Black people's ethnic origin, Africans and Caribbeans tend to be collapsed into one ethnic group. Yet, although they share the same racial characteristics and phenotype, each of these groups are culturally and ethnically distinctive" (p.4).

Although the differences between these two groups may be perceived as subtle, their differences can be tracked all the way back to the motivation for their immigration to Britain. The history of African migration differs significantly from that of those Caribbean immigrants who were recruited directly for the purposes of employment. In contrast, Africans mostly came either as seafarers who settled unofficially in British ports or as students seeking to further their education with the prospect of improved circumstances on the return home (Daley, 1998). Characteristics derivative of African culture include a strong religious and spiritual orientation, strong kinship bonds among non blood related kin, a strong work orientation, a value of expressed individualism and the importance of group over tribal needs (Boyd Franklin, 1989, Hill, 1971, Greene 2004). African communities are also characterised by certain cultural values which include a sense of community life, a sense of good human relations, a sense of the sacredness of life, a sense of hospitality, a sense of the sacred and of religion, a sense of

time, a sense of respect for authority and the elders and a sense of language and proverbs (Gyekye, 1996).

Caribbean communities may differ from other African populations in terms of language, diet, customs, beliefs, and migration history (Agyemang, Bhopal and Bruijnzeels, 2005). Defining characteristics of Caribbean culture include respect for law and order, respect for the preservation of family life and for authority and property, respect for tradition and national heritage, the recognition and belief of the family unit as an integral part of society, tolerance and understanding, belief in a man's word as his bond and in the basic human rights of an individual (Agyemang, Bhopal and Bruijnzeels, 2005). However, this is not an exhaustive list and it is important to highlight that individuals of African and Caribbean descent represent thousands of different languages, ethnicities, cultural values, histories, sub-cultures which cannot all be explored here.

African communities also differ from Caribbean communities in terms of their languages, which vary from one region to another. Across the African Diaspora, hundreds of languages, varying from Akan to Yoruba and Afrikaans are spoken, which is in direct contrast to Patois and Creole, Dutch and French which are spoke in Caribbean islands (Gyekye, 1996). Within African and Caribbean communities, there is also an obvious divergence in food and its association with certain customs. For instance, Counihan and Esterik (1997) suggest that food is regarded as an essential part of cultural identity and is a cultural artefact infused with meanings and values. In specific countries in Africa, food is an expression of certain customs and certain life events, e.g. the coming out ceremony in the Ashanti region in Ghana is commemorated by the consumption of yam and palm oil (Gyekye, 1996). In contrast, in the Caribbean, the type of food goods chosen, and the preparation and presentation of certain foods, "all re-affirm cultural belonging and a strong ethnic group consciousness that is linked

to the Caribbean homeland" (Reynolds, 2008, p.5). These include food prepared at family occasions such as *ackee* and salt fish, breadfruit, pepper pot, curried goat, garlic pork, and fried plantain (Reynolds, 2008). However, these broad differences are based largely on specific examples in cultural literature, and as mentioned before, African and Caribbean cultures represent a myriad of different languages, ideals and values. Thus, in addition to the differences between these two communities, it must be noted that intra-group differences also exist within both African and Caribbean communities.

The range of characteristics belonging to these two cultures affect the lives of many Black British lesbians, with many viewing their racial identity as an important, if not the primary, factor in their identity structure (Greene, 2000). The history of slavery and immigration, cultural ideals and roots, and the past and current experiences of racism all play a role in the socialisation of Black individuals. These factors have a great influence on the development of a Black British racial identity as they form part of the content dimensions which make up Black identity. This identity is one that emerges and develops long before the development of a sexual identity or a particular sexual orientation (Greene, 1994) but may be developed concurrently with a Black female identity, again emphasising the idea that social identities function in tandem with each other (Breakwell, 2001). Furthermore, racial identity exists in a definite position relative to sexual or gender identity. As such, its influence or interaction with these structures may or may not be favourable depending on the compatibility of the content dimensions of each of these social identities.

Racial identity theory

The development of a racial identity is a process which has been explored in recent years by several theorists (e.g. Parham, 1989; Helms, 1990) but perhaps the most prominent of these theories is that of Cross (1971, 1995) who put forward the first comprehensive model of racial

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identity which proposes a five stage sequence in the development of a Black identity. His research yielded one of the first theories in academic literature that conceptualised the process that an individual undertakes in forming and consolidating a Black racial identity and is therefore important to consider in developing an understanding of the racial identity formation in Black British lesbians.

When an individual has successfully progressed through Cross's (1971) proposed stages, a positive racial identity is incorporated into the identity structure, which may include the underlying components of community expectations, cultural norms and rules. These components are often reinforced by the Black community and family. A positive Black identity is also reinforced by the shared experience of racism in the wider community, and thus the Black community becomes the primary reference group because of this shared experience. However, Helms (1990) points out that theoretically, an individual can progress from the least developed stage in this model to the most developed, and vice versa. It is also possible that not every individual will enter the developmental cycle at the same place, and furthermore, recycling through the stages may occur as the person advances through their lifespan (Helms, 1995). This thinking reflects the idea that identity is a dynamic and fluid concept, so Cross's model may be seen to be restrictive as it assumes that development of a racial identity is a neat, structured process which requires sequential stages in order for the individual to develop a healthy racial attitude or racialised position.

Helm's (1995) version of racial identity theory postulates that members of all socio-racial groups "regardless of ethnic or racial group classification are assumed to experience a racial identity development process that can be described by several statuses" (p.183). These stages differ between identity groups because of the variations between social and racial groups. She suggests that they are best understood as ego statuses, which are world views used

for handling racial and ethnic information. These statuses permit the complex management of racial material. The more statuses an individual has, the more likely they are to engage in complex race-related behaviour. This is because they are able to utilise specific information-processing mechanisms (Helms, 1995). Cross (2001) himself has since revised his model following research in this area which has refuted his original stage sequence and has incorporated the influence of other external factors and placed emphasis on the dynamics of racial identity, in the process validating Helm's (2006) critique.

It is important to note, however, that in acknowledging the diversity of Black individuals, it cannot be assumed that Black identity is a uniform construct; factors such as history, migration, environment and community make it so. Although Cross (2001) and Helms (2006) offer perspective on Black identity development, neither theoretical perspective necessarily takes into account the diversity of the Black race. For this reason, whilst useful in understanding the processes that Black individuals may undertake, it is important to consider the perspective of Black British identity theorists in order to further enhance the comprehension of Black identity. Gilroy (1993, 2001), Hall (1996) and Mama (1995) all offer a different perspective on Black Identity from a British perspective. Hall (1996) suggests that in exploring Black British cultural identity, researchers "should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (p. 222). He suggests that the development of a Black British identity emerges from two perspectives. The first perspective reflects "the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history " (p. 223). He goes on to point out although Black British identity has many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which "constitute 'what we really are' or rather - and since history has intervened-

'what we have become'. We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about 'one experience, one identity', without acknowledging its other side -- the ruptures and discontinuities" (p.224). By this, Hall is referring to the unique aspects of Black British identities which may have been formed from historical beds, but alter with the presence of migration and a new environment.

This perspective was further explored and expanded by Gilroy (1993). In his book *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, he suggests Black British identity has been formed from contrasting sources, citing the influence of various African and Caribbean countries, and from Black America that mixed together to form a Black British identity. This contrasts with ideas that were previously held concerning the formation of Black identity which claimed that the Black community comes from an ethnically absolute source and is acquired through the progression of several stages (see Cross, 1995). Gilroy (2001) states that this is a problematic way of thinking of the Black community since this is a community that was formed from many different nations and which covers various ethnicities that are all considered Black. His ideas are steeped in the diversity of the Black British experience which is illustrated by slavery, immigration, and the Caribbean and African roots which are specific to Black British individuals. It is important to explore these factors to develop a more informed understanding of the racial identity development in Black British individuals and its effect on the development of multiple identities in Black British lesbians. The diversity and difference that Gilroy (2001) speaks of highlight the 'content dimension' that Breakwell refers to in explaining the array of factors which make up particular identity structures, and indeed, what makes Black British lesbians unique in their makeup and not part of a uniform construct. Perhaps previous non-acknowledgement of this is what has led Black British lesbians' exclusion in the psychological literature.

Mama's (1995) earlier work on Black British identity work seems to emphasise some of these later ideas. She suggests that the Black British identity is a multiple identity as it combines national and racial subjectivities and in so doing, "contests the dualistic world order which deems Blackness and Britishness to be mutually exclusive (p.114)." She suggests that the formation of the Black British identity is a dynamic process as it has emerged from the post colonial era and continues to develop as a result of the identities formed within the west and in the former colonies and essentially in "human, cultural and material traffic between the two"(p.114). She further suggests that building a Black British identity is propelled by racism, as individuals acquire the ability to secure positions in Black discourses once they recover from the trauma of racism. She posits that Black identity development is underlined by the development of Black subjectivity; one that develops from contradictory experiences leading people to search for an alternative discourse with which to place themselves. Seeking these positions involves "retaining a sense of dignity and integrity, a resolution of inner tensions and tensions between oneself and one's social environment" (p.116). In this case, Mama is referring to a social environment which may be dominated by a white milieu. She further emphasises that the subjective process is not a simple linear evolution, much like it is suggested in Cross's (1995) initial model, but instead it is a process of Black British identity development in which various options are continuously available to the individual. In other words, it is an evolving, dynamic process based on the multiplicity of subjectivity which may comprise of being Black, British, African, Jamaican or all of these at any given time over the life cycle. This process, in effect, can be affected by historical periods in an individual's life, social relationships and interactions, an imbibed knowledge of various discourses and ways of being. These ways of being include the gender and sexual experiences as experienced by Black British lesbians. Again, Mama's (1995) ideas highlight the core of Breakwell's (2001) IPT model, in acknowledging that the formation and subsequent consolidation of Black identity is a

dynamic process. She mirrors Breakwell's (2001) idea that identity is not stagnant. Just as multiplicity of subjectivity affects the development of a racial identity, in the same way, the interaction of several processes - e.g. subjectivity and socialisation - affects the development of a self identity. Breakwell's (2001) model is further applicable when considering the role of gender identity in the identity negotiation process for Black British lesbians.

Gender Identity

Gender Identity Theory

The concept of gender identity is a well explored one in psychology, especially in the area of social psychology (e.g., Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Gurin and Townsend, 1986; Ashmore, 1990; Spence, 1995; Egan and Perry, 2001; Corby, 2007). Ashmore (1990) defines gender identity as "a set of gendered personal identities that results when the individual takes the social construction of gender and the biological 'facts' of sex and incorporates them into an overall self-concept" (p. 512). Abrams, Thomas and Hoggs (1990) extend this concept by presenting contexts such as culture and race that may make gender categories more prominent and increase gender identification. This may lead to traditional attitudes and behaviours (otherwise known as gender roles). This is echoed by Howard (2000), who suggests that gender identity "is the sense of organising a sense of self around the perception one is female or male, and internalising pre and proscriptions of behaviours deemed culturally appropriate to these self-perceptions, are thought to be learned through early socialisation and enacted and reinforced throughout the life span" (p. 379). Butler (2007) points out that that when gender is defined under the notion of constructs, it suggests a certain determination of "gender meanings inscribed on anatomically differentiated bodies, whose bodies are understood as passive

recipients of an inexorable cultural law" (p.11). She sees this as problematic as it positions gender as a determined, fixed construct, when in effect it is an identity which is complex, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time. Additionally, it is important to consider the fluidity and other contributing factors to the development of gender identity per individual, instead of insisting upon "a coherent, unified model which denies the multiplicity of cultural, social and political intersections in which the array of women are constructed" (p.19). Uniformed coherent models (e.g. Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989) have been used to explain the identity development processes from different standpoints for a long time, hence the dearth of knowledge present in the psychological literature pertaining to Black British lesbians. Butler's assertion further adds credence to the diversity and fluidity underlying the identity process theory; particularly in its applicability to Black British lesbians.

Female identity models such Helm's (1990) 'womanist' model somewhat perpetuate the linear and uniform approach to exploring identity construction as criticised by Butler (2007). Helms argues that a healthy gender identity in women involves moving from externalised standards of gender identities which are constructed and imposed by society to internal ones which are based on an individual's attributes and ideals. Her 'womanist' model suggests that women progress through various stages in order to develop a gender identity. Helms (1990) adapted the racial identity framework developed by Cross (1979) to conceptualise the development of a female gender identity. Whilst the steps she describes serve to hypothesise the possible processes female individuals may experience, by adopting the same framework she earlier criticised, Helm's deviates from the idea of identity as a fluid process and does not fully account for the interaction of interaction of other identity components such as race and sexuality.

This criticism is perhaps addressed at some level by Egan and Perry (2001) who advance past theories of gender identity which support the proposition that gender identity is multi-dimensional and can have an effect on psychosocial adjustment. Their model suggests gender identity comprises five components: (a) *membership knowledge* (knowledge of one's gender); (b) *gender typicality* (perceived similarity to others of one's gender); (c) *gender contentedness* (satisfaction with one's gender assignment); (d) *felt pressure* for *gender conformity* (pressure felt from parents, peers, and the self for conforming to gender stereotypes); and (e) *intergroup bias* (the belief that one's own sex is superior to the other). Corby, Hodges and Perry (2007) extend this model by incorporating an ethnicity component, arguing that Egan et al's (2001) model has limited applicability to Black and Hispanic individuals. Corby et al (2007) attempt to account for variations between groups through the incorporation of an additional cognitive construct in which "conceptions of gender identities and conceptions of gender roles become two interacting components of a causal cognitive system, with the effects of gender identity on adjustment moderated by the specific content (and adaptivity) of individual conceptions of gender roles" (p.265). They suggest that these gender roles and constructs are influenced by culture and environment, thus the cognitive construct might allude to individuals' conceptions of the attributes that are important for person of each sex to possess based on the knowledge they attain from external cultural resources.

A majority of gender identity models (Egan et al, 2001; Corby et al, 2007; Ashmore, 1990; Spence, 1995) acknowledge the influence of wider community attitudes on gender identity formation. In western society for instance, historical evidence shows that men and women are not perceived to be equal (Kacak, 1992). Kacak (1992) points out that men and women in western society are defined by particular roles that reinforce their inequality in society. These roles and behaviours define 'masculinity' as superior to 'femininity'. As a result, although women are not defined as a minority in numerical form, they are often assumed to be the

sexual minority (Greene, 2000a). Phoenix (1998) posits that these stereotypes usually have political implications and can provide a window to how different groups are perceived in society. She suggests that women are stereotyped as being the complementary opposite of men. They are supposed to be "nurturing, passive, weak, and non-competitive, while men are supposed to be aggressive, active, powerful and competitive - qualities which have frequently been used to justify male dominance of society" (p.63). She further suggests that it is possible that this is the perception that boys and girls develop on the process of becoming gendered (Phoenix, 1998).

Although sexism affects all women, Black women are faced with the added hindrance of racism while constructing their gender identity, which in turn consolidates their minority status in society. This challenge is best exemplified by Black feminist, Bell Hooks (1989), who states that "as far back as slavery, there has been an established social hierarchy based on race and sex that ranked white men first, white women second, black men third and black women last….most Americans, and that includes Black people, acknowledge and accept the hierarchy; they have internalised it either consciously or unconsciously" (p.58). Carby (1998) echoes this sentiment in her suggestion that gender construction in Black women differs from constructions of White femininity because it is also subject to racism. As a result, the construction of a Black female identity is said to be subject to 'double jeopardy'; the notion that Black women are oppressed at a double level as a result of the complexity of their black and female identities. This is a concept that is unique to Black women, and indeed other women of a racial minority status. Beale (1970) wrote that, "As Blacks they suffer all the burdens of prejudice and mistreatment that fall on anyone with dark skin, as women they bear the additional burden of having to cope with White and Black men" (p.13). This type of oppression was present even during slavery and colonisation when Black women were subjected to similar workloads and punishments of Black men, but were also subject to forms

of subjugation only applicable to women (King, 1988). King (1988) points out that "the institutionalised exploitation as the concubines, mistresses, and sexual slaves of White males distinguished Black women's experience from that of White females' sexual oppression because it could only have existed in relation to racist and classist forms of domination" (King, 1988, p. 47).

Another contributing factor to sexism and the oppression of Black women has been the stereotypes perpetuated during the era of slavery. Bush (2000) provides an extensive summary of these stereotypes and how they have led to the perpetuation of certain attributes associated with Black women. She goes on to illustrate how these stereotypes serve to dissipate the influence of the African and Caribbean cultural roots of Black women. Her central argument is that stereotypes of Black women were highly gendered and clustered around contradictory representations, particularly the 'Sable Venus', 'She Devil' and passive 'Drudge' (Bush, 2000). Bush describes the 'Sable Venus' as a representation of male erotic fantasies, and also alludes to the widespread practice of concubinage and sexual exploitation of Black women. The 'drudge' was the backbone of the slave labour force, who bore the dual burden of work and childbearing and was subjected to a dual oppression. The 'She Devil' depicts Black females against 'slave labour' and the term also illustrates the ways in which changes and developments in stereotypes reflect the anxieties of powerful groups. Bush (2000) suggests that whilst White representations of Black women have changed over time, "a core of negative stereotyping remained, especially around Black female sexuality and Black women's 'drudge' status, still adversely impacts upon contemporary Black women's identities" (p.781). Bush (2000) further suggests that although Black female identities have been adversely affected by stereotypes and sexism, a majority of women of African and Caribbean descent also develop self-identities framed in African and Caribbean derived cultural values.

Black cultural influences in the construction of the female identity

As well as from their wider society, individuals internalise conceptions of masculinity and femininity from their cultures, so it follows that characteristics considered to be masculine or feminine depend on one's race or culture (Pettigrew, 1964; Wade, 1996). Studies of Black British female and African American female identities (Collins, 2000; Bush, 2000; Wade, 1996; Oliver & Shapiro, 1997) acknowledge that Black women's definitions of womanhood have expanded beyond traditional notions of femininity to include hard work, perseverance, self-reliance, tenacity, resistance, and sexual equality (Collins, 1991, 2000). As such, Black girls have been socialised with both traditional gender roles (e.g., carer and nurturer) and non-traditional gender ones (e.g., worker, financial provider) (Ward, 1996).

In Black British culture, the influence of an African and Caribbean background also has an effect on the construction of Black female identities. Cutrafelli (1983) suggests that Black British female identity can be affected by the concept of motherhood and the deeper structures of family and kinship which held African societies together. Even though a cultural and linguistic diversity exists between Africans and Caribbean people, certain core cultural values relating to kinship, religion and gender roles remain as major influences on female identities. Some of these values include strength and tenacity (Hooks 1989). Hooks (1989) states that these Afro-centric ideals stem from African culture where women are regarded as the backbone of the community; whilst Black men are often professed to be the head of the family unit and the strong resilient provider, it is the Black woman who facilitates these ideals. Bush (2000) also alludes to this representation of strength as a feminine value in African and Caribbean cultures and the influence it has on Black British female identity. She also recounts tales from the slavery era which highlight women's "strength and muscularity and the way they competed with men in enduring toil, hardship and privations" (Bush, 2000, p.767).

Historically, the concept of motherhood has been of central importance in the philosophies of people of African and Caribbean descent, particularly because it is seen to be a partial definition of what a Black woman should be (Forna, 2000). Black British female identity is informed by the reverence which is accorded to motherhood. Black communities reflect the strong family ties which invoke both the nuclear and extended family, and as such, high emphasis is placed on family, marriage and procreation (Forna, 2000). Collins (2000) suggests that motherhood in the Black community is seen as an experience where Black women can "learn the power of self definition as a woman, the importance of value and respect and the necessity of self reliance and independence and the belief in a Black woman's empowerment…it provides a basis for self actualisation " (p. 200).

The development of a Black female identity is couched in historical legacies, cultural values, cultural definitions and gender roles and impacted by the interaction of racism and sexism in the British community (Greene, 2000). Much like the development of a racial identity, it also precedes the development of a Lesbian identity (Crawford, 2002). For Black British Lesbians, the interaction of a Black female identity is intrinsic to the development of a Lesbian identity as the development of a Lesbian identity may be influenced by both racial and gender components and the underlying characteristics of these two identities (Collins, 2000). The development of a sexual identity inevitably causes the interaction with the already positioned and perhaps more established components of the identity structure (Breakwell, 2001).

Lesbian Identity

General models of sexual identity development

Diamond (2008) suggests lesbian/gay sexual identity development can be conventionally defined as "the process by which sexual minority (i.e.) non-heterosexual individuals come to acknowledge and accept their same sex sexual orientation and to develop a positive interaction between their non-heterosexual identity and other aspects of selfhood" (p.279).

Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin (1948) have been widely cited as some of the first to recognise that sexual orientation varies along a continuum, with relatively few people falling on either side of it. These ideas highlighted the presence of fluidity in the development of a sexual orientation. With regards to sexual identity, Kinsey et al (1948) seemingly highlighted the notion that a variety of factors could be seen to have an effect on the ever-changing nature of sexual orientation, most notably, the culture and environment in which they are raised. He suggested that an individual's sexual identity history is not an all or one proposition, and indeed, just as the living world is a continuum in each of its aspects, so it the concept of sexual identity (Kinsey et al 1948).

Early models of sexual identity seemed to discard this notion of fluidity, with several linear models emerging to explain the process of sexual identity development. Models proposed by Cass (1979) and Troiden (1989) suggested linear stages for identity development with the individual eventually assimilating a healthy sexual identity marked by their ability to disclose or come out. Although they served as the basis for future research in this area, they could be said to be problematic and limited in their ability to aptly describe the sexual identity process for both men and women, and for individuals of varied cultural and social

backgrounds. Most of the data from which these models were derived were based on predominantly male subject pools. Applications of these models to women have been argued to show them to be outside of normal patterns and seemingly behind in their identity development transitions. Diamond (2000) and Miller and Schoknick (2000) suggest that these models were also "inexorable linear development trajectories" (p.472) which began with individuals in a confused state, progressing towards healthy ego integration. Furthermore, the lack of acknowledgement for the other roles and influential external and internal factors (culture, race community, relationships) play in sexual identity development could be said to limit it's applicability to persons of different cultural descents and genders, particularly Black Lesbians (Green, 2004). These models also seem to suggest that disclosure equals an absolute adoption of a Gay/Lesbian identity; it could be suggested that this does not account for individuals who may not disclose their identity, or even see their sexual identity as paramount in comparison to their other identity components.

Subsequent models/theories/ research of sexual identity development seem to be more reflective of the processes individual experience in their journey of sexual identity development(e.g. Kitzinger, 1996; Peele, 2002; Diamond, 2003; Greene, 2004; Butler, 2007). These ideas could be seen to have more emphasis on variation, fluidity, difference and the influences of external factors and is a modern extension of the ideas of Kinsey et al (1948).

Theorists such as Plummer (1995), Weeks (1998) and Langdridge & Butt (2004) explore the idea of fluidity in sexuality, with Plummer (1995) in particular arguing that by stepping away from traditionalised, linear models of sexual identity development, ongoing narratives from individuals of a sexual minority become necessary. He suggests the emergence of new sexual stories - which encompass difference, fluidity and the factors which interact with sexual identity - brings with it a new attitude to the those who identify as gay or lesbian, who

would have previously been referred to as the 'other' and who would previously have been assimilated, ostracized, or placed within the confines of limited theoretical models. Plummer's (1995) ideas were further echoed by Weeks (1998) who also advocates the development of narrative sexual stories in order to allow for the emergence of the emergence of new sexual subjectivities. These new approaches allow for sense to be made of past, present and future living. Identities in this cultural context are understood as stories, or discourses, which both allow for sexual expression and exploration of the differences in sexual identity development (Landrgidge, 2009). However, whilst both views are important in highlighting the complexity and fluidity pertaining to sexual identity development, there again seems to be an absence with regards to the explicit applicability of these theories to the experiences of Black gay men and lesbian women, and more explicitly Black British lesbians.

Other theorists have also adopted the premise of fluidity but have instead developed ideas around sexual identity development which specifically relate to women. An example of one of these is a model by McCarn and Fassinger which focuses specifically on lesbian identity development. According to McCarn and Fassinger's model (1996), social contexts and relationships have an effect on lesbian identity development and propose four phases (awareness, exploration, deepening/commitment, and internalisation/synthesis) in order to "conceptualise the process as continuous and circular; every new relationship raises new issues about individual sexuality, and every new context requires renewed awareness of group oppression" (p. 522). They also hypothesise two branches to their theory, suggesting that the phases can describe an individual's internal journey towards sexual identity consolidation and/or describe a process of adopting group membership. Although their approach may be deemed to be moving away from stage theories and sheds some useful light on the journeys that lesbian women may travel, it could be suggested that that the 'phases' stem from similar

ideas of individuals needing to experience certain stages in order to adopt a 'healthy' sexual identity. Even so, it is the acknowledgement of the effect that external factors and other identity components have on the sexual identity process which may allow their theory to be slightly more applicable to Black lesbians.

Further exploring these ideas, and steering away from stage conceptions, research by Peplau and Garnets (2000) suggest that the concept of sexual fluidity is "the cornerstone of a new paradigm for understanding women's sexualities" (p. 333). They identify three predictions concerning the fluidity of sexual identity, the first of which is the influence of the social environment. This predication suggests that sexual fluidity can be shaped by a myriad of social and situational influences. The second, 'within person variation', suggests that a woman may change aspects of her sexual identity or sexual orientation across her life span. The final prediction is attitude behaviour consistency and refers to the consistency within an individual's sexual attitudes, desires and behaviours. In line with these ideas is the research conducted by Kitzinger (1996, 2001) who in employing a sexual constructionist approach suggests that a lesbian identity does not fit into an essentialist approach (which suggests that a lesbian identity is a fixed early on in life and persist immutable to change or influence from other factors). Neither should it be seen as a 'sick' or 'abnormal' opposite of heterosexuality which requires the individual to reach a stage of acceptance or disclosure in order for their sexuality to be deemed normal. She instead suggests that one of the ways of acknowledging the fluidity of a lesbian identity is by taking account of the ways in which women construct and interpret their changing identities in relation to their construction of the term 'lesbian'. In so doing, this is a way of accounting for the various individuals who exist under the umbrella of a lesbian identity whose experiences were seemingly ignored or discounted in earlier models of sexual identity.

For Black British lesbians, this may include interpreting their gender and racial identities in the light of a developing sexual identity.

Sexual identity development: Black British Lesbians and Multiple identities.

Given the vast amount of research and theory which exists in the field of sexual identity development as demonstrated in the previous section, it is surprising that more research and thinking has not been applied to the experiences of Black lesbians. It can be suggested, on review of past research, that the influence of social interaction, social environment and cultures underlie the concept of fluidity in identity formation, and more specifically, sexual identity development (Breakwell, 2001; Greene, 2004). Current theories of lesbian identity have placed more emphasis on the ways in which sexual identity, especially in transition, can interact with other components of the identity structure, albeit successfully or unsuccessfully. In the case of Black British lesbians, components of race, sexual and gender identities could be said to interact in different ways to form a personal identity. However, each of these identities are fluid within themselves, and at any point, the prominence of one or another identity may take precedence or conflict with one of the other identities. This is especially true in the case of race, gender and sexual orientation as they are overlapping identities which are heavily influenced by external factors such culture, family and the environment (Greene, 2000).

It has been suggested that the negotiation of multiple identities is characteristic of the struggle that Black lesbians face (Greene, 2000; Bowleg et al 2003). The ability or inability of a Black lesbian to successfully negotiate intersecting identities of race, gender and sexual orientation is dependent on culture (often a component of racial identity), the perception of

gender identity in the Black community (which is directly influenced by gender roles), the perception of gender identity in wider community as a whole (which often incurs experiences of sexism) and the attitudes that both the wider community and the Black community

Furthermore, Hill (2006) argues that for Black lesbians who constantly face conflicting cultures, there is a constant negotiation where the self may struggle to project a consolidated personal identity when ostracised by the conflicting communities. The lesbian identity may be marginalised within the ethnic and wider community, the racial identity may be marginalised by the gay and lesbian community and the wider community, and gender identity may be marginalised within the wider society. Hill (2006) suggests that this struggle may influence and hinder the sexual identity development of Black lesbians.

The role of racial identity is particularly relevant in the journey of sexual identity development for many Black lesbians as they have a strong tie to their cultural heritage and "generally view their racial identity as primary" (Greene, 1997 p. 245). This is evidenced in one study by Jones and McEwan (2000). Subjects were asked to identify the salience of particular identity components in their core identity structure. They found that race was a particularly defining component for Black women in comparison to White women who were more likely to regard gender as a more defining factor. In developing a racial identity, Black lesbians are given essential information about positive attributes which are associated with being a Black person which are often associated with culture, history, and gender roles. The formation of a lesbian identity is seen to be a violation and rejection of the Black identity and community because of the attitudes and ideas which may be held about homosexuality within this black community. According to research which has been conducted in this area, some of these expressed views include the ideas that homosexuality is a violation of religious beliefs; an adoption of wider community ideals and unnatural (Greene, 2004; Lociano, 1989; Stokes

and Peterson, 2004). Studies conducted by Greene (2000) and Bowleg Craig and Burkholder (2004) found that the issue of race is amplified when Black lesbians are confronted with the pressure of remaining in the Black community which shares experience of racism and Black pride. They must often make a choice to conceal their sexuality, or be open about it and face possible rejection by the community with which they most identify (Greene, 2000). Whilst Black families and the Black community may teach individuals to negotiate racial and sexual barriers, and aid in the development of a racial and gender identity, they may be unable to teach individuals to navigate the assimilation of a lesbian identity or how to deal with homophobia (Greene, 2004). Whilst it could be said that this struggle may be applicable to lesbians of any race, Black lesbians may have a unique challenge due to the complexity and the prominent influence of environment and culture on the development of their self identities. As such, many Black lesbians may seek validation or for the development of a lesbian identity outside of the familial or community system, which in itself is costly when there is no one outside of their families to turn to, something that is quite common for Black lesbians (Greene, 2004; Hill, 2006). Greene (2004) suggests that outside of the Black community, Black lesbians may have to grapple with racism in the gay community from which they may also seek acceptance, and may also feel misunderstood by community outlets or other professionals who may not have knowledge of their unique experiences.

Several researchers (e.g. Greene, 2000; Collins, 2000) have also cited incompatibility with cultural gender roles as one of the contributing factors to difficulties with sexual identity development for Black lesbians. Wall and Washington (1991) suggest that "lesbians in particular, often find acceptance difficult, because lesbianism is largely incompatible with female role expectations based on traditional African American values" (Wall & Washington, 1991, p.288). It seems reasonable that this premise could also apply to Black British lesbians who are socialised in the Black community and therefore learn and adopt certain gender roles

and norms (Bush, 2000). As discussed earlier, Black culture, regardless of the differences between African and Caribbean communities, places particular emphasis on family, marriage and motherhood / procreation. Motherhood, in particular, has held importance in the Black community and generally for women for centuries. Often in the Black community, a lesbian identity is seen as a contradiction of the cultural norms. It is seen as a threat to the continuation of the culture and as a violation of the very important concept of motherhood which is seen as a central tenet to the definition of a Black woman (Hooks, 1989).

As Black women, Black British lesbians could be said to be oppressed on account of their gender status because of sexism in the wider society and their own communities. This factor also has an effect on their sexual identity development by making it difficult to disclose a lesbian identity. This is because a facade of heterosexuality may afford Black lesbians some sense of control and normalcy in the face of the racism and sexism they experience. Hill (2006) suggests that the maintenance of a heterosexual identity provides a slightly higher status within the wider society and Black culture than that of being a lesbian. This is echoed by Greene (1994) who suggests that Black lesbians "have been found to be more likely than White lesbians to maintain strong involvements with their families, to have children, and to depend to a greater extent on family members… for support" (p.225). By this, Greene (1994) is referring to the need for some Black lesbians to 'pass' as heterosexual in order to maintain ties to their families and communities. As a result, the perceived repercussions of multiple oppressions may encourage concealment of a lesbian identity among Black lesbians who want to maintain this type of support, and a sense of inclusion. Greene's (2004) suggestion is further shared in research by Ferguson (1995) who surveyed 161 Black lesbians and found that 67 percent of the group reported being in a committed relationship with a man at some point in their lives, while 39 percent reported having children. Ferguson (1995) suggested that engagement in heterosexual relationships and adherence to gender roles may allow Black lesbians "to perceive

a sense of belonging and acceptance within their racial community, rather than being isolated because of their sexual orientation" (Ferguson, 1995, p. 288). This research seems to reflect findings by Peplau and Garnets (2000) whose participants (White lesbians) also reported engagement with heterosexual relationships prior to the embracement of a lesbian identity. It is unknown whether this is more prevalent in either race; perhaps this is due in part to the paucity of research for Black British lesbians.

Although research in this area may be sparse, reports of heightened homophobia against Black gay men and women are present in mainstream press, and may be an identifiable factor which may influence the negotiation of a sexual identity in the Black community. Homophobia is the "illogical fear, hatred, and intolerance of people who are gay, lesbian or bisexual" (Craig, 2002, p. 40). Documented studies (e.g. Harris, 2004) and research (e.g. Herek and Capitanio, 1995; Ward, 2005; Fenton et al 1999) suggest that there are substantial negative attitudes towards homosexuality, particularly within Black communities. These attitudes seem to be largely based on cultural and racial expectations, religious objections and historical community attitudes. There appears to be a direct contrast between feelings toward Black identity and culture (which are positive) and negative feelings toward homosexuality within the Black community. Qualitative research carried out in the United Kingdom by Fenton et al (1999) found that there were significant negative attitudes towards homosexuality particularly among Jamaican communities. However this research also found that negative attitudes were less evident amongst second and third generation immigrants and those who had increased interaction with the majority culture. This suggests that negative attitudes to homosexuality may be more prevalent amongst older generations in the Black British community.

Further research by Herek and Capitanio (1995) and Greene (1997) found that individuals within Black communities tend to view homosexuality as wrong, unnatural and sinful. These

views seemed to have developed from messages they had received about homosexuality while growing up. Caitlin (2001) suggests that whilst individuals of the Black community regularly promote positive Black values, they are also likely to discourage ideas or actions which do not support these values. She suggests "while racial stereotypes are refrained by the family and ethnic community, negative cultural perceptions of homosexuality are reinforced" (Caitlin, 2000, p.6).

Research (e.g. Greene, 2004; Bridges, Selvige and Matthews, 2003) also suggests that there may be several underlying factors which have contributed to the development and sustained presence of these negative attitudes which include strict gender roles and views of sexuality. As discussed previously, there may be a belief that individuals who do not adhere to gender roles are weakening the Black community and violating cultural norms (Greene, 2004; Bridges, Selvige and Matthews, 2003). Another perpetuating factor of homophobic attitudes is the presence of the Black Church (e.g. Crishlow, 2004; Woodyard, Peterson and Stokes, 2000). Ward (2005) defines the Black Church "as the central, oldest and most influential institution in the black community" (p.494). He further suggests that the Black Church has been the "organisational and cultural matrix from which many Black social institutions and forms of artistic expression emerged and have been sustained over the past 250 years" (p.494).

The Church holds central importance in Black British cultures and is clear in its message on homosexuality (Icard, 1986). These messages seemingly promote a negative view of homosexuality that stems from certain passages within the Bible which condemn homosexuality, such as Leviticus 18:22: "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination" (King James Version). Whilst this quotation cannot necessarily be seen to be an exclusive evidence of religious condemnation of sexuality, the Black Church quote from

this passage in defending their stance on homosexuality. Since the Church is often seen as a point of reference and guidance for many individuals in the Black community, this may contribute to the perception of homophobia amongst Black individuals (Stokes and Peterson, 1998). This premise is supported by a study (Lemelle and Battle, 2004), which found that the attitudes of Black men are likely to be shaped by the repeated, impassioned Church-inspired homophobic messages. Furthermore, regular Church attendance was significantly associated with homophobic attitudes toward gay males amongst heterosexual individuals. The church historically plays a huge role in the Black community, and "selective scriptures are used to reinforce homophobic attitudes" (Greene, 1994, p.246).

Multiple identity negotiation: Psychological Functioning

Although limited, there has been some empirical research which has focused on the issues surrounding Black lesbians and gay men, a lot of which has targeted the psychological functioning of the individuals in this population. Mays and Cochran (1988) pointed out that African-American lesbians were at greater risk for experiencing tension and loneliness but were less likely to seek professional help. In a national review of mid-life development, lesbians were twice as likely as heterosexual women to demonstrate major symptoms of depression (Cochran, Sullivan and Mays, 2003). Additionally, Cochran (2001) concluded in a research review that, compared to Black heterosexual women, Black lesbians show significantly higher rates of anxiety, major depression, and substance abuse problems. There is also evidence of increased psychiatric morbidity among Black lesbians (Cochran & Mays, 1994). In a study examining multiple minority stress and reports of suicidal thoughts, depression and self esteem, Consolacion, Russell and Su (2004) demonstrated that African American and Hispanic female youth reported more suicidal thoughts, higher levels of

depression and lower self esteem than male counterparts in the same racial/ethnic group. These and other studies (Cochran & Mays, 1988; Mays, Cochran, & Rhue, 1993) suggest that Black lesbians may be more vulnerable to developing psychological problems.

Research conducted by Parks, Hughes and Matthews (2004) examined the effect of race and ethnicity on sexual identity development in African American, Latina and White lesbians. Their sample consisted of 450 participants, with findings indicating that African American and Latina respondents did not significantly differ in their disclosure of their lesbian identities. On the other hand there was substantial variation between women of colour and White women. Generally, women of colour began to question their sexual orientation at a much younger age, had a slower process of realisation of their lesbian status and eventually disclosed their identity more quickly than White women. They were also less likely to disclose their sexual identity to non-familial groups. They attribute these differences to cultural expectations of silence within racial communities and difficulties with bicultural competency and lack of anticipated support from their own communities.

In another comparative study, Rosario, Scrimshaw and Hunter (2004) conducted a longitudinal study which examined racial differences in the disclosure process amongst 145 lesbian, gay and bisexual youth from three racial/ethnic backgrounds: Black, Latino and White. Using a sexual risk behaviour assessment the researchers compared the sexual identity formation, current sexual orientation and social involvement in gay-related activities of the participants (Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2004). Findings in this study indicated that there were no significant differences in sexual development milestones, sexual orientation, sexual behaviour and sexual identity. However, Black youth reported limited involvement in gay-related activities, reported less comfort with others knowing about their sexuality and disclosed their identity to a smaller number of people than White youths. Rosario et al (2004) attribute

these findings to the perceived risk that Black youth may face regarding disclosure to their families, and the racism they may experience in the gay and lesbian community. Their findings also indicated that Black youths initially endorsed fewer positive attitudes towards homosexuality, which may indicate inherent internalised homophobia. However, examination of these attitudes over time revealed a growth in positive attitudes which may indicate an ability to resolve negative attitudes through increased comfort with their sexuality and increased involvement in gay and lesbian organisations (Rosario et al 2004). They concluded that whilst culture has a significant influence on sexual identity development, it does not impede identity formation, but instead may delay identity integration.

A criticism of these studies is the issue of multiple identity negotiation being overlooked in favour of examining the development and negotiation of dual identities (such as race and sexuality). One could suggest that this could lead to the omission of the varied experiences of Black lesbians by instead repeatedly focusing on race and sexuality, and does not account for other identity components e.g. gender, class which may play a significant role in the sexual identity process.

Fewer studies have addressed multiple identity formation and negotiation, but those studies which have done have helped to identify the possible factors which affect this experience and some of the management strategies that may be employed by individuals who experience it (e.g. see Cochran and Mays, 1998; Bowleg, Craig and Burkholder, 2004; Greene, 2004; Bowleg, Brooks, Huang, Black and Burkholder, 2004; Gibson, Schossler and Brook-Murray, 2007; Selvidge, Matthews and Bridges, 2008).

Bowleg, Brooks, Huang, Black and Burkholder (2003) explored the experiences of multiple minority negotiation and resilience amongst 19 African American lesbians. The researchers found that racism was a significant trigger for multiple minority stress, as was

sexism and heterosexism. Their findings provide empirical support for the triple jeopardy experience of Black lesbians. Participants in their study were able to demonstrate levels of resilience despite their multiple identity negotiation and their triple minority status, and may have developed such resilience because of their unique resiliencies and resources honed from earlier experiences of oppression (such as racism and sexism). Participants cited family, the Black community, involvement in the gay and lesbian community and internal characteristics (e.g. self esteem, happiness, humour) as some of the resilience resources they employed to overcome identity conflict. The participant pool in this study comprised of Black lesbians who were not randomly selected, but instead were self-selected at a Black lesbian women's retreat. It could be suggested that these participants may have been active in their coping and resilience mechanisms considering their attendance at a retreat which promoted a celebration of Black lesbian identity. Additionally, the researchers also described their participants as "affluent, highly educated and middle class" (p.237) which may also have had an effect on their coping skills. Limited generalisation notwithstanding, the study was also important in addressing the notion of homogeneity of experience amongst Black lesbians as their findings suggest that in spite of minority stress, the participants were able to exist as Black lesbians and utilise resources to address identity conflict and minority stress.

A qualitative study by Gibson, Schossler and Brook-Murray (2007) investigated the identity management strategies of 16 African American lesbians of African origin within their families of origin. Participants' responses enabled themes related to the coming-out experiences, familial support patterns, and the integration and management of lesbian identities within African-ancestral families to be examined. Participants generally reported positive feelings and attitudes about themselves and their lesbian identities. They also reported varied levels of distress during the coming out process, but reported that several management techniques, including support from family, management of relationships with families of origin

and religion or spirituality, were used as a means of managing identity conflict more effectively. The researchers discuss the implications of their findings for counselling psychology, and stress the need for practitioners to be aware of the issues affecting lesbians of colour since they are less likely to seek psychological help (Cochran and Mays, 1994). They also suggest that practitioners might benefit from an increased awareness of the coming-out experiences, coping strategies, and support systems for African-ancestral lesbians.

Models by Reynolds and Pope (1991) and Jones and McEwan (2000) have attempted to illustrate the difficulty that may be faced by individuals having to negotiate multiple identities. They suggest that individuals who have to negotiate multiple identities may identify with one aspect of themselves passively or fragment the different aspects of their self identity. Alternatively, they may identify with all aspects of themselves by integrating all identities into their sense of self. These models are important in demonstrating the ongoing construction of identities of individuals and the influence of changing contexts on the experience of identity development.

Breakwell's (1993, 2001) model of threatened identity and identity process theory, explored earlier may be both useful and important as a theoretical tool for illustrating individuals' attempts to negotiate multiple identities. As identity is fluid, movement of an individual to different contexts, time periods may cause pressure to for change in identity. She suggests that in its negative form, this can be seen as a threat to identity. If there is a threat to any one of the identity components, it could possibly affect other relative aspects of the individual's identity and the fluidity of identity. In the form of Breakwell's (2001) Identity Process Model, identity threat occurs when "the processes of assimilation – accommodation are unstable and are unable for some reason to comply with the principles of continuity, distinctiveness, self efficacy and self esteem" (p.346). In the case of Black lesbians, the

component of sexuality which needs to be assimilated into the identity structure is likely to be incompatible with the pre-existing components of identity (i.e. race and gender) and this may in turn pose a threat to the individual's self perception. When an individual experiences this threat, she may adopt strategies will move her into a social position which is less threatening, or adopt strategies to revise identity structure in accordance with the principals which guide the identity framework.

Unfortunately, the issue of negotiating multiple identities as a Black British lesbian is one that has not been widely addressed in psychological literature. Although there have been some empirical studies that have examined the issues surrounding the experiences of Black lesbians (e.g. Greene, 2000; Bowleg, Craig and Burkholder, 2004; Selvidge et al, 2008; Sukiyami et al 2009), the participants in these studies have been of African-American descent. There is a scarcity of studies which concentrate solely on the experiences of Black British lesbians in negotiating racial, sexual and gender identities. In an attempt to fill this void in the psychological literature regarding the experiences of Black British lesbians, this research attempted to address this imbalance. This is particularly relevant to the Counselling Psychology field, as research has shown that there is an increased level of depression in ethnic minority lesbians because of the 'triple oppression' that they experience and the difficulty they face in negotiating multiple identities (Greene, 1994) It is also possible that those women may present themselves in a therapeutic setting. Often, Black lesbians have chosen not to seek help for fear of discrimination or lack of understanding from health care providers (Bridges et al, 2003). It is important that practitioners are aware of these issues in order to seek the best method of exploration and treatment with clients. This research aims to address this imbalance by exploring the experiences of Black British lesbians in negotiating racial, gender and sexual identities. African American individuals and Black British individuals are not a homogenous group, and as such, it is possible that the way Black British Lesbians construct their sexual

identities may differ from of African American lesbians. This could be due to cultural differentiation, the variation in location and community, and the degree to which issues related to sexual orientation are explored in the British community. This research aims to explore the way in which Black British lesbians constructed their sexual identities within a British context and the experience of identity negotiation if this was relevant to their experience. It also aims to explore the phenomenon of identity conflict and its relevance for Black British lesbians.

Methodology

Why A Qualitative Method?

The research approach employed in this study was qualitative, based on the premise that "the aim of qualitative research is to understand and represent the experiences and actions of people as they encounter, engage, and live through situations "(Elliot, Fischer and Rennie, 1999, p.216). In light of the paucity of research on Black British lesbians, the researcher believed that a qualitative approach would provide an effective and informative method for exploring the experiences and identity negotiation strategies of these women without hindering their responses. Qualitative research attempts to develop an understanding of a particular phenomenon based on lived experiences and from the perspective of those being studied. The central purpose of qualitative research is to contribute to a process of revision and enrichment of understanding, rather than to verify earlier conclusions or theory (Thorne, Kirkham and O'Flynn-Magee, 2004).

As noted by many scholars of qualitative approaches, such methodologies are well suited to the investigation of unexplored phenomenon (Hill, Thompson, &Williams, 1997; Hill et al., 2005; Ponterotto, 2005). Qualitative research can complement quantitative studies by shedding light on unexplored areas and add richness to a study. It appears that certain research topics lend themselves to the qualitative approach because of the need to develop new perspectives within areas that are not easily identifiable or are as yet undefined. Additionally, when theories are not yet available to explain phenomena, qualitative designs are available to assist the theory-building process (Morrow, 2007). When a process or phenomenon is unknown or misunderstood, qualitative research may bring innovative or unexpected

knowledge to the fore (Creswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Black British lesbians are poorly represented within psychological literature, which is surprising given the rich nature of their identities and experiences which may sometimes trigger psychological implications and identity conflict (Greene, 2004). A qualitative approach gives a voice to this underrepresented population by utilising their lived experiences and discourse gain an increased understanding about the challenges they face, the way in which they exist and the positive ways in which they embrace their multiple identities. Quantitative methods in this area have been instrumental in enabling a broad understanding of issues related to Black Lesbians, in that they are "able to delve into complex processes and illustrate the multifaceted nature of human phenomena"(Morrow, 2007 p.212). Additionally, qualitative inquiry is congruent with the narrative perspectives of therapeutic work, and can be used to facilitate interventions which may be prevalent in therapy (Hoshmand, 1989). This is particularly important as one of the aims of this piece of research is to inform the counselling psychology field of a population which are underrepresented in the psychological literature. For this piece of research, the researcher chose to use a qualitative method-interpretative phenomenological analysis-- which would allow an in-depth exploration of the experiences of an underrepresented group. It was hoped that this approach, which uses words as data, would lend itself to rich narratives which cannot be obtained through quantitative methodologies.

Why IPA?

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) has been used to analyse qualitative data on a range of health and well being topics (Dunne & Quayle, 2001; Eatough and Smith, 2006b; Timotijevic & Breakwell, 2001; Coyle & Rafalin, 2000; Smith, 1999). IPA was deemed an appropriate method of analysis as it can be considered to be "particularly suitable where one

is interested in complexity or process or where an issue is personal and is able to contribute to understanding an area of interest through a deeper, more personal, individualised analysis" (Kay & Kingston, 2002, p. 171). Other methods of inquiry were considered in the adoption of a qualitative method (e.g. Grounded Theory) but these were abandoned in favour of an IPA which seemed to fit more with the epistemological stance of the researcher and would be most beneficial in attaining the information needed to explore this topic. The choice to adopt IPA and an explanation of its theoretical underpinnings will be explored in the subsequent sections.

What is IPA?

IPA is a research method which aims to gain an understanding of how individuals view, experience and make sense of their personal and social worlds. The object of the analysis is to obtain an insight into another person's thoughts and beliefs in relation to the phenomenon under investigation (Chapman & Smith, 2002; Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). It is interested in participants' subjective experiences of the world and recognises that individuals can experience the same objective condition in very different ways because these experiences are mediated by individual thoughts, beliefs, expectations and judgements that the individual brings to it. IPA acknowledges that a researcher's understanding of participants' thoughts is necessarily influenced by his or her own ways of thinking, assumptions and conceptions. However, "these are not seen as biases to be eliminated; instead they are seen as necessary precondition for making sense of another person's experience" (Willig 2008, p.69). The term 'Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis' is therefore used to signal the dual facets of the approach (Smith et al., 1997) and the joint reflections of both participant and researcher form the analytic account produced (Osborne & Smith, 1998; Smith et al, 1997). The knowledge it

produces is reflexive in so much as it acknowledges its dependence on the researcher's own standpoint, and therefore requires a high degree of self-reflexivity (Willig, 2008). Finlay (2002) suggests reflexivity can be a valuable tool in IPA research as it can examine "the impact, position and perspective and presence of the researcher and "promote rich insight by examining personal responses" (Finlay, 2002 p. 532). Finlay (2002) also suggests that another advantage of reflexivity in qualitative research is that it can be used as a tool to evaluate the research process, method and outcomes.

Intellectual origins of IPA

Smith (2008) suggests that IPA has its theoretical underpinnings in phenomenology and hermeneutics. Largely attributed to the work of Husserl (1931), phenomenology is interested in the world "as it is experienced by human beings within particular contexts and at particular times rather than in abstract statements about the nature of the world in general" (Willig, 2008, p.52). Hurssel (1931) attempted to conceptualise a process with which to capture the epitome of things; by bracketing what we as individuals think we already know about them. In essence, a phenomenological perspective suggests that we are not separate from our experiences, all subjects and objects present themselves to the individual as something. Furthermore, an individual can have different perceptions of the same thing or event, by the same token, an individual can perceive a particular thing in a variety of ways (Willig, 2008). Hurssel's (1931) transcendental phenomenology was criticised by subsequent phenomenologists who felt it was unrealistic in nature and difficult to achieve. Giorgi et al (2003) suggest Hurssel articulated a philosophical phenomenological method which at the level of scientific practice might be hard to follow. This is due to the fact that the research would result in a philosophical analysis rather than a psychological one, which might therefore suggest analysis from a non-human

perspective. A non-human perspective does not posit a "real existing subjectivity at the source of its acts" (Giorgi et al, 2003, p. 171) and would not fully encompass or relay the individual experiences explored in the research. Other phenomenological thinkers (e.g. Merlau-Ponty, 1962; Giorgi, 1997, Heidegger, 2004) went on to explore and emphasise different aspects of phenomenological theory, and developed analytical research perspectives based on ideas from phenomenology. IPA, however, partially draws on the work of Martin Heidegger (2004). As a student of Husserl's (1931), Heidegger (2004) adopted an ontological approach to reinterpreting the phenomenological method. He argued that the phenomenological method was interpretative, and its descriptive component is a special type of interpretation. He advocated an interpretative methodology which converges with the tradition of hermeneutics -- thus placing an emphasis on what he called '*dasein*' (loosely translated to mean 'being there'). *Dasien* "is the place where the question of *being* arises, its task is to interpret the meaning of being" (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2003).

Hermeneutics is related to the theories of interpretation and 'symbolic interactionism' which suggests that "human beings are not passive perceivers of an objective reality, but rather that they come to interpret and understand their world by formulating their own biographical stories into a form that makes sense to them" (Broki and Wearden, 2004, p.88). Heidegger (2004) suggests that the very nature of being in the world is hermeneutic. Our relationship with the world is a hermeneutic one which exists in a hermeneutic circle; this circle opens up the possibilities for new understandings in self interpretation. Heidegger (2004) therefore de-emphasized consciousness which is an essential part of Husserlian phenomenology (1931) in favour of focusing on the question of being.

In adopting the ideas of both Husserl (1931) and Heidegger (2004), IPA attends to the body as it is lived and experienced and takes into account that individual life is "socially and historically contingent and contextually bounded" (Smith, 2008, p.180). IPA attends to these experiences through a method "which asserts that events and objects which are directed towards are to be investigated how they are experienced and given meaning by the individual (Smith 2008, p.181). As a phenomenological approach, it has a concern with illuminating individual lived experience on all levels such as wishes, feelings, and belief systems. It places emphasis on the interpretative features of the analysis. The emphasis on analysis of lived experience is one of the core reasons as to why this qualitative approach was chosen over another approach the researcher considered: grounded theory. Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) seeks to establish claims for a broader population and is more interested in social processes than personal experience. Given the lack of representation of Black British Lesbians in the psychological literature, it seemed more appropriate and conducive to examine their experiences from a phenomenological standpoint in order to gain an in depth view into the variation of their experiences. Willig (2008) suggests that the applicability of Grounded Theory to psychological research may also be questioned as it was originally designed to study social processes. As such, it aims to identify and elucidate contextualised social processes which account for these phenomena. IPA was designed to gain an insight into individuals' psychological worlds. It is interested in the nature of phenomena, a concept which is chiefly relevant when examining the negotiation of multiple identities and the psychological impact they can have on respondents' psyche and sense of self (Yardley, 2000).

IPA's idiographic approach

IPA adopts an idiographic approach due to its concern with "the convergence and divergence within a small set of accounts" (Smith 2004, p.182). An emphasis is placed on the pursuit of universal meaning through the detailed examination of unique individual lives and by illustrating the variation of textures and nuances within related personal accounts. In so doing, a rich analysis is produced which pays specific attention to the idiosyncratic nature of the Black British lesbian experience in this instance. Smith (2004) suggests that IPA's idiographic approach argues for "an intensive examination of the individual in his or her own right as an intrinsic part of psychology's remit" (p. 183). One might argue that such an approach limits generalisation and limits the variance in information one can attain. However, an idiographic approach in this study, particularly with an under-studied and under-represented group allows for a more in depth exploration of each individual story to cross case analysis, thus taking "one closer to the universal by investigating the particular" (p. 183). Such an approach highlights areas and raises queries for further exploration which "can illuminate and affirm the centrality of certain general themes in the lives of all particular individuals" (Evans, 1993, p. 8). In the case of this research, it is intended that an idiosyncratic approach will allow for an exploration of human life with the aim of developing a clearer understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Smith, 2008).

IPA as an interrogative tool

IPA attempts to take an interrogative stance to its own findings and psychological literature. One of the ways it does this is by giving cognition a central role in its analytical stance. It highlights the idea that cognitions are an aspect of being in the world and this is a part of lived experience. As such, IPA taps into both hot cognitions (Smith 2004) - those issues in a person's life which are emotive and dilemmatic such as the feeling of not belonging or

identifying an affinity with others - and cold cognitions which involve long term reflection across the life course, e.g. the ongoing evolution, fluidity and development of gender, racial and sexual identities for Black British Lesbians. However, in placing cognition at its core, IPA may assume that language provides participants with the necessary means to relay that experience. Willig (2008) argues that language in itself cannot wholly give expression to experience, and thus, phenomenological research can be criticised for "not engaging sufficiently with its constitutive role" (p. 67). Phenomenology, as social science research, relies on participants' descriptions of their own experiences; but this is dependent on how effectively participants are able to communicate their experiences to the researcher. The issue of language must also be reiterated here as not all individuals are able to use language to reveal and capture the subtleties and nuances of their unique experiences.

Whilst this is important to consider, Smith (2008) points out that "lived life is much more than historically situated linguistic interactions between people" (p.185). Although language plays a large role in what is conveyed by individuals when sharing their life stories, it is not the only method of communication; the role of emotion cannot be ignored. Experience is also relayed through emotion in the form of body language, non-verbal cues, and imagery, all of which are present in the exchange between researcher and participant. These may not be captured in a quantitative study or indeed in other qualitative approaches including Discourse Analysis. Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995) focuses on dialogue, which whilst important, may not account for important aspects of an interview process which may not be reflected in the dialogue. In a normal interview process, respondents may not disclose certain elements about their experiences and motivations for a number of reasons. When conducting IPA, the emotional state and thoughts of participants, including that which is not represented in the dialogue of the interview, may all inform the analysis process. Additionally, Chapman and

Smith (2002) point out that whilst Discourse Analysis and IPA are both committed to qualitative research and language, they differ on the status of respondents' thought processes and their importance in the research process. Discourse Analysis regards verbal reports as behaviours in their own right and suggests that this should be the focus of functional analysis, whilst IPA is concerned with what the respondent thinks or believes about the research topic under discussion (Chapman and Smith 2002). IPA recognises that respondents' thoughts are not necessarily transparent in an interview transcript, however, an IPA researcher engages in analytical thinking while attempting to say something about that thinking. In reference to this research piece, an attempt was made to present the perspectives of the participants based on their described experiences and understandings, some of which was not inherently present in the dialogue presented in the transcripts. The adoption of IPA allowed the researcher to examine all these phenomena, both apparent and non-apparent.

An IPA approach was chosen because it explores "existential matters of considerable importance for the participant" (Chapman and Smith 2002, p.186). It allows the researcher to access the participants' world at a deep and meaningful level, and also encourages change, reflection and re-interpretation for the participant. In exploring the complex notion of identity and the role it plays in the lives of Black British lesbians, the research needed to employ a qualitative approach which has a concern for "identity and sense of self, a focus of participants' interpretation and an attention to bodily feeling within lived experience" (Chapman and Smith 2002, p.186). The experience of Black British Lesbians may have shaped or had an effect on their sense of self over the course of their identity journeys, and IPA allows these effects to rise to the fore. In so doing, this approach is similar to, if not grounded in, the psychological relationship. This will be further explored in the next section.

IPA and counselling psychology

Historically, counselling psychology has employed a non-pathologising approach to clients and has instead focused on a positive coping model in the treatment of clients. This approach recognises that there are myriad ways for people to resolve their problems and understand or conceptualise their experiences (Morrow, 2007). IPA, in its attempt to seek and understand the sense and meanings people place on their experiences, can facilitate the counselling psychology approach that is "characterised by feminist, narrative and social constructionist orientations" (Morrow, 2007 p. 227). Understanding experience is one of the cornerstones of psychology, and IPA affords psychologists the opportunity to learn from the insights of experts - the research participants - whose experiences help to enhance the understanding and knowledge of a range of different issues which may present themselves in a therapeutic setting. In accessing the experiences of the participants, IPA allows respondents to engage in enquiry which affects their everyday lives. Furthermore, IPA research directly benefits those whom psychologists hope to empower and about whom they learn (Rios Moore et al, 2004).

Williams and Hill (2001) suggest that qualitative methods may help to bridge the gap between research and practice. As a qualitative approach, IPA provides the opportunity for professionals within the field of counselling psychology to conduct research which is congruent with their research interests and enhance their knowledge in these chosen areas (Ponterro, 2005). Additionally, it also presents possibilities for scientific enquiry into

therapeutic practice. This can therefore result in a more informed approach than that which occurs devoid of self-examination (Ponterro, 2005). McLeod (2001) also suggests that the "activity of doing qualitative research, (identifying and clarifying meaning; learning how the meaning of aspects of the social world is constructed) is highly congruent with the process of conducting therapy (making new meaning, gaining insight and understanding, learning how personal meanings have been constructed)" (p. 16). This is particularly representative of IPA which is concerned with process, innovation and intricacy (Smith and Osborn, 2003).

Epistemological Reflexivity

Acknowledging the epistemological stance is important when carrying out qualitative research as "epistemology constitutes an overarching theory of knowledge, it investigates the standards used to assess knowledge or why we believe what we believe to be true" (Collins, 2000 p. 252). Collins (2000) suggests that when a researcher investigates the subjugated knowledge of Black women (as is the case in this research), a degree of ingenuity is required that is not necessarily needed when researching the standpoints of other groups. She also suggests that defining the epistemological standpoint in the research of Black women is particularly important because it helps to determine which "areas merit investigation, which interpretative frameworks will be used to analyse findings and to what use any ensuing knowledge will be put" (p.252). She posits that Black feminist epistemology encompasses standards for assessing truth that are widely accepted amongst Black women (Collins, 2000). Therefore, in relating to a Black Feminist epistemological standpoint, it is important that the interpretative framework chosen allows for the participants to express their own standpoint using a narrative tool. In adopting this epistemological stance for this research, the choice to use IPA, which allows the participant to be the 'expert' in describing their experience, is

reflective of this interpretative framework and representative of the core values of Black feminist epistemology.

Collins (2001) suggests that Black Feminist epistemological standpoint encompasses theoretical interpretations of Black women's identity by those who live it in different forms and aspects. She further suggests that Black women's standpoints are those experiences shared by Black women which provide a unique angle of vision on self, community and society and themes that interpret these experiences (Collins, 2001).

It has been suggested that because Black women may share common experiences, and that certain characteristic themes will be prominent in Black women's standpoint (Richardson 1987). These themes may include the legacy of struggle (against sexism and racism), the interlocking nature of race, gender and class oppression, replacement of denigrated images of Black womanhood with self-defined images, Black women's activism as mothers, teachers and Black community leaders and sexual politics (Collins, 2001). However, Collins (2001) clearly points out that the existence of these core themes does not mean that Black women respond to them in the same way. Diversity among Black women produces different concrete experiences that in turn shape various reactions to the core themes. This may be due to differences in social class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, country of origin, urbanisation and age. She further asserts that Black women as a group experience a world different from that of those who are not Black and female; these concrete experiences can stimulate a distinctive Black feminist consciousness with regards to that reality (Collins, 2001).

By collecting and articulating these individual expressions of consciousness, focused group consciousness and knowledge becomes possible. This reflects one of the ideas

underpinning IPA with an exploration of individual experience in order to gain a more general knowledge (Smith, 2004). Dillard (2000) suggests Black women's ability to form these "individual unarticulated, yet potentially powerful expressions of everyday consciousness in an articulated self-defined collective standpoint is integral to Black women's survival, makeup, growth and representation" (p.667).

Black female intellectuals (Collins, 2001) - including researchers, story tellers, writers, poets and indeed, this researcher - stand in a special relationship to the community of Black women of which we are a part and this special relationship traces the shape of Black feminist thought (Collins 2001). Black feminist thought revaluates and articulates taken for granted knowledge shared by Black women and can be instrumental in transforming them (Collins, 2001). Through the process of re-articulation, via research, the telling of stories, various writings, Black female intellectuals offer Black women a different view of themselves and their world from that presented by the dominant group. By adopting a Black feminist epistemological stance in research, and utilising an approach that allows this re-articulation, the participants in this study, who in different variations make up a group of Black British lesbians, may have their lived experiences shared, articulated. These experiences can then be used to illuminate their unique experiences through the use of a qualitative method which captures this.

The Black feminist standpoint has been criticised for being contradictory in meaning, specifically, with regards to the assumption that only Black females can articulate this standpoint and the idea that there are a range of advocates and ideas around Black feminist thought which can suggest abstract notions as opposed to defining the theory and standpoint itself. Furthermore, others have suggested that the notion of an epistemological stance which adheres to a specific group is in effect advocating the very exclusive stance Collin's criticised

feminists of in their development of feminist theory (e.g. see Siegal, 2006; Chafetz, 2004; Crasnow, 2008). Siegal (2006) takes the following stance

"the suggestion that different cultures have their own, unchallengeable epistemological perspectives such that what counts knowledge or as acceptable research varies from group to group, is equally incorrect philosophically and equally undermining of the very point of conducting such research" (p.10).

Collins (2000) in response to these criticisms suggests that a Black feminist epistemology represents the diversity within Black female communities, and is not intended to be exclusionary. Collin's (2000) points out that no standpoint is neutral as no individual or group exists un-embedded in the world. Whilst Black female intellectuals are the primary instigators in Black feminist thought, she posits that Black feminist thought cannot flourish in isolation from other groups. Indeed, she suggests that "Black feminist standpoint is undermined as a critical perspective by being dependent on those who are biologically Black and female" (p. 67). However, Black women must not forgo the importance of their experiences and consciousness which are crucial to the centrality of Black feminist thought. She thus re-articulates Black feminist stance as "theories or specialised thought produced by Black women intellectuals designed to express a Black women's standpoint" (p.68). She identifies the dimensions of this standpoint as "the presence of characteristic core themes, diversity of Black women's experiences in experiencing these themes and the interdependence of Black women's actions, experiences and actions" (p.68). The diversity of Black women's experiences as a core dimension is particularly important as it highlights the differences which exist amongst Black females. It does not assume that this standpoint will be interpreted in the same way by all Black women. She suggests Black female intellectuals should aim to infuse Black women's

diverse experiences with new meaning. For researchers, this may be achieved by adopting an epistemological stance which incorporates these themes. By adopting this epistemological stance, it enables this researcher to tell the stories of a diverse group of Black women, often unheard, and not only gives meaning to their experiences, but also uses their experiences to give meaning to others.

The Components of Black Feminist Thought

Black feminist epistemology encompasses four main components: *Lived experience as a criterion of meaning, the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, the ethics of caring and the ethics of personal accountability* (Collins, 2000).

(i) Lived experience as a criterion of meaning

Lived experience is considered a knowledge claim as this criterion allows for subjectivity within the research process. Collins (2000) suggests that for most Black women, those individuals who have lived through the experiences about which they can claim to be experts are more believable and credible than those who have thoughts or only read about those experiences. This fits with the ethos of IPA which attempts to gain knowledge and understanding of a particular phenomenon from the individuals who are the experts in these experiences.

(ii)The use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims

This criterion argues that researchers should engage in dialogue with participants and develop a connection with the knowledge validation process. Collins (2000) suggests that a primary epistemological assumption underlying the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims is that "connectedness rather than separation is an essential component of the knowledge validation process" (p.260). IPA represents this criterion by allowing researchers to engage in dialogue with respondents through the use of semi-structured interviews which encourage the respondents to relay their experiences and views about the topic at hand.

(iii)The ethics of caring

This component suggests that personal expressiveness, empathy and emotions are central to knowledge validation. This criterion is illustrated by the emphasis which is placed on individual uniqueness, appropriateness of emotions in dialogues and the development of the capacity for empathy. The emphasis on individual uniqueness suggests that each individual is thought to be a unique expression of their lives, despite their shared commonalities with a particular group. The appropriateness of emotion in dialogues emphasises the need to acknowledge emotion and intellect as two linked components, therefore, emotion indicates that a speaker believes in the validity of their dialogue, and this should be represented in qualitative research. Finally Collins (2000) suggests that as researchers, our ability and capacity to develop an empathetic stance to respondents' experiences can encourage an honest and rich dialogue which is essential to the exploration of a particular phenomenon. In attempting to address the experiences of Black British Lesbians, it was hoped that my position as a Black woman, coupled with my professional training and standing, would enable me to empathise with respondents in this study. Additionally, IPA recognises that every individual has a unique experience and a unique take on that experience which is represented in the presentation of an

IPA analysis section. Furthermore, IPA allows for comment on processes that are not necessarily present in a transcript, such as emotional presentation and expression.

(iv) The ethics of personal accountability

This criterion suggests that researchers should develop their knowledge claims through dialogue, and should be accountable for these knowledge claims. IPA helps to achieve this by encouraging the researcher to engage in personal reflexivity during the research process. Essentially, the interpretation of dialogue may be influenced by the researcher's standpoint, therefore by engaging in a degree of reflexivity and acknowledging this influence, the researcher is adhering to the Black epistemological framework by being accountable for particular knowledge claims.

Collins (2000) suggests that because Black women have access to the experiences that encompass being both Black and female, a Black feminist epistemology rearticulates a Black female standpoint and reflects the convergence of both sets of experiences. Other components underlying these experiences, such as sexual orientation, may also be articulated by employing this epistemology. She also suggests that "a Black feminist epistemology may lie in its ability to enrich our understanding of how subordinate groups create knowledge that fosters both their empowerment and social justice" (p.269). An appropriate research approach, such as IPA, fosters the underlying concepts of Black feminist epistemology and allows the experiences of the respondents in this study to be fully articulated and truthfully represented.

Personal Reflexivity

It must be acknowledged then, that in qualitative research and more specifically IPA, researchers cannot be separated from the research process; they are inextricably linked and have a subjective influence on the data gathering and analysing processes. Rennie (2004) suggests that in order to address this, a degree of self-reflexivity needs to be employed. This is echoed by La Compte & Preissle (2003) who suggest that one of the most critical aspects of conducting qualitative research involves the recognition of how meta-theoretical predispositions (e.g. conceptual assumptions) and our own personal (e.g. cultural) and professional (e.g. educational background experiences) influence our choices of study, research questions, selection of participants, our interpretations, and subsequent theories (LeCompte & Preissle, 2003). As such, it is important to touch upon my personal reflexivity with regards to this piece of research. I shall speak in the first person in order to relay the ownership of this account. I grew up in a variety of different cultures all over the world, and as a Black British African woman, I have always experienced an element of difference and to some extent, an outsider status in these cultures. Although I was fortunate to experience diverse cultures and diverse people of different races, religious backgrounds and ideals and values, I feel to some extent, I had to assimilate myself into these cultures to fit in, and to establish an element of sameness whilst retaining certain aspects of my identity. This has been both a struggle and a unique learning process for me, and as a result I have always been interested in the way in which individuals construct their unique and complex identities, and how they deal with their own sense of sameness and difference. My cultural and racial backgrounds have fostered an interest in working with communities of colour and formulating questions and approaches that respectfully represent their experiences. As an ethnic minority individual, I feel a sense of responsibility to give a voice to underrepresented individuals in the Black community as I feel

that this will help to increase awareness and knowledge about the experiences of a diverse culture which represents one aspect of my own identity.

As a Counselling Psychologist who has worked with a variety of individuals experiencing threatened identities as a result of holding multiple identities, I have an interest in the psychological impact of holding multiple identities and the ways in which counselling psychology can help to address this. I have worked with several individuals who have struggled to consolidate a personal identity as a result of identity conflict, and I must admit, when I initially started working in this field, I felt I lacked the necessary knowledge needed to address these issues. A part of me felt embarrassed that as a Black female therapist, I was unable to utilise the necessary tools to help my clients, in spite of my own struggle with identity consolidation. Conducting research in the area of identity conflict has allowed me to gain a better understanding of the experiences that these individuals have, and how to best address them. It was hoped that I would be sensitised to this data set due to my position as a Black heterosexual woman who is familiar with issues surrounding the experiences of Black women and who has conducted research in the area of identity conflict and gay sexuality (Nkansa-Dwamena, 2006) thus yielding an affluent analysis. However, these hopes and assumptions did not necessarily translate to the research process. Although in some cases, my gender, race and sexuality proved to be an asset, these components seemed to be 'a double edged sword' and may also have had an influence on the research process with regards to participant engagement and disclosure. At times, the question of disclosure of sexual orientation became an important theme during the course of interviewing. These issues will be discussed in depth later on. It was hoped that I would be able to identify any assumptions or interpretations which were not consistent with participants' described experiences by gaining analytical aid from a White female research supervisor who would be able to curb any biases.

My own experience of identity negotiation triggered a curiosity in this research area. My professional encounters with identity threat heightened this curiosity. I was interested in finding out if this was experienced by others, but particularly Black females, who hold many different components in their identity make-up. My position as a Black British African woman highlighted the similarities between myself and my participants and perhaps lent an enhanced understanding in the interpretative process. Alternatively, my position as a heterosexual female highlighted the differences in our experiences. This allowed me to have a fresher perspective, but ultimately, the position of reflexivity I adopted hopefully allowed me to establish a balance between interpretation and allowing the voices of my participants to be heard.

Procedure

Sampling and Participants

Attempts were made to recruit eight participants of African and/or Caribbean descent who identified themselves as lesbian. The choice to recruit eight participants stemmed from the researcher's desire to illuminate the phenomena and research question being studied and to develop a rich and full interpretation of the data, both of which might not be accomplished with a very large sample size. Smith (2004) has argued that there is no 'correct' sample size in IPA research because of its retention of an idiographic focus. He further argued that in this method, small sample sizes are the norm in IPA as the analysis of large data sets may result in the loss of "potentially subtle inflections of meaning" (p. 626). Currently, consensus towards the use of smaller sample sizes seems to be emerging (Smith, 2004; Reid et al., 2005).

The term 'African or Caribbean descent' was used in recruitment literature instead of the racial identification term 'Black' because of the political and personal connotations that the term 'Black' holds for different individuals. In the United Kingdom, the term 'Black British' signifies all ethnic minority populations. This stems from terminology used at the end of the British empire when several empires and colonies (in Africa, India and the Caribbean) gained independence and formed a new national identity (Bush, 1999). Additionally, the researcher made the decision to advertise for women who identified as lesbian because of the variation of ways in which individuals define their sexual orientation (Kinsey et al, 1953). Kinsey et al (1953) asserted that sexuality is prone to change over time, and that sexual behaviour can be understood both as physical contact as well as purely psychic phenomena (desire, sexual attraction, fantasy). This argument is supported by Brown (1995) for whom lesbian identity is "a self ascribed definition held by a woman over time and across situations as having primary sexual, affectional and relational ties to other women… This identity may or may not be congruent with overt behaviour at any point during the lifespan and the variables making up this definition may come and go from the foreground of a woman's definition as life circumstances change" (p.4).

The researcher initially aimed to recruit eight participants; however, ten participants were recruited due to the larger response from individuals who expressed a great interest in taking part in this research. This was deemed a plausible number as the sample size was manageable enough to attain detailed experiences and develop a rich analysis, whilst retaining an idiographic focus (Smith, 2004). Participants were recruited through advertisements (please see appendix A) placed on websites geared towards lesbians, with organisations specifically targeting Black lesbians, in media sources such as the radio and newspapers, and through flyers (please see appendix A) left in clubs and bars. Also important was the snowballing effect

started by those who volunteered via these channels. It was hoped that word of mouth referrals would access women who were less involved in both the lesbian and Black lesbian communities as initial response to recruitment was slow. When describing the study to potential participants in these advertisements and flyers, care was taken not to convey the hypothesis about identity conflict because of the risk of failing to attract participants who had not experienced conflict. Thus, the study was described as being interested in the experiences of Black British Lesbians. The researcher was aware of the personal safety issues involved in advertising in this manner; which included possible response from individuals who might not have been interested or appropriate for this research. There was also the issue of possible contact or harassment from individuals who may have objected to the research topic. As a result of this, the researcher chose to include limited personal information on the flyer (e.g. a non-personal phone number and an email address). Due to limited funding, recruitment took place in urban centres around London.

Participants who expressed an interest in participating in this study were initially sent an information sheet which explained the nature of the research (please see appendix C). They were then screened via telephone in order to make sure that they met the criteria for inclusion in the research. Participants had to be above the age of 18, of African or Caribbean descent, and identify as a lesbian. During this screening, the nature of the research was further reiterated and the researcher answered any questions or concerns that the respondents had. If the potential participant met inclusion criteria for the study and agreed to participation, a time and place to meet was arranged. In order to make the process as convenient as possible for the respondents, they were given the option to have the interview conducted at City University or at a location of their choice. If they decided to be interviewed in their preferred locations, the researcher maintained personal safety by informing two chosen individuals about her

whereabouts and the expected length and duration of the interviews. The chosen individuals were given an address of where the researcher would be, and a contact number which was to be used if they had not heard from the researcher after an agreed time period.

Ethics

Ethical approval was obtained from City University prior to commencing research. An ethics release from was submitted to two members of staff. The form outlined the nature of the research, requirements and anonymity participation explaining how the participants and the university would be protected. A research proposal, which outlined the aims and procedures for this research, was appended to these forms (please see appendix B for a copy of the ethics release form). The researcher also adhered to the code of ethics set out by the British Psychological Society

All of the participants were screened to ensure they met the inclusion criteria for this researcher which stipulated that they had to be above the age of 18, of African or Caribbean descent and identify as a lesbian. All participants received an information sheet describing the aims, procedures and possible risks of the research. The information sheet also provided the researcher and supervisor contact details (please see appendix C for a copy of the information sheet).

Informed consent was obtained from all the participants in order to ensure that they had a clear comprehension of the purpose and procedure of the research. Participants were required to sign and retain a copy of a consent form (please see appendix D for copy of consent forms).

Participants were informed of their role in the research process, which included participation in an interview lasting between an hour and a half and two hours which would be taped and transcribed. The participants were informed that the taped interviews, consent forms, demographic questionnaires and research notes used this research would be kept in a locked cabinet to which only the researcher would have the keys. Additionally, participants' anonymity was protected by the use of pseudonyms and the removal of all identifiers in the writing up of the research. The researcher did not anticipate any psychical or psychological harm to the participants in this study and participants were given the right to withdraw at any point during the research process without consequence.

Due to the sometimes difficult and sensitive nature of this research topic, participants were given support packs (see appendix G) at the end of the interview and fully debriefed. Some of the questions posed during the interview process may have required participants to divulge information about their past experiences, which elicited certain emotions and concerns, therefore the information pack was essential to address the needs of the participants if necessary. This pack contained details for further areas of support should they need it and included addresses, phone numbers and email contacts of various organisations who offered support or information for Black British lesbian women. All participants were also given the option to receive a copy of the finished study upon completion.

Interview Process and Interview Schedule

Ten women were interviewed face to face about their experiences of constructing and simultaneously maintaining Black and lesbian and gender identities through the use of semi-

structured interviews (Please see appendix K for profiles of the participants). Three interviews were conducted at City University, five in the participant's place of work and two in the participant's home. Upon reflection of the content of the interviews, it seemed that the interviews which were conducted outside of the university yielded richer data, this may have been due to participants comfort within their own environment. Also interesting is that the richness of data varied within the interviews and this appeared to be linked to the rooms in which the interviews were carried out. Rooms in the university, which were small and somewhat sterile, seemed to make the interviews more formal, in comparison to larger spacious and well lit rooms elsewhere.

The interview process began with the administration of a demographic questionnaire (please see appendix E) in order to acquire basic background information on the participants. This allowed the researcher to develop profiles for each participant and to demonstrate the diversity of the individuals in this sample. The questionnaire posed questions about participants' educational background, marital status, age and sexual orientation. Questions were worded in such a way so as not to seem presumptuous, but instead to gain an accurate description of each participant. In an attempt to make the questionnaire inclusive and to recognise diversity, it was filled out with the participants so as to gain any further information which may have been omitted from the questionnaire. Participants were then asked questions drawn from an interview schedule (please see appendix F). The interview schedule consisted of a series of open ended questions with optional probes. The questions sought information about their experiences of growing up as Black women, the construction of their sexual identity and their reactions to the process, the relationship between their Black, sexual and gender identities and any difficulties which did or did not arise as a result of this. The interview schedule also covered the disclosure of their sexual identity to family members, within the Black community

and within the wider society and their conceptualisations of their current identity. The questions were constructed in order to cover a broad range of issues that may affect an individual's experience in building simultaneous lesbian, female and Black identities. The construction of the questions was informed by the topics and issues that were presented in the background research which was carried out for this study (e.g. Greene, 2004; Bowleg, Brooks, Huang and Burkholder, 2003; Collins, 2000; Reynolds and Pope, 1991; Jones and McEwan, 2000; Breakwell, 1986). Questions were ordered in such a way so as to initially establish rapport with the participant and hopefully yield rich data which would later be used in the analytical process. It was hoped that by employing this method of questioning, the participant would feel comfortable enough to answer the more sensitive questions that appeared later on in the interview (please see appendix F for interview schedule). The interviews lasted between one hour and a half and two hours. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim.

Analytical Procedure

Henwood and Pidgeon's (1992) guidelines for good qualitative research stress the importance of transparency. Therefore, in accordance with these guidelines, it is necessary to outline the analytic procedure. The first step involved reading and re-reading the transcripts in order to become well acquainted with the described experiences. Each transcript was read individually after which notes were made on the left hand margin of the transcript. These notes contained initial thoughts on the transcript such as associations and connections and summaries or paraphrases of each participant's account. At this stage a commentary was also made on the participants' language and their emerging sense of themselves and their personal world. Within each transcript, the right hand margin was used to condense the notes into initial

themes; great care was taken to ensure that these initial themes were reflective of each particular passage and illustrated appropriately with quotations from the data (please see appendix J for an example of a transcript). After this was done for each transcript, the emergent themes were compared across transcripts in order to identify commonalties and differences (please see appendix I for an example of a participant's themes). Subsequently, themes which had a connection were clustered together in order to produce a super ordinate theme. These themes were then incorporated into a table and ordered coherently in order to produce a logical narrative. Some themes were ultimately dropped as they did not necessarily address the research question. However, it is important to note that individual experiences were also taken into account as these sometimes informed the underlying complexity of common themes. Furthermore, whilst the themes and sub themes arose from the analysis of data, some also reflected the content of the interview schedule. As a result general topics which were evident in the interview schedule were elaborated into more specific themes and sub-themes through the process of analysis (please see appendix H for a full list of super ordinate themes).

Methodological Reflexivity

The process of carrying out IPA can be an interesting yet complicated process. As a researcher seeking answers, experiences and views regarding the experiences of Black British lesbians, it was a challenging and revealing experience. During the interview process, my stance as a Black heterosexual woman definitely affected the research both negatively and positively. During my first two interviews, the subject of my sexuality came up and I faced the dilemma of whether to disclose my sexuality in view of how this would affect the interview process. I chose to present my sexuality as undefined, which seemed to satisfy the participants. However, during one of my interviews, the participant assumed I was a Black British lesbian,

and I chose not to correct her, mainly because the comments which alluded to my sexuality appeared at an interesting point in the interview. As a researcher, I did question the ethical nature of this decision; however, I was afraid to threaten the balance of the interview process and did not venture explanations or discussions. Conversely, two potential participants refused to take part in the research because they felt that my status as a heterosexual woman would cloud the research process and their experiences would not be adequately represented, and this also affected my choice regarding disclosure.

I believe that at times, my identity and presentation as a Black woman allowed for a degree of relaxation during the interview process, unspoken dialogue and a degree of familiarity. It was important that I did not allow this comfort and familiarity to cloud the interview dialogue and process, or allow for the exclusion of information which might have been pertinent to the topic at hand. For this reason, I often found myself asking questions for clarification, or probing when I felt the respondent spoke with the notion that I would automatically understand because of our shared backgrounds. This experience is reflected in the research experience of the American researcher Juanita Bailey (1999) who reflects on her role as a Black female researcher interviewing African American women. She spoke of the tensions that arose during the interview process as a result of shared racial and cultural backgrounds between herself and the participants in her study and how her ability to be reflective and reflexive allowed her to use those factors to inform her research.

After my pilot interview, my interview schedule had to be altered slightly, not in content, but in the ordering of the questions, which varied for every single participant. I tried to engage my participants as much as possible, and at times, it seemed to be a conversation between two individuals rather than an interview process. I believe that this helped to elicit

dialogue from the participants, with some revealing information they had never disclosed before. Even though the ordering of questions changed and varied from one participant to another, I always had a mental and visual check to make sure I had covered all the areas. This was not always easy, and in the first few interviews, I found that I had to return to certain questions because of omission on my part. By tailoring the question format to each participant, creating an atmosphere and the rapport between the participant and the researcher, my aim was to gain knowledge of the participants' experiences in a non-threatening manner; similarly, by imposing a semi-structure, it is hoped that the participants did not feel that they were just answering a list of questions. Smith (2004) suggests that in conducting semi-structured interviews as part of an IPA approach, an interview schedule offers maps of possible ways in which the interview may advance, and is used very flexibly. In practice, the interview may diverge considerably from what was originally envisaged as was the case in this research.

After each interview, I reflected on the process by keeping a reflective journal. This journal allowed me to note down unspoken dialogue, body language, my errors, and things I could adopt in order to improve the interview process. Later on, the journal served as a reference while I wrote my analysis section, particularly when I wanted to emphasise a particular quotation by adding context and tone.

Finally, the process of transcribing, although at times labour intensive, proved to be a very rewarding and revealing process. With each transcript, I was reminded of what transpired in that interview, and whilst this was useful, it placed a lot of pressure on me to make sure I was completely accurate in interpreting the experiences of my research participants. Drawing themes was at times difficult, as I kept thinking I had overlooked certain words or phrases. Additionally, there were times when I omitted certain themes because I assumed that those

themes drawn from particular dialogue constituted 'known' information. As such I overlooked valuable described experiences which were highlighted by my supervisor, and accordingly, I redid the first stage of the analysis, and approached it from a more reflective stance. This allowed for a fuller theme table from which I could draw super ordinate themes.

Analysis

Overview of Analysis

Demographics

Participants' mean age was 36.9 years (Range 22- 49; S.D 9.64). Among the 10 participants, ethnicity was reported as follows: One was of mixed Black African/Caribbean origin, one was of mixed Black British/African/Caribbean origin, four were of Black Caribbean origin and four were of African origin. Participants' relationship status was as follows: seven participants specified their marital status as single. One participant was divorced. One participant was in a committed relationship with another woman at the time of the study and one participant was married (civil partnership). Participants reported many levels of educational achievement. One had a Postgraduate degree or diploma, three held a degree, three had A- levels (or equivalent qualifications), and three had diplomas. All of the participants were employed and reported a variety of careers including health, social services, art, media and education.

Nine participants reported that their sense of being Black was currently very important to them, and one participant specified that is was very important. At the time of the study, all

the participants lived in urban centres, in or around the London area of Britain. The

demographics of each participant are represented in the table below:

Demographics

Participant	Age	Cultural Background	Sexual Orientation	Marital Status	Employment Status	Highest Level of Education	Sense of Being Black
Cassandra	38	Black Caribbean	Lesbian	Divorced	Employed	Diploma	Important
Wanda	49	Black African	Lesbian	Civil Partnership	Employed	Degree	Important
Mechelle	45	Black African/ Caribbean	Lesbian	Single	Employed	Diploma	Important
Harlow	29	Black Caribbean	Lesbian	Single	Employed	'A' levels	Very Important
Lisa	23	Black African/ Caribbean/ British	Lesbian	Single	Employed	Diploma	Important
Amber	35	Black African	Lesbian	Living with partner	Employed	'A' levels	Important
Jennifer	22	Black Caribbean	Lesbian	Single	Employed	'A' levels	Important
Paige	40	Black African	Lesbian	Single	Not specified	Degree	Important
Dana	48	Black African	Lesbian	Single	Employed	Degree	Important
Priscilla	40	Black Caribbean	Lesbian	Single	Employed	Postgraduate Degree	Important

Table 1

The participants of this study described the experiences that represented their journey

as Black lesbian females and how these experiences affected their identity development. The

themes presented in this analysis section reflect the participants' negotiation of their multiple

identities. Thematic analysis yielded six super ordinate themes: Development of a Black Identity, Development of a Black female identity, Development of a lesbian identity, Experience of Triple Jeopardy, Management of Identity conflict and Reconciliation of a Black British lesbian identity. Each theme yielded a subcategory/ sub theme which are presented in bold font following the main theme in the analysis. In order to provide an accurate illustration of the content of the interviews carried out, interpretations will be grounded in examples from the data set. In these quotations, empty brackets [ ] indicate missing text and ellipsis points (…) indicate a pause in the flow of participants' speech. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the participants.

Analysis

Developing a Black identity

"Every individual's intra-psychic, personal, familial and social history is embedded in the context of the socio-political realities of their lives" (Greene 2004, p 101). These social and political realities include an individual's dominant or subordinate social status and the characteristics - race, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status - that anchor this status. These realities appear to have a large bearing on an individual's understanding of who she is, what she may or may not do, what she is entitled to or not entitled to do and what she can become (Greene 2004). Socialisation plays a large role in developing this understanding.

Socialisation indoctrinates group members on the behaviour that is deemed appropriate for their group or community (Greene 2004), and is particularly relevant when exploring the development of a racial identity. Themes emerging from this study suggest that for several participants, socialisation in the Black British community includes the instilment of ideas and beliefs such as Black pride, the development of certain values and expectations, an encouragement of belonging and sameness in the community, and the experience of racism. The experience of socialisation emerged as being guided by two primary sources- the Black family and the Black community- and had a direct effect on the development of a Black identity.

Socialisation in the Black Family

Participants in this study spoke of the role their families played in their socialisation. For a majority of the participants, it was their family members who helped them to develop an initial curiosity and eventual assimilation of a Black identity. This was achieved through family experiences, learned values and expectations, messages and beliefs about Black pride and influences from non-Black family members.

Developing a sense of "Blackness"

Participants described experiences where family members passed along knowledge about cultural and racial roots, Black history and their own experiences of being Black individuals in society. For example, Cassandra talked about the lessons she learned and the messages she received through the many open discussions her family had around Black identity:

> *I think I grew up very aware of my Blackness [ ] I think in our house there was always discussion. And I think especially being the youngest in a home where there are people who are older than you, sometimes you are like a sponge and you learn things from other people. (Cassandra)*

Another participant was encouraged by her family to delve into the rich history of Black culture as a way of developing her Black identity. Literature and verbal narratives provided by her family members gave a sense of who she was as a Black individual, and where she had come from:

I started reading about Black issues at a fairly young age [ ] I also knew a lot about the whole history of the civil rights movement and I had read all of that, Malcolm X and stuff like that [ ] I think that all contributed to that identity. (Dana)

Participants in this study also spoke of the role their families played in encouraging a sense of pride in their heritage. For many participants, this sense of pride greatly contributed to the positive development of a Black identity and particular emphasis was placed on lessons about the strength and empowerment of the Black race as a result of their past struggles and their ability to exist as minorities within a diverse society. This was reflected in a comment by one participant who described the ways in which her mother encouraged her to develop a healthy outlook about her race:

She would take me to Black conferences and Black speaking events [ ] She would talk to me about Black empowerment and our history and things like that. (Lisa)

This was echoed by another participant who spoke of the conversations she had with her father who would often recount the personal experiences which had led to the development of his pride in his community and re-tell significant historical events that had contributed to the strength of the Black race:

'You know he had really good conversations with us and would talk about us as Black people, so it was always a reminder. (Amber)

Three participants described the effect that their families had on their perception of their Black pride and how this influenced their identity. For example, Cassandra reflected on her current sense of identity and pride in her race as a result of familial influences:

If I was to say how I feel about my Blackness now, it's that I am extremely proud of my Blackness. (Cassandra)

This was reiterated by Wanda who described a continued sense of pride in her identity:

I have always actively liked being Black. I actively like it. I look in the mirror and I like it. (Wanda)

Paige had maintained a sense of pride in her identity from childhood all the way into adulthood:

Never felt anything but fine in my skin, proud of my skin, never felt any other way apart from that. (Paige)

The experiences of these individuals clearly reflect research (e.g. Greene, 2004) which suggests that the lives of Black individuals are influenced not only by the attitudes of the dominant society, but also by the unique features of their own cultural history and community. It is important to note then, that for many of the participants in this study, the family served as a primary reference point for the development of their Black identities. By acting as socialisation agents, the family inevitably shaped and influenced the gradual assimilation of a Black identity into the overall identity structure. This allowed the participants to reach the

desired stage of *immersion/emersion* in the transcendence of the Black identity development process (Helms, 1995). It is interesting that the maturation of a Black identity seemed to be one of the primary identities developed in the course of the participant's consolidation of a personal identity, and seemed to have an influence on the development of subsequent gender and sexual identities.

Sharing Black values and expectations

Participants in this study spoke of the values and expectations which were instilled in them, and how these formed an essential component of their Black identity development. Many participants suggested that these Black values were consistently reinforced by their family members through messages, conversations and proverbs. Many alluded to the fact that these values shaped who they became as Black individuals. One participant spoke of her how her father consistently instilled the value of hard work in her, because of her status as a Black individual in a multicultural society:

> *From my dad's perspective, it was just kind of the everyday struggle, because he went through a lot of stuff when he was young [ ] he always used to say to me, you know, it doesn't matter what you are doing, there is going to be hard times [ ] you have just got to know how to dust yourself off and keep going. [ ] just work…this is what we do, we came from the boat to this and we are still here. [   ] Hard work is just the Black way. (Lisa)*

Another participant spoke of the taught values of unity and togetherness. Her parents always stressed the importance of familial and community unity, and instilled a strong sense of togetherness:

We had high standards, morals and values…I mean you do stick together. The African culture is very strong in terms of togetherness, we always stood together as one. (Amber)

This was echoed by another participant who embraced the value of familial unity and Black community appreciation:

Black people….it's just lovely in terms of valuing family and people. (Wanda)

The instilment of values seemed to yield certain expectations of these participants; many described the spoken and unspoken expectations the family members placed on them, and how these expectations seemed to be symptomatic of what a 'good' Black individual should be. One participant spoke of how as a Black individual, she was expected to reach a high standard:

I think the messages I got were still very high in terms of expectations. If anything actually, slightly higher. (Wanda)

This was echoed by another participant who commented that expectations from the Black family were of such a high standard because generally, Black people were expected to fail:

You have to work ten times harder because everyone is expecting you to fail. (Lisa)

Cassandra reiterated this sentiment, and described the expectations of success that her family placed on her, mainly because it was a 'Black' attribute to work hard and make the most of any opportunities that were presented:

I think the expectations of people has always been quite low really [ ] so I grew up very aware of my Blackness…very aware that my mother came from Jamaica, how aware of how it was a struggle for her [   ] and how important it was for me to succeed in the best way that we can. (Cassandra)

The values and expectations that the participants speak of appear to stem from a historical legacy that required Black individuals to demonstrate inner and mental stoicism, maintain unity and overcome the low expectations of individuals from the wider society in order to gain respect and be viewed as an equal individual in a society that marginalised them because of the colour of their skin (Harper et al 2004). Boyd-Franklin (1989) suggests that these values and expectations are the result of traits and behaviours that derive from African culture and have been confounded with behaviours that derive from the need to manage racism from the dominant culture.

Socialisation in non-Black families

Two participants spoke of their socialisation in non-Black families; they were brought up in White foster families. These participants experienced a different upbringing than that of their counterparts in that there seemed to be less emphasis placed on the development of 'Black' values, expectations and messages. As a result they felt the assimilation of their Black

identity occurred later on in life and this affected their self-perception as Black individuals. One participant described her upbringing in a White family:

> *So in terms of me growing up as a girl…ummm…yeah…as a girl and as a Black girl, it was very different. I think, I mean I am sure, I think, by no default, I'm sure I assumed I was White [   ] some of the messages were negative, even though my foster parents absolutely adored me, they seemed to try to fit me into their world, they didn't see me as being Black. (Mechelle)*

For this reason, she felt unable to identify with other Black people or any components of the Black racial identity. This was evidenced in a situation where she rejected a Black doll her grandmother had given her:

> *She came to visit me and there was an issue with me playing with dolls, a lot of White dolls and actually she brought me a Black doll and I rejected it....I wasn't accepted, because I was brought up in a White family I was different.[ ] I had to quickly fit in…I dropped my accent [ ] shouldn't have had to do that, but I had to do it in order to be accepted. (Mechelle)*

Another participant recounted a similar experience where she described the effect the absence of a visible Black community in her life had on the development of her Black identity. Again, because of the experience of being raised in a Caucasian family and a predominantly 'White' environment, she struggled to identify with the Black community:

I was a bit isolated from being Black because there wasn't anyone to be Black with. I am trying to move[ ] from a place where there are no Black people to a place where there is a very high minority population[ ] I think I was very nervous about being around so many Black people[ ] I could say it made me feel like I didn't belong. (Wanda).

In comparison to other participants, the described experiences of Wanda and Mechelle seem to reflect the absence of a socialising agent from whom these participants could draw in order to develop a salient Black identity. This is not to suggest that individuals who are brought up in non-Black families inevitably lose the ability to assimilate a Black identity, but it seems that in this study, the presence or visibility of a Black community or family aided the Black identity development process. Greene (2004) postulates that one of the reasons for this is that in Black families, children learn to view themselves positively because of loved and trusted family members' positive responses to them as Black individuals. She suggests that for family members, positive cultural mirroring affirms and reinforces the salience and positive aspects of membership in one's ethnic group.

Socialisation in the Black community

The Black family played a strong role in the socialisation of participants, but equally, so did the Black community. The Black community, in a sense, is seen as an extension of the core family unit (Collins, 2000). Participants in this study spoke of the ways in which the Black community influenced the development of their Black identities by instilling values and expectations, establishing a sense of sameness and belonging to the community and by teaching them how to navigate in the wider society in the face of racism and discrimination. It

is also from the Black community that participants gleaned a sense of individuality and difference in comparison to other members.

Expectations of representing the Black community

Many participants spoke of the way in which the values and expectations passed on from the family members in turn fostered community expectations which they felt they had to fulfil. One of the most important expectations was the act of positive representation. Participants were expected to be ambassadors for the Black community and represent the community in a positive light. Some participants explained that these expectations stemmed from community values of strength and pride, as well as a need for the Black community to rid itself of the stereotypes and negative connotations which were often attributed to the Black race. This was Lisa's experience:

I think you have to be like a representative…I feel like I have to show this other side of Black culture [] I just try to represent a good side to our culture

This was echoed by another participant who described how her actions as a Black individual represented the actions and values of her community and as such, she needed to uphold a strong positive image:

As a Black woman, it was important that I was a decent role model, that what I did and how I was perceived reflected on all Black women. (Wanda)

Another participant spoke of how the expectation to show the Black community in a positive light sometimes involved concealing the negative aspects of the Black community:

For me sometimes it's about putting on this front, so to make everything look good on

the outside. (Amber)

The participants found that there seemed to be a great deal of responsibility placed on them to maintain a sense of decorum and positive representation of the Black community. Research (e.g. Martinez, 2003; Collins, 2000; Bridges et al, 2003; Hooks, 1989) suggests that this attitude possibly stems from the long history of negativity that has been associated with the Black race, which includes notions of laziness, low intelligence and aggressiveness. Bridges et al (2003) suggest that in the early stages of Black identity development, individuals may be trying very hard to fit into the dominant society and attempting to hide whatever they see as flaws. This seemed to be important to the decision of the participants in this study as to whether to disclose their lesbian identities because of the perceived notion that they would be tarnishing the reputation of the Black community.

Sameness and Belonging

Participants in this study spoke of how the identification of sameness and the encouragement of belonging in the Black community contributed to their Black identity development. Belonging to a community which consisted of individuals who were similar in appearance and with whom they had a shared heritage seemed to further encourage a positive assimilation of a Black identity. One participant acknowledged this sense of sameness and described its effect on her standing as a Black individual:

I just feel empowered [ ] I feel special because I know that there is no other culture like

us, who have gone through the same shit as us. (Lisa)

This was echoed by another participant who attributed a sense of pride in the belonging that was displayed and encouraged in the Black community:

Black people… it is just lovely [   ] a sense of belonging. (Wanda)

It has been noted in psychological literature (Bridges et al 2003, Greene, 2000, Harper, Jernerwall and Zea, 2004) that for many Black lesbians, the Black community serves as the primary identity reference group, and indeed, it is within the Black community that these individuals find and define their primary sense of self. This is due, in part, to the sense of belonging and the similarity with individuals who understand and have experienced racism as they have, who have endured discrimination in various forms and are able to identify and provide a sense of community. When negotiating multiple identities, Black lesbians often cite the loss of this belonging and sameness when embarking on a lesbian identity development journey, and the lack of similarity in the gay community and in the Black community, particularly where there seems to be a lack of visibility of Black British Lesbians (Bridges et al 2003).

Being different in the wider society

Whilst particular attributes and experiences identified the participants as members of the Black community, these same attributes set them apart from individuals in the wider society. Socialisation in the Black community gave the participants in this study the necessary tools needed to navigate the wider society, particularly because they were likely to experience racism and discrimination as a result of being different, a stark comparison to the sameness and

belonging spoken of earlier. All of the participants spoke of experiencing racism and discrimination as a result of being Black. Cassandra expressed her surprise at being addressed in a derogatory manner because of her skin colour:

I remember being called names as well. I remember we had a neighbour whose relatives came from Spain, and they used to lean over the fence and call us something in Spanish for "nigger". And again, the shock of it when it actually happened, I was like, "hey, they are talking about me [ ] they are saying something discriminatory about me because of the colour of my skin".

Likewise, Priscilla also spoke about her experience of being a Black person in the wider society where segregation and racist taunts seemed to be commonplace:

I am from a time where the signs in clubs would say "no Blacks allowed" [ ] and I remember, you know, "Black bastard" used to be an expression that was used quite a lot when I was really younger. (Priscilla)

Racism and discrimination seemed to be some of the primary sources of oppression for the participants in this study. Combined with the added oppression of sexism, these participants knew what it meant and how it felt to exist in a minority status, and the difficulties associated with it. It is important to consider this in light of the added minority status that these participants acquired as a result of their sexual preferences. Much has been made of the fact that the Black community plays a large role in acting as a buffer against racism and discrimination in the wider society (Greene, 1994; Icard, 1986). It seems that this protective

mechanism may have been lost, or at least greatly reduced when these participants embraced their lesbian identities as evidenced in comments made later on.

Intra-racial discrimination

Whilst a majority of the participants described their experiences of sameness and belonging within the Black community, a few of the participants also spoke about the sense of difference they felt within it. It seems that the very factor which set them apart from individuals in the wider society seemed to incur discrimination from their own group members. Often called intra-racial discrimination, this form of prejudice seems to contradict the existence of sameness and belonging that other participants spoke of. The concept of intra-racial discrimination as described by the participants was especially prevalent in regard to skin colour. One participant described an experience she had with her own family members concerning the difference in appearance between light-skinned and dark-skinned Black individuals:

> *And also there is this whole thing in... within the Black community ourselves with this whole light skin, dark skin, I remember when my daughter was born, I think her nose is totally fine, but my mom wanted to do this exercise to straighten her nose, and I said, "you need to leave that nose alone". Why is a straight nose a good nose? Because White people have a straight nose and it's the whole way we see beauty. (Cassandra)*

Another participant spoke of the discrimination she experienced as a result of possessing 'White' attributes which seemed to affect her perception of herself as a Black individual:

> *I wasn't Black enough, I wasn't White anyway, but I wasn't Black enough for some Black people. (Mechelle)*

This was echoed by another participant who further commented on the absence of belonging she experienced as a result of being light-skinned. This contradicted statements made by other participants who expressed a sense of pride in the belonging that members of the Black community had demonstrated to them:

> *I did have issues that I was lighter than everybody else, my whole family is darker than me [ ] that was a bit weird [   ] I didn't belong. (Harlow)*

The experience of intra-racial discrimination clearly demonstrates a facet of the complexity of holding a Black identity. Whilst other participants bemoaned the racism and discrimination in the wider society, these participants additionally had to deal with discrimination from within their own community, the very community with whom they shared a sameness, the community that encouraged belonging and the community they regarded as the primary reference point for their racial identity development. However, it is interesting to note that although participants in this study spoke of experiencing intra-racial discrimination, this did not stop them from identifying as Black individuals, and later on, when they started to develop a lesbian identity, their Black self-image was a component of their identity conflict. In fact, it served as another facet of frustration, because for most of these participants, the absence of belonging within the Black community because of their skin colour fostered a continuous need and attempt to be accepted by the Black community. However, this desired acceptance may have been averted by a lesbian identity which may have further alienated them and further differentiated them from other Black individuals**.**

Experience of growing up as a Black female

All the participants in this study spoke at great length about their experience of growing up as females in their respective environments. The construction of their gender identity seemed to be influenced by a variety of factors - these included racial/cultural influences in the form of messages from the Black community, and messages and experiences from the wider society. Their race/racial identity (as discussed in the previous section) played a major part in their gender identity development: therefore, their gender identity development was not merely about their progression into womanhood, it was primarily about their development as Black women.

Transition into womanhood: Constructs of Black female identity

Participants in this study spoke of the values that were associated with the development of a female identity. Most of these values were very specific to the development of the Black female identity and included values of strength and responsibility and traditional values which had been passed down through generations of the Black community.

Importance of mental strength and responsibility

Participants spoke of particular values which shaped the development of their gender identity. Specifically in the Black community, there was a particular emphasis placed on instilling the value of strength as this seemed to be representative of who a Black woman should be. Several participants spoke of the messages they received about being a strong Black

woman and the effect it had on their perception of their Black female identity. For example, Cassandra recalled how her mother constantly reiterated the importance of strength in a Black woman:

I remember my mother saying, [   ] you know you have to be strong as Black women. (Cassandra)

She went on to explain that although strength was a value which was often synonymous with Black women, vulnerability was also important, but this was not an encouraged characteristic in Black female development:

I think as a Black woman, yes it is very important, yes we are strong, I can stand up and say I am a strong Black woman, but there is going to have to be a time where you can't be strong, there is also going to be a time when things can get to you, when you are going to need a shoulder to cry on, where you need to express your pain. (Cassandra)

This sentiment was echoed by another participant who recounted the messages she received about being a strong and independent Black woman:

You had to be strong [ ] there were expectations in somehow being stronger, being independent. (Wanda)

Another participant described the display of stoicism from the female figures in her family and explained that these displays encouraged strength within her that she would later pass on to her own daughter:

> *'My parents made me strong both physically and mentally. [ ] My mom, she had four kids. That was the reason why my dad had to respect her, she kept that house going, she made sure her children got up and wore clean clothes to school, so that was that strong African woman. Have you ever heard of Yaa Asantewaa? A warrior, yeah? That's my mom, my mom is a strong Black woman. (Amber)*

Participants in this study also spoke of the responsibility they had to carry as Black women. Many spoke of the fact that as developing Black women, they were encouraged to carry a lot of responsibility - for themselves as women, for their families and for their communities. One participant summed this up in her feelings about being encouraged to have this sense of responsibility:

> *You have got to carry the whole world on your shoulders. (Mechelle)*

This was echoed by Cassandra who felt that she carried this sense of responsibility over the course of her life and how this was a normal occurrence in the Black community because it was part of her female identity development:

> *I've always had to be the strongest woman, do everything for everyone and kind of sometimes ignoring yourself. (Cassandra)*

Lisa also spoke of the sense of responsibility she felt she was obliged to take on as a Black female, as it was something her mother had done as a Black woman, and thus formed an important part of her female identity development:

I just noticed that I was….it felt to me like there was a lot of responsibility coming towards me. [ ] for me it just felt like I was going to get all the burdens that my mom got. (Lisa)

Hooks (1989) stated that whilst Black men are often professed to be the head of the family unit and the strong resilient provider, it is the Black woman who facilitates these ideals. The ideals of strength and responsibility that the participants speak of appeared to be synonymous with historical perceptions of Black women who exemplified strength and tenacity in the face of racism, sexism, slavery and wars dating back hundreds of years. For instance, in her research article about Black women's identities, Bush (2000) highlighted how tales from the slavery era often commented on women's strength and muscularity and the way they competed with men in 'enduring toil, hardship and privations'(p.767). For the participants in this study, the strength developed was not simply a characteristic of who they were as females, but also extended to their overall identity as Black individuals. However, it is also important to comment on their sense of responsibility. The comments of the participants in this study suggest they felt the need to represent the Black community in a positive light as Black individuals, and carry the responsibility of being Black women, both within the wider and immediate communities. Given past research, one might hypothesise how this sense of responsibility affected the development of a lesbian identity (Stokes and Petersen, 1998, Cochran and Mays, 1994) which suggests that Black lesbians violate Black female ideals by misrepresenting the community and diminishing their sense of responsibility.

Feminine values: Roles and Skills

For many of the participants, a large part of their gender identity development placed emphasis on the assimilation of traditional 'female' values such as cooking, cleaning, maintaining a family and home and being a lady. Three participants described the experiences they had as young women growing up in Black families; they were taught early on that it was important to look after oneself, be strong yet ladylike and be an efficient Black woman:

I mean getting to grips with the learning how to look, learning how to wash your knickers, I mean all the good grounding you should get as an African woman., you know, knowing how to wash your cuffs, and the neck of your shirt…cleaning, the expectations of you as a woman, it was very much a stereotypical thing, what a woman should be or what a young girl should be. (Amber)

My mom, I learnt to cook from a young age, she dragged me into the kitchen, by an early age, so by the age of … 8, 9, 10, I was cooking proper meals…in the kitchen boys are out there playing, girls are in the kitchen [   ] marriage….education, family, tolerance and not to be outspoken. (Paige)

You know you have to be a good wife, and the woman is supposed to cook and clean, and the woman is supposed to be in the kitchen, make sure you get the chores done. (Harlow)

One participant described the messages she received about where females stood in society, and what was expected from them because they were female:

Girls do this, guys do that, girls have to be more careful, girls should be handy around the house, got to be a good girl. (Priscilla)

This was echoed by another participant who noticed inequality in her household with regard to who did the chores, who looked after the house and who ran errands:

We all gave my mom and him a lot about why he doesn't do housework, and why he doesn't go shopping, why he didn't do the dishes, number of things and she was like you are a girl child, you should be doing these things because you are a girl child. (Cassandra)

These comments are reflective of research which suggests that individuals internalise their conceptions of masculinity and femininity from their culture; therefore, characteristics considered to be masculine or feminine depend on one's race or culture (Harris, 1994, 1997; Pettigrew, 1964; Wade, 1996). By necessity, Black women's labour has been pivotal to the economic survival of the Black family; therefore, Black women's definitions of womanhood have expanded beyond traditional notions of femininity to include hard work, perseverance, self-reliance, tenacity, resistance, and sexual equality (Collins, 2004). As a result, Black girls have been socialised with both traditional gender roles (e.g., care and nurturance) and non-traditional gender roles, e.g., worker, financial provider (Ward, 1995).

Expectations

As Black females, participants in this study had certain expectations placed on them which fell in line with the perception of who a Black woman should be and what a Black woman should represent. This included the expectations of femininity, motherhood and marriage.

Femininity

Another important component of Black female identity development seemed to revolve around the encouragement of femininity. Participants in this study described experiences where they were encouraged to be feminine by dressing and acting in a certain way. A majority of the participants seemed to rebel against these expectations as they preferred to be tomboyish, as described by Priscilla and Paige:

Whereas dresses and all that kind of thing, I tried very hard, I tried very hard not to be in them. I wasn't a girlie girl in any case.[ ] It was just so funny, so my mom wanted a girlie girl and I wasn't it, she used to give me bows and dresses ad there were periods I went through to try and please her. (Priscilla)

I was always the tomboy from hell, always climbing trees, running around and never ever into makeup or fancy dresses[ ] my mom, they were like you have to behave like this , or you have to, my mom was always making me wear high heels, there was always dresses and makeup , I always had jewellery from my mom [ ] jewellery, silk, gold, gold, massive chains, my hair was always being hot brushed. (Paige)

Another participant expressed her hatred of having to adopt these particular feminine qualities as she was more comfortable engaging in more 'boyish' activities and acting more 'masculine':

Wear dresses? I hated that. [ ] No I didn't like dresses at all. Sit at the table, cross your legs, sit like a lady, straighten your back. Such a bother [ ] None of the girls could find me to play dolly house or anything to that effect. I was playing prince of thieves, climbing trees and stuff like that. (Harlow)

These comments are reflective of Bem's (1984) gender schema theory that proposes that individuals' thoughts and feelings about gender influence their response to culturally prescribed socialisation practices. Bem (1984) theorised that gender-typed (masculine male and feminine female) individuals are more likely than non-gender-typed individuals to be responsive to cultural gender prescriptions. Accordingly, gender-typed individuals are likely to evaluate themselves in terms of traditional stereotypes, which define the gender "appropriateness" of attitudes and behaviour (Bem, 1984). Each of the gender roles (gender-typed masculine or feminine, androgynous) has implications for psychological well-being, which can vary for members of different racial/ethnic groups (Bem, 1984).

The need to fulfil the role of motherhood

According to participants in this study, there was particular emphasis placed on the importance of motherhood during the course of Black female identity development. Participants were encouraged to fulfil this role, in fact, for some of them it was an expectation that they would marry and bear children, and this was one of the most important components in the makeup of a Black female. For one participant, generations of women before her had

embraced motherhood and encouraged the same need in her to be a mother and make her family and community proud:

> *I think I kind of looked at my sisters as well, and saw how they were as women, how they were mothers to their children. (Cassandra)*

This was shared by another participant who also embraced motherhood as her mother and grandmother had done before her. In spite of the absence of men in their lives, they were carrying out one of the idealised roles of a Black woman:

> *The whole thing from my parents was about marriage and family from my birth family, it wasn't so much about them telling me anything, it was about seeing the situation. My mother wasn't married, and she had two children from two different men. [ ] so I kind of followed the pattern, I had, I did get children*. (Mechelle)

She also talked about how her construction of motherhood represented the exemplification of the of her grandmother's actions:

> *My grandmother was the matriarch of the family. For me she was very strong in that sense. (Mechelle)*

Two participants recounted the direct messages they received about womanhood and motherhood-

> *I felt the messages were that [ ] I should have children (Priscilla)*

And Paige:

> *Interviewer: Do you remember the messages you received in regards to your perceptions about the future as a girl?*
>
> *Paige: [ ] Family. Motherhood.*

However, one participant expressed her dislike for motherhood, even though it was a role which was consistently promoted within her household and community. For her, there were many aspects of Black womanhood that she enjoyed and adopted, but motherhood was not one of them:

> *I think I will continue to enjoy being a woman. I don't know any different and the things that come with being a woman and there were stereotypical things [   ] no, now motherhood I didn't enjoy and never ever wanted children. (Amber)*

Marriage

Participants in this study also recounted the messages they received about marriage. Alongside motherhood, it seemed that marriage was a great expectation of the Black women in this study and held an important place in their Black female identity development. Marriage was an important cultural cornerstone, linked to the unity of the Black community. One participant recalled the messages she received about marriage; it was reiterated over and over again as an important component of her makeup as a Black woman:

> *It was the same messages of getting married, having children, basically getting married. (Mechelle)*

This seemed to be the same experience of Wanda who also spoke of the messages she received about marriage:

> *I knew then that young women were getting the messages that they would marry. I knew that would be everything.*

One participant described her experience of repeatedly being introduced to potential partners:

> *I mean at [ ] parties they used to introduce us, and this was a lot on my younger, but I remember being introduced to people that were studying for their law degree and things like that. (Amber)*

Amber also spoke of the importance of marriage in the African culture and how this was lauded as a rite of passage and a true representation of respectable males and females:

> *It is very rare that you would see a Ghanaian woman who is not married to somebody [ ] man and woman stay together [ ] My parents [ ] They both went and had children at the right time, did the whole getting married thing.*

However, the concept of marriage was not promoted in the cultures and families of all the participants. Two participants spoke of how achieving a good education took precedence over marriage. Dana spoke of the disappointment her father felt when she married at a young age:

> *I got married quite young and I think that a big disappointment to my father because I didn't go to university, I chose to get married and my father thought that was terrible*

[ ] I wasn't brought up to be a female in that sort of stereotyped way that your place is to be married etc. That was not an encouragement in our household at all. [ ] but I know the expectations were that we would go to university.

This was echoed by Wanda who spoke of the messages she received from her mother regarding marriage:

I knew then that young women were getting the messages that somehow they would marry. I knew that would be everything. My mother suggested I would marry, and that was incidental [ ] but that what was important was that I get a decent education.

The reactions and thoughts from these participants regarding marriage and motherhood are mixed, but what seems to be present in a majority of the experiences recounted is the expectation from their families and the Black community that they procreate and continue the family/community line. A majority of gender models acknowledge the influence that race and community attitudes have on gender identity formation. Bush (2000) suggests that motherhood in particular was one of the ways in which Black women developed an identity since, 'identity came primarily through motherhood and in relationship to the deeper structures of family and kin which cohered African societies' (p.780). Drawing from some of the comments in this sections, it could be ascertained that these women saw marriage, and motherhood in particular as a way to cement their identification as Black women, however, one might wonder how these ideals and concepts fit with a lesbian identity, which may be seen as a violation of the underlying components of Black womanhood**.**

Representing the Black race

Participants previously spoke about the fact that as Black individuals, they had to be ambassadors for the Black community. This expectation was reiterated during the course of their female development. As Black women, they were expected to represent the community in a positive light and uphold the positive image of their families in any role they existed in - be it mother, daughter, or sister. Wanda summed this up in her description of her experience and the messages she received:

But what was important was that I get a decent education, I was able to care for my own children, that I wasn't dependent on any man. You know, that I looked after the reputation of the family and behaved decently. And all of that was important because I was a girl.

As a result of this, she felt that she had a responsibility as a Black woman to present the Black community, and especially Black women, in a positive light:

I felt responsible for Black women. As a Black woman, it was important that I was a decent role model and that what I did and how I was perceived reflected on all Black women.

It is interesting that the expectation of positive representation of the Black community is further reiterated during the course of Black female identity development. This may have its roots in the negative connotations that were historically associated with Black females, which included stereotypical terminology Black women were highly gendered and clustered around contradictory representations, particularly the 'Sable Venus', 'She Devil' and passive

'Drudge'(Bush, 2000; Collins, 2000; Smith, 1982). For a long time, perceptions of laziness, sexualised beings and child bearers have been embedded in the general illustration of Black women, hence the need to dispute these negative claims and perceptions.

Construction of identity in wider society (Double Jeopardy)

Although the construction of their Black female identity depended greatly on the guidance and knowledge of the Black community (which also consisted of their families), it is within the wider community that participants in this study gained further knowledge about their place in society. They described their experiences of sexism and racism and how these affected their female identity development and their perception of their womanhood. Amber spoke of her initial positive Black female development and how this changed when she experienced a double minority status within the wider community:

> *I dealt with racism, prejudice, I dealt with fascist pigs, I still liked being a Black woman, but I realised it came at a price.*

Lisa spoke of the racism and sexism she experienced in the workplace and how her status as a Black woman determined that she was destined for failure because she was perceived to be a double minority:

> *...Everybody kind of looks down on you, because obviously they expect you to fail, they don't particularly want you in the workplace because they think you are untrusting.*

Another participant described feeling objectified as a result of her race and gender:

I feel that being a Black woman in this society, I feel quite sexualised in this society[ ] sometimes people have a certain image about Black women that is quite sexualised, and they objectify women as well, and that is how I feel. (Cassandra)

Wanda spoke of her participation in various causes in order to address the inequality she experienced as a Black woman:

I could just see conferences and events and things, and a few Black women and us talking about being marginalised and talking about us not being heard [ ] I'm talking about women's earnings, not having control of our sexuality.

Wanda and Mechelle spoke about the messages they received about existing as Black women within the wider community. They both alluded to the high expectations that were set for them as a result of their marginalisation:

The messages I got from the wider community [ ] If anything were slightly higher, I think [ ] we were going to be women and therefore, there were all these things we had to be good at[ ] You had to be strong. (Wanda)

It was the same messages [ ] Getting a job, it wasn't like pursuing a career. You carry the whole world on your shoulders, And ummm....that's enough. There isn't going to be a better way. (Mechelle)

These comments suggest that as Black females, these participants were already oppressed because of their gender and their race. Several researchers (e.g. Greene, 2000;

Gibson et al, 2007; Bowleg et al, 2004, Beale, 1970) have commented on the experience of Black women living in a racist and sexist society, termed as double jeopardy. It is important to reflect on this in light of the development of a lesbian identity which placed these individuals in yet another marginalised category. This will be discussed in the next section.

Experiences of Lesbian Identity Development

For many participants in this study, the development of a lesbian identity began very early on in their sexual identity development. There seemed to be awareness that heterosexuality was not a natural path or identity that these participants felt comfortable affiliating with. Many spoke of the initial feelings they experienced. For some, these feelings were unexplainable but seemed familiar. For others the feelings seemed alien and wrong, and they were quick to suppress their urges and desires. There seemed to be several factors which prevented certain participants from pursuing a lesbian identity. These included messages from the Black community, religious beliefs, admonishments from their family and internalised homophobia, to name a few. For all the participants, whether they initially chose to address their feelings or not, it was the beginning of a journey which comprised of discovering, evolving and for some, various degrees of difficulty.

Developing a lesbian identity

Initial Identification/Awareness

Participants spoke of the initial feelings they experienced in relation to other females. For some, this evoked confusion and dismay, while for others it felt like a natural occurrence and

gave meaning to their existence and individuality and to the questions they had regarding their feeling of difference. Cassandra spoke of the confusion she experienced when she became aware of the feelings she had developed for her female friend:

I think I had this confusion about how I was feeling about the other girls in school...And I had a best friend [ ] I was absolutely in love with her, not really knowing why [ ] maybe it was a phase not knowing I was gay, so again I was very confused about that.

Wanda spoke of her initial dismay when the realisation that she was attracted to women first arose:

I can remember being dismayed when I realised I was attracted to girls, because I thought perhaps I was turning into a boy, and I really didn't want to be a boy [ ] That was dreadful. I thought, "shit - this is dreadful".

Two participants spoke of their initial encounters with women and described the anticipation they felt, and how natural it felt for them to be attracted to these individuals. For example, Priscilla spoke of certain feelings being evoked when she had an initial encounter with her teacher, it felt different to previous encounters she has had with the opposite sex:

I have always felt [ ] I can remember when I was like five, [ ] I can remember Marilyn Monroe sitting down watching television and thinking "ok" (laughs). And just like those experience, I can remember at school, the American supply teacher put me in her lap, and I was like, "ooohhh" [ ] so you know there is something to be said for that, I would be with men and not really feel anything.

However, for some participants, although the initial awareness was there, several factors prevented them from pursuing these feelings straight away. One participant spoke about her religious upbringing and how this had a direct effect on her discomfort with the initial feelings she had for her friend. Although she couldn't dispel her feelings, she felt it was wrong, and as such, developed defence mechanisms in order to prevent herself from pursuing them:

> *But Jane is what made school worth it, but she is also the person I would say...I would... at the time, I didn't understand why I liked this person so much, but I knew that I fancied her. [ ] I didn't like the feeling I had of fancying Jane [ ] because it was wrong and I go to church every Sunday. You know, that's not right, how could another girl fancy another girl? You go to church and it's Adam and Eve [ ] so yeah, it was wrong, but I just couldn't help that. (Amber)*

Three participants spoke of the messages they received about heterosexuality and the expectations that were placed upon them as women. As a result, pursuing their same-sex feelings was not an option, or something that they felt comfortable enough to try. Dana spoke of her experience:

> *In retrospect, I always sort of had crushes on girls in school. But there was never... not an option, there was never any consideration in my mind of that being sexual, or pursuing it as something sexual. You went out with boys, and that is where you had sex. And that is what everybody did, and that is what I thought I was supposed to be doing.*

Priscilla reiterated this in her description of the management strategies she adopted in order to deal with her initial feelings. She had been brought up in a household and a community where

homophobic slurs were commonplace, and in her mind, pursuit of these feelings and urges was not an option she could consider:

> *I was like hiding [ ] I suppose being feminist, because that is the only way I knew how to deal with it, was not to be this way or that way[ ] kind of how I dealt with it was not deal with it, but to suppress it.*

She also spoke of the fear of losing her mother's love if she decided to pursue these feelings:

> *About my sexuality, my biggest fear was that my mother wouldn't love me anymore, I know she definitely wanted this girlie girl who she could comb her hair and vice versa and be that close because she never had that with her mother.*

Cassandra spoke of how the expectation of marriage and the messages she had received about her femininity and her future prevented her from exploring her feelings around her sexual identity:

> *Well when I was (age omitted) I met my husband. He was ten years older than me, now even though at that age I knew I was gay, I went along with it.*

For many participants, the earlier messages of femininity, marriage, motherhood and representation of their families and communities seemed to have an adverse effect on their willingness to pursue their initial feelings of attraction for certain female individuals. Suppression and conformity seemed to be a consistent defence mechanism used by these participants, and this reflects research which suggests that family, community and religion are

primary sources of emotional support and referral sources for many racial/ethnic minorities. However, a strong anti-gay and lesbian sentiment has also been identified within families and religious communities of Black women (Greene, 1997; Parks, Hughes and Matthews, 2004). It follows that these may have been conscious or subconscious impediments for the exploration of the initial feelings experienced by some of the participants in this study. Additionally, during the development of gender and racial identities, it was clear the family and cultural ideals contributed largely to the shaping and successful integration of these identities. The participants spoke of messages that were passed on to them, of the knowledge they acquired about their history and their roots. This is in direct comparison to the described experiences here, where participants spoke of confusion and a sense of wrongdoing, but could not turn to the community who had been a prominent source of information in helping them to develop their Black and female identities.

Messages (Black Community and Wider Society)

Participants also spoke of the messages they received about homosexuality and how this adversely affected their initial feelings and burgeoning lesbian identity. Much of what they spoke about seemed to be tied in to messages that they had received about their female identities, i.e. the expectations and values of a Black woman and hetero-sexism. Paige spoke of her experience:

> *I felt that the messages were that I should be married, I should have children and I felt that well, at that point, I didn't, and the other messages I picked up about my sexuality was that it was going to be hard.*

Dana spoke of the secrecy or the non-acknowledgement of homosexuality during the course of her upbringing, and how the absence of this discourse led her to initially dismiss her feelings as she did not know what they where or where they came from:

I didn't think something, this thing called lesbians and women loving other women was not something that was part of, I don't know, it was not something that I ever knew about , it wasn't something that was discussed either in corners or anywhere, it was just not part of my vocabulary.

These comments about the lack of information regarding sexuality and the message that embracing a lesbian identity would entail a difficult journey seems to reflect research which suggests that hetero-sexism is paramount in the Black community and the wider society. Collins (2000) suggests that 'the ideological dimension of hetero-sexism is embedded in binary thinking that deems heterosexuality as normal and other sexualities as deviant'. She also suggests Black females are more likely to receive messages about the normality of heterosexuality and the abnormality of homosexuality, because homosexuality is constructed as constituting an abnormal sexuality that becomes pathologised as the opposite of heterosexuality. Therefore, a lesbian identity is presumed to be deviant and abnormal, and as such, may be seen as a violation of Black female identity.

Embracing a lesbian identity

Experience of Disclosure

For many of the participants in this study, disclosing their sexuality was a major undertaking. There seemed to be a myriad of feelings that were entangled in taking this step - fear, anticipation, excitement and a need to declare their individuality. Cassandra spoke of her mother's reaction when she decided to disclose her sexuality:

> *I reflected about my childhood. I reflected about everything, I reflected, I did a damn good job reflecting and I decided that needed to tell them the truth, and also my mom was pretty shocked.*

Similarly Harlow described the moment she told her mother and the reaction which ensued:

> *I am like, "this is who I am, and you either take me the way I am because I am your daughter. Ummm...you know, I am just a lesbian, I like girls." She was like, "I have never tried it", I say, "I am not asking you to try it. I am just saying I am comfortable and happy with the way I am, Do not try to find me any boyfriends because I will beat them".[ ] She was still having issues with that.*

Another participant, Wanda, described her disclosure experience. Unlike Cassandra and Harlow's, hers happened without plan or caution, and certainly without intention. And unlike Cassandra and Harlow's experiences, Wanda's mother had an adverse reaction:

How did she find out? She walked in, not on me and a lover. I was painting a banner, and she walked in furious, absolutely furious [ ] she was screaming, look at the shame you've brought on me.

Reactions to disclosure varied, but they certainly had an impact on relationships with family and members of the community. More than half of the participants spoke of the negative effect disclosure had on relationships with family members and friends, and also on themselves. Amber described how her long period of self-reflection had prompted her to take the big step of starting her sexual identity journey. She spoke of disclosure to her friends:

I told them, [ ] "This is how I am going to live my life."(She) was so upset, because she is very religious, and we sort of stopped talking for some years [ ] That's where the tolerance and understanding stopped, with my friends.

And to her mother:

My mom was possessed. The devil took her up that night, because she didn't go to work. She jumped up [ ] she dropped down to the floor, she said I need holy water. She brought out her bible, she was praying, she was on the floor, on the floor. This was my mom. On the floor. Distressed. Very distressed.

Mechelle also spoke of how her experience of disclosure to her friends put a strain on their relationships:

Those that I have told, I can feel some distance between us. Because now the conversations change, you know, my straight girlfriends, when we are talking, they want to talk about men and stuff. And that's...I have nothing to say.

Wanda and Jennifer described the effect their disclosure had on her relationship with their mothers:

It resulted in me being estranged from my mother for a couple of years, which was devastating, but I was determined, I mean I was the woman she had made me to be. (Wanda)

My mom read my diary and she actually came to my house [ ] so we had quite a big showdown and [ ] she was trying to fight me. (Jennifer)

However, negative reactions were not the norm for all the participants. Amber and Priscilla spoke of the positivity and acceptance they received from some of the people they chose to disclose to:

And I said, well I have told you I have got something to tell you. I am a lesbian. And she burst out laughing. She laughed so much, she said she started to wet herself. She says, I don't care what you bloody are know, you are still the same. (Amber)

When it came down to it, and I just realised, it came down to my responsibility, because this is my life. And if it meant losing my mother, because that was the ultimate fear. But

she has been more open than she has ever been [ ] it's through her that I have learnt, I have come to understand me coming out meant she had to come out. (Priscilla)

These accounts depict a range of reactions and decisions concerning disclosure, but what seems to be common among most of the participants is the feeling that they no longer suppress their sexualities or maintain a facade. Although this did not apply to all participants, where it did, disclosure was the necessary first step in embarking on a sexual identity journey, one that was markedly different to the previously seamless journey they had undertaken as presumed heterosexuals. The variance in disclosure described by these participants is reflective of research which has explored the concept of disclosure from the viewpoint of ethnic minority lesbians and gay men. For instance, studies (Greene, 1998; Loiacano, 1989; Martinez &Sullivan, 1998; Rodriguez, 1996; Savin-Williams, 1996; Stokes & Peterson, 1998) suggest that disclosure may be complicated by cultural factors that operate to hinder or halt the process. Furthermore, cultural factors including the importance of family, traditional gender roles, conservative religious values, and widespread homophobia may lead many ethnic/racial minority individuals to experience difficulties in the formation and integration of a lesbian or gay sexual identity. On the other hand, other analysis (Morris & Rothblum, 1999) suggests that universal fear is not necessarily associated with disclosure, and in fact, ethnic minority individuals have been able to disclose their sexual identity without repercussions or negative consequence. This was reflected in the last two participant comments in this section.

Experience of Sameness/Difference

Difference

Participants in this study spoke of their movement from heterosexuality to homosexual identity and the initial fear they had about existing as Black lesbian women. The similarities they shared with the Black community seemed to be initially absent within the gay community. There seemed to be a lack of Black lesbians within the gay community, and they were certainly not visible within the Black community, a community they often used as a reference point. Amber spoke of her initial trepidation existing as a Black lesbian when she did not see any evidence of any others:

> *I came back and the fear of who on earth are you going to bloody tell, you are a Black woman, as far as I was concerned, I would have been the only Black woman ever to say she liked Black women.*

Cassandra reiterated this sentiment when she spoke of how different and alone she felt as a Black British lesbian woman and as a Black lesbian mother:

> *I was the only person in the family that was gay [ ] I thought I was the only one , didn't know who to go to, didn't know who to talk to, thought I was completely alone [ ] I really thought I was the only Black lesbian mother[ ] I realise that there are many Black lesbian mothers but how I saw myself was someone who is very strange, very alien.*

Lisa spoke of the difference she felt existing as a Black lesbian within the Black community and the wider society and the impact this had on her sense of self. She spoke earlier of wearing her racial identity with pride, but that pride being diminished in light of her disclosure as a Black lesbian:

But it was like, I went in there, and it felt like everybody was so, "shhh- don't say anything", and I was like, "ok", like it was a bad thing[ ] I was like, "ok". I'm not allowed to be proud of what I am kinda thing, but everybody else is?

Sameness

Some participants developed a sense of similarity when they were able to identify with other individuals who were experiencing or travelling on the same journey they had embarked on. One participant spoke of the sameness she felt when she was able to build a network of like individuals - both Black gay men and lesbians - and how this served as a positive catalyst for her transition from Black female to Black female lesbian:

I had a whole new set of friends from being a lesbian, I had the Black gay group, talking with Black gay men about how we were going to get kids and what we were going to do about that [ ] So in this one way I was completely alone, in that there was no one who was responsible for me, but on the other hand, I was completely buoyed up by the community. (Wanda)

Another participant spoke of the importance of visibility in validating her sense of sameness. She was able to seek out other Black lesbian and gay youth, and this made her feel like a

member of a community, much like she felt like a member of the Black community prior to her identification as a Black lesbian:

I had just started to identify as a lesbian and I started to go to youth project[ ] where I hung out with other lesbians and gays, and started to get more comfortable with the idea that, "yeah, this is me, there are other people like me, I'm not the only one". (Harlow)

This was supported by Dana who spoke of the validation she felt when she was able to identify a sense of sameness and similarity with other Black women who identified as lesbian:

I think that had a very positive effect really, because first of all they were Black women and they were lesbians, so I think it had a very positive effect in terms of confirming my own feelings[ ] validating myself[ ] there are lots of other people who were sort of dealing with the same issues, or even if they are different you can share them.

It is interesting that when speaking about their racial and gender identities, participants were more able to identify sameness with regard to the colour of their skin, racism, and cultural ideals. Although there was difference, the number of participants who commented on their difference in relation to the sexual identity as opposed to their racial identity was larger. Reasons cited for difference included the lack of visibility of Black lesbians in the wider and Black community, a dissipated sense of identification with heterosexual individuals, and a general feeling of loneliness. Smith (1996a) has suggested that one of the reasons for the lack of visible Black lesbians and the acknowledgement or acceptance from other Black women and the Black community may be due to the fact that heterosexuality is the only privilege that

Black males and females can possess without prejudice. However, the comments on sameness seem to suggest that identification of similarity with other lesbians had a positive effect on the development of a lesbian identity. This reflects research by Bowleg, Craig and Burkholder (2004) in which they suggested that the visibility of Black lesbians via retreats, support groups, etc, may enhance active coping and progression among Black lesbians because they can facilitate internal factors such as self esteem and lesbian identification, and external factors such as social support.

Exploration of Sexual Behaviours and relationships

Sexual Behaviours

Some of the participants in this study spoke of the sexual evolution they experienced when they decided to embrace their lesbian identity. Earlier experiences which were characterised by tentativeness, discomfort and fear experienced in relating to the opposite sex were overridden by the positive experiences that these participants described. Cassandra described the elation she felt at finally being able to enjoy a sexual experience:

> *Ummm, also, obviously, sexually, it is like a revolution for me...yeah it is, in terms of my sex life now, it is a lot more adventurous, it is a lot more exciting, it is something I do enjoy.*

Mechelle described comfort she felt with a woman, a feeling that had been absent in the relationships that she had had with her former male partners:

I mean I felt comfortable being with a woman, sexually, when we did make love [ ] it just felt right.

Lisa spoke of her confused experiences with men, and how she often felt that there was something missing and she also felt she had to play the role of the teacher. In adopting a lesbian identity, she discovered a side of her that had been untapped and undiscovered:

But like we were in her house, and I kissed her and it was like ok, I think that's when my freakiness just stemmed from there, kind of thing, I was like, "ok, doors have opened, what's next?"

Many participants recounted the excitement, discovery and comfort they felt in being able to explore the sexual aspect of their lesbian identity, in spite of the fear and difficulties they were described they were experiencing in trying to reconcile their multiple identities. This emerged as a positive aspect of their described journeys and appeared to cement their certainty that a lesbian identity was one that represented and defined them.

Racial preference of partner

The majority of participants in this study spoke about their preference for partners with a similar racial background. Although their reasons for this varied, there seemed to be a homogenous need for a sense of similarity within their relationships. Additionally, many saw similarity in a partner as a way to retain their ties to the Black community. Some participants spoke about the universal understanding that existed amongst Black females, and its important contribution to the existence of a healthy relationship. Most importantly, given some of the difficulties these women were experiencing, they suggested a Black lesbian partner would be

better prepared to relate to their journey as emerging lesbians. Amber described her need to retain a Black identity and how this could only be attained with a partner from a similar racial background:

You lose yourself. I don't care what anybody says, when you start going out with people who is not from the same race as yours, you have to...there is some part of you that you end up losing because you cannot be as radical as you want to be, you cannot talk about slavery, or that you were enslaved.

Mechelle elaborated on this statement, describing the special connection Black woman have, and how this was an attractive quality in a partner:

So for me as a woman lover, I would prefer to be with a woman who is Black [ ] I think the connection between Black women is very powerful.

Another participant commented on the fact that her upbringing fostered a feeling of difference from the Black community. When she disclosed her sexual identity, she tended to pick White females which seemed to be a direct manifestation of the disconnection she felt to the Black community. However, much like the other participants, having a White partner was not a comfortable decision as she felt it further distanced her from her racial community:

So almost all of my sexual partners were women, White, female, but White...ummm, so that didn't sit comfortably with me [ ] that was an extension, that feeling of feeling different from Black women generally. (Wanda)

It is important to note that while the preference for a relationship with a woman with a similar ethnic background applied to a majority of the participants, it was not a universal one. Greene (2000) has suggested that the race or ethnicity of the partner of a Black lesbian can greatly influence the dynamics of the relationship as well as its visibility or invisibility and how it is perceived by the Black family and community. She argues that while lesbian relationships are generally unsupported outside of the lesbian community, some women may find support for their relationship if they are able to maintain a level of invisibility. Given this dilemma, it is understandable that many participants sought relationships with individuals of a similar background, given the rejection they may have felt from their families and the community. Having a sense of similarity and identification with an individual who may understand their struggles seemed like a plausible approach.

Triple Jeopardy: Identity Conflict

It's triple jeopardy being a Black woman, and being gay. (Paige)

As evidenced in this study, the development of a Black identity and a Black female identity preceded the development of a lesbian identity, even though a majority of the participants had an early awareness of same sex feelings and desires. What seemed to be problematic for a majority of participants in this study was the interaction of a lesbian identity with other identity components, and the fact that their identification as Black lesbian women placed them in a triple minority category. As Black women, they described their experiences of oppression as Black individuals. In a majority of the experiences described, their lesbian identities incurred oppression from the Black community, wider society and even the gay

community. It cannot be denied that the interaction of these three identity components had an impact on these women psychologically. They experienced homophobia as a result of their lesbian identities and also found that disclosure was a tentative decision which incurred negative or positive reactions, depending on the individual. The severity of identity conflict varied depending on each participant, but all experienced it at some point in their journey.

Impact of triple jeopardy

Psychological

A majority of participants experienced psychological difficulties as a result of a burgeoning lesbian identity. Many spoke of the fact that a lesbian identity was inherently incompatible with their other identity components, and as such, they struggled to reconcile them. They struggled with disclosure, and some spoke of the psychological impact of loneliness and isolation. Others spoke of the impact of other people's reactions to their identity. However, for a smaller number of the participants, positive disclosure and a subsequent successful assimilation of a lesbian identity through the use of various strategies had a positive psychological impact and promoted an increased sense of self worth. It should be noted, however, that for some of the participants, much like the sexual identity journey they embarked on, the psychological impact of triple jeopardy altered with time and changing factors. This is exemplified in comments by Cassandra, who spoke of the psychological difficulties she experienced when she initially disclosed her sexual identity. She spoke of the disappointment she felt in herself, largely because she saw her sexuality as the major contributing factor to the demise of her family unit:

The whole image of us being the perfect Black family and whole thing about Black women and Black women not staying together, yet we were, and the only reason we have broken up is because of my sexuality[ ] I think part of me was shut down. There is just something you just shut down, and I think part of me shut down, and I always used to say to my counsellor, it felt like I was breaking my soul in a lot of ways, or damaging myself in some ways, my inner self.

These psychological difficulties reduced with time. Cassandra also spoke of her current state of mind as a positive outcome of the journey she had taken. Although she was continuously experiencing triple jeopardy, she felt that integration of her Black, female and sexual identity had given her a clearer sense of who she was:

I think I am a far more confident person, I am very positive about the future, very clear about what I want, where I want to go.

Her sentiments were echoed by another participant who felt that the experience of triple jeopardy had allowed her to discover her true self identity:

I found myself. I found myself. (Mechelle)

Another participant also spoke of the coming to terms with her sexuality, and how she used the underlying messages she received regarding her Black identity to assimilate a lesbian identity. This allowed her to bypass a difficult psychological stage:

I knew I had my own self esteem and myself worth and the whole Blackness thing – pick yourself up and you can do it, so that's what I had. (Lisa)

More than half of the participants described the negative psychological impact they experienced. Reasons for this included a lack of a support network, lack of visibility of other Black lesbians to identify with, and an inability to reconcile their Black female and lesbian identities in a way that allowed them to be comfortable with whom they were. For example, Amber spoke of her experience as Black British Lesbian and the effect it had on her psychological well being:

Amber: I was feeling quite low at that stage because I had cut myself off from my friends and going to places which were predominantly heterosexual if you want to put it like that.

Interviewer: Is that because you thought you didn't feel you could identify with those things anymore?

Amber: I was looking for something, and it wasn't in those places.

Harlow also cited a lack of support or visibility in the Black and wider community of Black lesbians as some of the triggers for the onset of a low mood and subsequent suicide attempt:

Because I have been through some shit, where I have tried to kill myself, as a young woman, a young lesbian woman with nobody to identify with, so I know there are a lot of young gays and lesbians who go through that, whether they are taking drugs or they are being bullied by their families, and isolated by friends and you know and certain

things, and you try to think of ways to get out of it, and you either try and kill yourself

or you are completely out of it, or you run away and you are suffering.

Priscilla's psychological difficulties developed in another form, she described the use of drink to camouflage the negative psychological impact her sexual identity had on her:

It led to me drinking, I had issues around drink for two years, umm... I had to go out

every single week just to get drunk. (Priscilla)

Harlow and Priscilla's experiences were echoed by two other participants who knew of others who experienced similar negative psychological impact as they had. Harlow and Priscilla expressed despair over the fact that these individuals had such difficult experiences as a result of their combined identities:

You find a lot of lesbians have a lot of depression. Really bad depression, a lot of

psychological issues and it's because of all that. [ ] There is a lot of self harm, self

abuse I would call it, in various ways. All of those are because of the way, I believe,

society ostracises you and you know, you're being is kind of invalidated, so it's that

psychological impact on you, and you are in a constant state of anxiety because you

don't know when it is going to hit you next. (Dana)

There was a girl who killed herself two months ago [ ] she told one of her parents

about her sexuality and they said they would take her home [ ] and she killed herself.

(Paige)

These narratives reflect a critical point made by Smith (1989) that intersecting oppressions of sexuality, race and gender and class produce neither absolute oppressors nor pure victims. Participants suffered from various degrees of psychological impact. These narratives also lend credence to research which suggests that ethnic minority lesbians and gay men are more likely to suffer from psychological distress as a result of their oppressed status. Various studies found higher rates of major depression among Black lesbians and gay men (e.g. Gilman et al, 2001; Sandfort et al, 2001; Cochran & Mays, 2000b). However, there seems to be a scarcity of research that supports the notion that Black lesbians with multiple oppressed identities may still exhibit positive mental health functioning as displayed in the comments by some of the participants in this study. Their positive mental health functioning seems to suggest a greater resilience and the establishment of active coping skills that enable them to exist as Black lesbians despite their triple minority status.

On relationships with community/others

Triple jeopardy also seemed to have an impact on the participants' relationships with their family, their friends and their communities (both the Black and wider communities). A disclosure of a lesbian identity seemed to attract homophobia, non-acceptance and alienation. For most participants, this was difficult to deal with. One spoke of the isolation she felt as a result of disclosure:

I was scared because how I've lived my life you know was very much as a straight woman, and there is a difference. A clear difference. There was no support groups for me to go to, I needed...I had to go it alone. (Amber)

She also recounted the reaction she received from her ex-partner when she revealed her sexual orientation and how this affected their relationship

> *You know, he put his hand up in my face, put me up against the wall [ ] because his baby mother cannot be a lesbian. Not even lesbian because they do not use that word. It's "blood clut", "sodomite", "harlot", "king-rug", "a carpet muncher", everything, everything you can think of. [ ] Somebody who wanted to marry you, spend the rest of his dying days with you, I understood because if the shoe had been on the other foot [ ] but yeah, umm we stopped talking for nine years.*

This account is similar to Cassandra's. Although the response from those she disclosed to was not entirely negative, there was a definite transformation in the relationship she had with those who were close to her:

> *I still felt I had to tell him the truth, and I'm really glad I did, even though I know it has hurt him, and it has hurt my two oldest children as well. My son [ ] even though he is very laidback, and cool and everything, sometimes there is some underlying stuff going on, he is not ready to talk about yet.*

Other participants also spoke of severed relationships as a result of their disclosure:

> *Some people I sort of lost contact with because they made it clear they didn't want to know me when they found out [ ] I mean once people know that you are a lesbian they completely back off. Even in work situations, they find out and they sort of change their attitude towards you. (Dana)*

Yeah, yeah, it is positive. But when I say positive, they say, you, why didn't you tell me that, it's not an issue. But then they say, it is not an issue, you don't hear from them. (Mechelle)

Previous narratives regarding disclosure in this study revealed participants' fear of the impact their sexual orientation would have on their families, friends and communities, as well as the quality of their relationships with others. Research (Greene, 2000; Bowleg et al 2004) has suggested that one of the main contributing factors to minority stress is the breakdown of relationships between Black lesbians and the significant individuals in their lives. This may lead to guilt, low mood and isolation and may impact on the successful integration of a lesbian identity into the overall identity structure. Although this was not the case for all the participants in this study, a number of them revealed that severed relationships led them to develop and establish new ones; some turned to the gay community and found they hit other barriers in the form of racism and the absence of visible Black lesbians in the gay community.

Homophobia

As a result of the convergence of their multiple identities, many participants in the study were subjected to homophobia. The homophobia presented itself in vicious acts and verbal abuse and seemed to come primarily from the Black community. The homophobia seemed to be a true representation of oppression from both their own community, who had initially contributed to the shaping of their Black female identities and had equipped them to navigate racism, and from the wider society where they already felt doubly oppressed as a result of their Black and female identity components. One participant spoke about the fact that

she disclosed her identity in the wider society first because of a fear of perceived homophobia from her own community; the Black community.

> *People as a whole in the wider community came first, and then the Black community, because the Black community tends to be more homophobic than others[ ] some people I would look and I would say something or not, because of that fear of being called every name under the sun. I'm thick skinned, I've got rhinoceros skin, but I am still a human being. (Amber)*

This was reiterated by Dana, who reduced her contact with people in the Black community because of her experience of homophobia:

> *Umm the experience of homophobia in the Black community has always been an issue that it's like, I don't really mix with those people.*

Wanda spoke of her experience of mixing in the Black culture and actively raising Black consciousness in the Black community, only to be subjected to homophobic comments and actions:

> *And I said, well, what if I am a lesbian? And he said, "Just come out. Come out now." And he meant leave. [ ] A few times I would go and speak [ ]to go and raise the Black consciousness[ ] constantly people would have to walk me to my car.*

She attributed these homophobic acts to religion. Religion played a large role in many of the participants' upbringing, and the Black church seemed to be vocal about their teachings with regards to homosexuality*:*

> *I think most responses [ ] were couched in terms of, it's a sin, it's a sin, it's not natural, it's against God. You know most of it was couched in those terms*

Mechelle spoke of the homophobic messages she heard growing up, and as a result, she suppressed her identity in order not to incur homophobic comments or actions from the Black community*:*

> *Well you know, being a member of the Black race scene, so much negativity. I remember coming up, as a state of mind [ ] you know, all homosexuals should just be put at the bottom of the island and we burn them. I was like 24, and it didn't sit right with me [ ] so if I am honest, I suppressed a lot of myself because of the community.*

As Black British lesbians, these participants had already been subjected to racism which they revealed during the discussion of their Black identity. They had also been subjected to sexism by virtue of their female identity and these narratives give light to their experiences of homophobia, which seems to have stemmed mainly from the Black community. The roots of homophobia stem from many different avenues, historical references, cultural norms and social attitudes. Greene (1994) suggests that Black individuals may regard any sexual behaviour outside dominant or cultural norms as a negative reflection on the Black community as a whole, and this threatens their chances for the wider social acceptance of Black lesbians. Furthermore, acceptance of lesbian sexual orientations may be seen as inconsistent with the

dominant culture's ideal, therefore, lesbians may be experienced as an embarrassment by Black individuals who strongly identify with the dominant culture.

On other identity components

The impact of triple jeopardy also extends to other identity components. By the time most of the participants in this study had developed a lesbian identity, their racial and gender identities were already cemented in their identity structure. As a result, there was an unavoidable interaction of these three identity components. Even with eventual assimilation, participants spoke of the impact that triple jeopardy had on their new self-definition.

Black identity

Although the impact of a Black lesbian identity on the Black identity component varied from one participant to another, the responses were split three ways. For some participants, the Black identity had such a permanent place within their identity structure that it went unaffected. Others suggested that their Black identity had been strengthened as a result of their triple jeopardy status. The rest of the participants felt that their new found identity had a negative impact on their Black identity. The messages associated with a Black identity in terms of who a Black person should be seemed to contradict the ethos of a lesbian identity. This was stressed in a comment made by Amber:

.... being Black and being lesbian, [ ] the two don't necessarily go together.

This incompatibility was reiterated by Wanda who cited her Black identity as the reason for the delayed acknowledgement of her lesbian identity. For her, the reconciliation of her Black and lesbian identity seemed to be a questionable concept:

> *Being a Black woman slowed my coming out as a lesbian. It slowed down me embracing that. I think if I were White I would have been more tougher around that. [ ] It worried me a bit about being African; I wondered how I was going to reconcile all of that.*

Another participant spoke about how her Black identity impinged on the expression of her lesbian identity. All the messages she had received regarding homosexuality (primarily from the Black community) were seemingly negative, to the extent that she felt she had internalised the homophobic stance she had grown up with:

> *I think my Blackness became an issue, more in the gay culture because I felt alienated to the expression of gaynesss. (Priscilla)*

These comments directly contrasted those made by other participants who felt that their Black identities were strengthened or unaffected by their triple minority status. One participant pointed to the fact that her identity was broad and self controlled. She felt her identity was not contingent on the box others put her in:

> *It's got to be broader than that. It is about defining myself. I am Black regardless of what you think of me. (Mechelle)*

Paige and Mechelle spoke of how their Black identity remained unaffected during the course of their journey to a reconciled lesbian identity. Mechelle further comments on how her Black identity helped in the reconciliation process:

There is one thing I will say about my Blackness. It has never been an issue about anything, it's always been a second skin. [ ] I mean I hear people talk about how it affected them, but to me it has always been positive. (Paige)

I think it helped. I don't think it hindered me. Because I always knew what I wanted, but I never, I just never actually went for it. (Mechelle)

Breakwell's (1986) threatened identity model suggests that identity is created within a specific social context in a particular historical period. Structurally, social context is comprised of interpersonal networks, groups and social category memberships and intergroup memberships. The content of identity is assimilated from these structures and generates roles to be adopted or beliefs or values to be accepted. In the case of the participants in this study, their membership of the Black community meant that they adopted certain structures, roles, values and beliefs as showed in the narratives earlier on in this section. However, a threat to identity occurs when assimilation, accommodation and evaluation are unable to comply with the principles of continuity, distinctiveness and self esteem. The comments here suggest that a lesbian identity is likely to be incompatible with the pre-existing components of identity, i.e. race, and that this may pose a threat to identity, or slow down the process of reconciliation. For participants who described a non-impact of their triple minority status, Greene (2000) attributes this to their ability to transfer their experiences, coping skills and resilience as Black females (a double minority status) in order successfully to reconcile a Black female identity.

This in turn enables the interaction and integration of a lesbian identity component into a personal identity structure.

Female identity

Participants in this study described the messages they received with regard to their female identity. Many spoke of the premise that a lesbian identity was seen by some in their community as a rejection of their Black female identities, and in fact compromised the definition of a Black female. However, all the participants in this study stated that their female identity still held great importance for them, and therefore, a lesbian identity did not impact negatively on their female identity because, essentially, they saw themselves as Black females, regardless of their sexual preference. Wanda, Dana and Lisa sum this up in their statements on the topic:

> *I can't imagine being anything else. I could never have imagined being anything else. (Wanda)*

> *They didn't change, a new perspective came to mind kind of thing [ ] it didn't hinder my womaness. (Lisa)*

> *I still define myself in the same way, as a Black woman and as a lesbian. (Dana)*

Harlow's experience was slightly different; even though she still identified as a female, she felt that she had become more aware of a suppressed masculine identity. However, she still valued her femininity and acknowledged the importance of being a Black female:

I started to identify more as maleish. I am very much more in touch with my male side than my feminine side. [ ] If I had the chance, or money, I would change. Because I feel more masculine, I don't feel feminine. [ ] But I wouldn't want to lose my female identity, because that's what makes me the gentle woman I am today[ ]I still identify as a Black woman.

Motherhood

Participants in this study also spoke about the impact of identity conflict via the context of motherhood. Identification as a lesbian did not diminish the desire for children, and many of the participants saw their roles as mothers to be an integral part of their lesbian identity. As discussed earlier, one of the reasons cited for opposition to Black lesbians is their perceived inability to procreate and continue the family line (Greene, 2000). Regardless of this, two of the participants embraced their lesbian identities after they had conceived, and for the others, heterosexuality was seen as a means to experience motherhood, regardless of their true sexual identity. Mechelle spoke about her urge for motherhood, and she achieved this despite her knowledge of a burgeoning lesbian identity:

I wanted to have another child, and I was very keen, so I selected this guy. He was totally clinical, a bit of a research project actually. I thought, "right, he'll do, I'll have sex and that is it. I don't want to know." And that was it. Cold and technical and then I got my daughter. I got what I wanted.

Another participant reiterated the homophobic message she had received with regards to lesbians and motherhood. For her, this was an initial factor that deterred her from acknowledging her lesbian identity:

Definitely the message that I should not have children because it was cruel and it was sick [ ] to a certain age I did actually believe that within myself that there is something not quite right [ ] I'm not afraid and I don't care if I'm a certain lesbian, If I want to have children, then it has nothing to do with what I am doing in my bedroom. (Jennifer)

Wanda echoed this statement and spoke of the stance she took to disprove the notion that lesbians could not have children, or that it was improbable for them to do so:

If there is one thing in my life that I didn't get and I wanted and didn't sit easy with me, it was to have children. [ ] I wondered actually, quite early on, I wondered if I wanted to have children to prove something. When I was quite young, I think I almost wanted to have a child as a kind of political statement. Lesbians can have children.

It is interesting that in comparison to their racial identities, many participants seemed to demonstrate a successful interaction of their gender and sexual identity components. Their femininity and 'womaness' seemed to fit seamlessly with their sexual identity, despite research which might suggest otherwise. Some participants demonstrated, and indeed acknowledged, their gender identity through motherhood which directly contrasts with documented beliefs that a lesbian identity ultimately circumvents procreation. In the description of their experiences as Black females, great emphasis was placed on having children, and some of the participants in this study fulfilled this in spite of their lesbian identity, even if it meant using unconventional

methods to do so. The narratives here also defy the presumption that Black lesbians are out of touch with their femininity, and aspire to the male gender role (Greene, 2000). It is clearly evidenced here that these participants embrace their femininity and their womanhood, because ultimately, it is a part of who they are as Black British lesbians.

Managing Identity Conflict

Participants in this study employed different strategies to deal with the threat and experience of identity conflict. Different strategies were employed at various stages during the continuing course of their sexual identity journey. For a majority of the participants, even after they had disclosed their identity to the significant people in their lives, they still employed strategies for safety reasons where it was deemed appropriate. These strategies included maintaining a heterosexual identity, which meant for some, maintaining or hiding or alluding to a heterosexual relationship. Others utilised support systems to help them during the most difficult periods of assimilation. Graded disclosure also acted as a management tool as it allowed some participants to stagger their level of disclosure, and in some instances, assess the safest people to whom to disclose their sexual orientation.

Living a heterosexual life/Double life

Participants explained that at times, it was necessary to allude to or exist in a heterosexual relationship because of the perceived difficulties and repercussions of existing in a same-sex relationship or identifying as a Black British lesbian. One participant spoke of her

need to fulfil parental and community expectations of marriage and children (seemingly attributes of a Black British woman) by maintaining a heterosexual lifestyle. The direct conflict between Black female ideals and the undisclosed lesbian identity evoked a need to fulfil that expectation:

> *I was like, "Hold on one second, you want me to go to church, you want me to find a nice African guy and you want me to get married and go and have children. I am trying, but I can't." [ ] Me and that whole relationship don't agree. I tried to settle down, I brought him home[ ] he absolutely fell in love with me and I hated the fact of having to be tied down[ ] I think the one thing I wanted to do because I felt that I had disappointed them was to conform to what society wanted me to be and to live something through their eyes. (Amber)*

This was echoed by Mechelle who felt the weight of the negativity from the Black community, and as a result, suppressed her lesbian identity in order to assimilate herself into the community and address her identity conflict:

> *I played it straight for twenty years [ ] being a member of the Black race scene, there was so much negativity. [ ] If I am honest, I suppressed a lot of myself because of that community.*

Another participant spoke of leading a double life mainly so she could still identify as a lesbian but also develop a way to manage the perceived homophobia and non-acceptance from the Black and wider community:

Cos it's almost like a double life [ ] you don't know what people think [ ]and sometimes you have to keep it down. So certain times you have to kind of live a double life, and be careful what you say and watch how you kiss your girlfriend and stuff like that [ ] Definitely by lying. Because like, when you talk to the hairdresser, like you talk and whatever, and you make up some men...it's really tricky sometimes. (Jennifer)

One of the fears of Black lesbians who attempt to disclose their sexuality is that of outright rejection from their families and communities, the resultant psychological distress and further complication of multiple identity negotiation (Greene 1997). This is reflected by Parks et al (2004) who suggest that "whilst the strength of family ties may avert outright rejection of sexual minorities, tolerance is often gained at the price of silence" (p.243). Many of the individuals in this study saw their racial identity as primary and felt the need to maintain some semblance of heterosexuality in order to assimilate themselves into the wider community, and retain their ties to the Black community. Furthermore, a concealment of their sexual orientation seemed to be a useful tool in helping to avoid homophobia and judgment from other individuals.

Graded Disclosure

Another management tool that a majority of the participants employed was the use of graded disclosure. This often meant that they disclosed their identity to specific people at specific times and at different stages of their journey. This allowed them to retain some control over the process and progress of their sexual identity journey and also inadvertently to address the identity conflict that they were experiencing. One participant spoke of this ownership and control in the description of her experience of graded disclosure:

Like I said, my sexuality is mine, and no one else's. Some people like to put it out, and when they put it out, they don't really like the response that they get. I don't put it out there. Unless I really trust you. I'm not going to tell you anything [ ] maybe it's more of a protective mechanism for me, whereas people are more brazen or brave or instinctive to talk about or come out or whatever, I won't do that. (Paige)

This was also the experience of Priscilla and Cassandra who stressed the importance of maintaining their own privacy, choice and safety through their acts of graded disclosure:

A lot of people are out to a degree. I have come to understand that. They are out to certain degrees, to certain people and in certain environments. So I might not disclose to everyone, if you ask me, I'll tell you, if you know, you know. (Priscilla)

I don't really talk about it, because I am a private person, you know, obviously when you have a partner and you meet their family, they know, so obviously you are out there as well, and maybe you are on tenterhooks, but then you get to know them even more and then I'm fine, but it's not something that I discuss. (Cassandra)

For Jennifer, sometimes it was necessary to employ the tool of graded disclosure as a defence mechanism against homophobia and ignorance:

If it was a Black salesperson we probably wouldn't, so in terms of strangers on the Black community, definitely keep it close to our chest [ ] I feel like there is an automatic armour we need to put up.

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Harper et al (2004) suggest that differential treatment in both the community of culture and mainstream White gay community may lead Black lesbians and gay men to conceal aspects of their various identities. As a result, they experience varying degrees of visibility and invisibility within in their own communities. Usage of graded disclosure to an extent allowed participants to maintain some level of control over their visibility in the wider and Black communities, but also allowed them to retain their status in the Black community and deflect negative reactions.

Support Systems

More than half of the participants credited support from individuals or collectives with helping them manage identity conflict. They cited shared experiences, knowledge, support and visibility as some of the ways in which these individuals helped to allay the difficulties of their triple minority status. Amber described an encounter with another Black British lesbian at a time when her conflict was particularly acute. It allowed her to become more comfortable with her sexuality and develop strategies to combat the identity conflict she experienced and eventually to reconcile her Black, female lesbian identity:

I got involved with this woman who taught me so much about me[ ] but taught me what it was like to be me and accepting of me [ ] She had such a calming energy, she was a lot older than me in fact [ ] as two Black women, we could sit down as friends and talk.

Mechelle also spoke of the importance of individuals who consciously or unconsciously aided the management of her identity conflict through their support, acknowledgement and similarity:

She was very significant, in that, in me coming to terms with my sexuality. She had no idea.

Jennifer paid tribute an important individual in her life who took the journey of disclosure with her by standing up to homophobic comments. This outward display of fearlessness made Jennifer feel protected and safe in an otherwise hostile environment, and also helped her ascend another step on the ladder of accepting her complex identity:

I think her mom helped us out quite a lot in particular [ ] she still doesn't want certain people to know, but I that is just for safety as well. [ ] One time I was getting my nails done and this woman came out of nowhere, she was talking to this woman about being gay and how it's not in the bible, and her mom was like, you have to accept it, it's part of life so she kind of outed herself as well, which was really nice.

A recurring suggestion in the positive psychology literature is that social support is a fundamental component of well-being (Lopez et al 2002). This is reflected in the comments above and it seems that various sources of support helped some of the participants normalise their sexual orientation and come to terms with the difficulty of maintaining multiple identities. As suggested earlier, when disclosing a lesbian identity, Black females are often unable to gain support from their families or communities because their sexual orientation may be seen as a violation of the cultural norm (Harper at al 2004). Research by Bowleg et al (2004) concludes

that support from available sources may further enhance active coping amongst Black lesbians particularly because they trigger internal factors such as self-esteem. Furthermore, support systems are important because of the idea that "in comparison to the social support that is readily available to Black heterosexuals for buffering the deleterious effects of race and class oppression, this support may not be as readily available to Black lesbians unless they choose to remain closeted from their families and communities" (Bowleg at al, p.238).

Reconciling Black/Female/Lesbian identity

The reconciliation of a Black female lesbian identity seemed to be achievable for the majority of participants in this study. For some participants, this meant that whilst there may have been remnants of identity conflict, they were accepting and comfortable with their sexuality to a degree that allowed them to exist openly in both the wider society and Black community. More importantly, they were able to exist comfortably in their own skin and in their own space. Not all the participants were successful in achieving this, and each individual participant described varying levels of reconciliation. For some participants, the first stage of reconciliation was admitting to themselves that they were Black female lesbians existing in a British culture. For others, it was the ability openly to admit to their communities and families that they had embraced their personal identity - one which included a sexual identity which may not have been culturally acceptable. Some participants explained that their reconciliation was illustrated by their ability to exist comfortably as a Black British lesbian woman, without the need to seek validation from their communities and families. For others, the most valuable aspect of reconciliation was their ability to incorporate their sexuality seamlessly into their

identity structure, to the extent where it became a natural component of their makeup and an automatic addition to their self- description. The various reconciliations of a Black female lesbian identity were illustrated by the self-definitions adopted by several participants:

I am a Black woman first. Black comes before everything else. My sexual identity does not come into things, but if I was to be asked to describe myself and my sexual orientation. I am a Black woman who loves other Black woman [ ] and yeah, if I want to get deep, I am a Black African woman who loves other Black Diaspora women. (Amber)

Black lesbian mom. I see myself as a Black lesbian mom [ ] it's been a struggle [ ] the journey has been a struggle. I am happy to say that I am a Black lesbian woman. (Cassandra)

The three defining things are female, lesbian and Black, I think that those are the three most important aspects. (Dana)

Lisa echoed the comments of these women, but also commented on the fact that her sexuality was a naturally assimilated component of her identity structure, rather than a separate, special entity. She also expressed her comfort with her self-definition. This was illustrated by the notion that she no longer needed validation for her sexuality:

I'm lesbian, it's not the first thing that comes out of my mouth, it's like I am a Black woman, that is the first thing that comes out of my mouth , I think that is the most important. Being a lesbian is my sexuality, I have sex with women kind of thing, being

Black is just amazing I think it is more important than who I sleep with kind of thing.

[ ] I'm a gay Black woman, if you don't like it you know, fair enough.

For a few of the participants, the process of reconciliation was an ongoing journey. Priscilla and Mechelle both spoke of about their ongoing journeys and their anticipation of evolving into individuals with an all-encompassing sexual identity:

I think the number one thing I would say number one and the most important is that I feel free. I've always wanted to be free, and I am free. I am free to be me, you know? I am whole. I was so lost, I fell out of integrity with myself, what I felt inside wasn't being reflected on a daily basis. [ ] My identity is changing as I grow, but that is fine, because my sexuality will grow with that, and I've got lots to learn, different things, but I feel whole. (Priscilla)

You know, you have your own journey. I say I am on the first step of a very long ladder. And I am not rushing. I am taking my time. (Mechelle)

One participant who had not reconciled her identity expressed her wish for the acceptance of gay and lesbian individuals instead of just toleration. She commented on the fact that sexuality was a natural component of an individual's identity structure, and should be seen as such. This was in direct contrast to her experience as a Black British Lesbian.

I just think people box lesbian and gay men and they say we should be tolerated, but I think it should be neither, we were all born the same way, you know, we were all born in the same way, we were all born in the same colour skin, we were born African,

Caribbean, White, Irish, American, whatever, and they shouldn't tolerate us, we are just who we are, it is part of our lives and that's that. (Paige)

Much of the psychological literature focusing on Black British lesbians has discussed and illustrated the pathology that may occur as a result of holding multiple identities. However, it is clearly demonstrated through these narratives that Black British lesbians can successfully negotiate a Black, female, lesbian identity and exist in the Black community and wider society. However, as demonstrated by the participants here, such a negotiation is often dependent on management techniques, coping skills, social support and resilience (Bowleg et al 2003). Additionally, each individual journey is unique. Therefore, the degree of success for every individual is dependent on their context, their comfort with their sexuality, and the notion that the negotiation of multiple identities is ever changing. As highlighted in a study by Jones and McEwen (2000), "the process of identity development when multiple dimensions are considered is an ongoing journey of self discovery" (p.413). This is illustrated by a majority of the participants in this study who self-define as Black British lesbians, but also stress the fact that their ongoing journeys are evolutionary and exploratory.

Overview

The presented analysis of the participants' accounts in this study demonstrated some of the difficulties that may be experienced by Black British lesbians attempting to construct a lesbian identity within the context of a Black British culture. The emergent themes suggest that the construction of a Black British lesbian identity is influenced by social and cultural contexts, specifically, the influence of a Black racial identity and a Black female identity. These themes seemed to reflect journeys which were fluid and evolutionary, and also had implications for the negotiation of multiple identities for each participant in this study. The accounts seemed to suggest that development as a Black female lesbian in a somewhat homophobic and sexist society had an effect on constructions of their identities. Subsequently, the difficulties which stemmed from the development of a lesbian identity prompted conflict, which necessitated the adoption of management strategies in order to cope. These experiences occurred over a period of time, affecting their conceptualisations of being Black, female and lesbian and the degree to which they experienced conflict. The themes which emerged from the described experiences of participants were integrated into the model below in order to produce a coherent narrative.
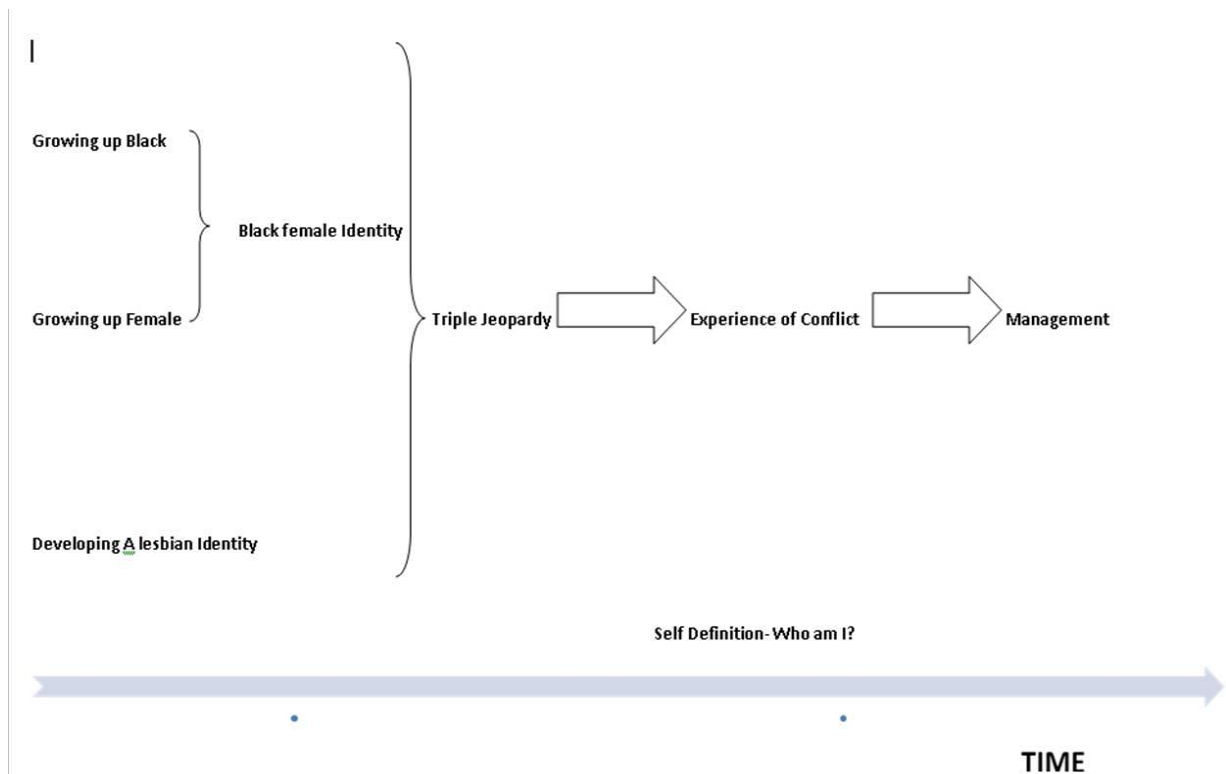
Figure 1

The participants in this study indicated that the development of a Black racial identity and a concurrent Black female identity preceded the development of a lesbian identity. The development of a salient Black identity they described seemed to reflect the ideas of the prominent identity models and theories presented in this study. The participants' experiences seem to particularly echo the ideas of Gilroy's (1993) and Mama (1995) as there seemed to be variations in responses regarding the development of a Black identity. These appear to be determined by environmental factors, and tended to split the participants into two groups. Participants who grew up in predominantly Black environments described a different process of identity development to those who were raised in White environments.

Participants in the former group spoke of their awareness and experiences of racism, and their anger at the unwarranted discrimination they experienced because of their skin

colour. This shared experience elicited a sense of belonging and sameness with other members of the Black community whose history was heavily illustrated by racism. The participants also spoke of their socialisation in the Black community which also established a sense of belonging for the participants. Through socialisation, participants were taught and adopted the values and expectations associated with a Black identity and as such developed a strong awareness and perception of their racial identity. Interestingly, their described experiences reflected one of the stages of Cross's (2001) revised model in which Black individuals are immersed in the Black community and develop a heightened feeling of pride in their Black identity. The latter group of participants who were socialised in predominantly White communities described a process which reflected a more linear progression according to Cross's (2001) model. They grew up in contexts which were largely devoid of any environmental cues to racial identity. Consequently, there seemed to be an acute curiosity about their racial identity which was addressed at later stages in their life once they developed an increased awareness and perception of a Black racial identity. However, their progression, although somewhat linear, did not reflect the exact described journey through Cross's (1995) original model, thereby demonstrating the fluid nature of identity.

The development of a Black identity seemed to be concurrent with the development of a Black female identity. Emergent themes in this research reflect Howard's (2000) assertion that the development of a gender identity is a process whereby an individual develops a sense of self around their perception of their sex, and internalises prescriptions of behaviours and attitudes which are deemed culturally appropriate for that gender identity. These prescriptions, much like those associated with a racial identity, are purportedly learned through early socialisation, and may be enacted, reinforced or altered throughout an individual's life span. Participants in this study spoke of their perceptions of a Black female identity which were

developed largely through socialisation in the Black community. They were encouraged to be strong and resilient, values which stemmed from a historical legacy of Black women being perceived as pillars of the community and the backbone of the family. The development of a Black female identity by the participants in this study also resembled certain aspects of several gender identity models (e.g. Helms, 1990; Ashmore, 1990; Spence, 1993, Corby, Hedges and Perry, 2007), as well as Egan and Perry's (2001) multi-dimensional model and the amended model of Corby et al (2007) which takes into account the influence of ethnicity and race on gender identity development. Egan and Perry's (2001) gender identity development models suggest that gender identity comprises five components: *membership knowledge, gender typicality, gender contentedness, felt pressure for gender conformity and intergroup bias.* Corby et al (2007) extend this model by suggesting that the implications of gender identity development and adjustment may depend crucially on messages about gender that may be experienced and internalised. These messages may be culture correlated and may include family practices and relationships, religion, and cultural norms and practices.

Thematic analysis suggested that participants in this study were made aware of their gender identity very early on in their personal identity development. They were encouraged to develop their femininity, fulfil particular gender roles and represent the Black community in a positive light, as their female relatives and members of their community had done before them. This is reflective of Egan and Perry's (2001) *membership knowledge* component during which individuals develop a knowledge of one's gender. It is also reflective of the gender typicality component where individuals develop a perceived similarity of one's gender (which in the case of participants in this study related to their perceived similarity with other Black women and women in the wider community). Participants also spoke of the importance placed on procreation and marriage, and acknowledged the emphasis placed on motherhood by their

families and communities. Motherhood was perceived as an important component of a Black female identity, a perception which was rooted in traditional cultural values, and also possibly developed from the significance placed on child rearing during the era of slavery (Ward, 2000). The described importance of gender roles, aptly reflected the component of felt pressure for gender conformity as participants adhered to the roles, expectations and values put forth by their families and communities (Egan et al 2001). The emergent themes also supported Corby et al's (2007) assertion about the importance of culture correlations in the development of gender identity and health social adjustment.

The development of a Black female identity was also compounded by the perception of a dual oppression for these women by virtue of their race and gender. This resembled Egan and Perry's (2001) component of *intergroup bias*. However it must be noted that participants in *this* study did not experience a feeling of inferiority within the context of their own culture. This was much more prevalent in the wider society where they experienced sexism in educational, social and work settings. Generally, participants expressed a sense of pride and contentment in being Black women which resembled the component of *gender contentedness*, a factor which suggests satisfaction with one's gender assignment (Egan and Perry, 2001).

There appeared to be a consistency in the themes which emerged regarding sexual identity development. The participants echo aspects of McCarn and Fassinger's (1996) sexual identity model, in so far as it suggests that sexual identity development is the journey of self-awareness to self-integration and identity management, and has a fluid circular pattern. Thematic analysis of participants' accounts suggested that for most, the realisation of same-sex feelings began during puberty and was directed towards classmates, peers, teachers, or friends. This awareness was followed by a period of confusion where participants questioned their

same-sex urges. Battling homophobia, fear of rejection and a direct conflict with the messages they had received regarding homosexuality, some participants rejected these same-sex desires and devised ways to avoid or dissipate these feelings. Participants revealed that homophobia, internalised homophobia, cultural and societal norms, and the consequences of adopting a lesbian identity were some of the factors associated with the development of a lesbian identity. Participants also described the expectation for them to adhere to cultural gender roles and heterosexual norms. They also described a sense of difference, which may have hindered or affected their ability to disclose their sexual identity. However, their decisions to disclose yielded different reactions, ranging from positive ones such as acceptance to very negative reactions, such as alienation by their family and friends. Participants described a sense of difference which they experienced during the development of a lesbian identity which seemed to alter when they were able to normalise their Black lesbian identity by interacting with other Black lesbians and gay men.

Attempting to assimilate a lesbian identity created a sense of conflict within the participants in this study. This conflict seemed to have stemmed from the perception that their Black lesbian identity instigated oppression on multiple levels by virtue of their race, sexuality and gender (triple jeopardy) (Green, 2004). Furthermore, the components of their racial and gender identities, which had already been assimilated into their identity structures, conflicted with the new components of a lesbian identity.

The participants indicated that the Black community instilled certain predominant values in them which seemed to favour a heterosexual identity. Participants also reported that their experience of racism and sexism fostered a sense of sameness and belonging with the Black community, and that it is from this community that they sought validation of their Black

female identity. Therefore, it was perceived that a lesbian identity somehow indicated an abdication of their Black female identity and violated their cultural norms. The experience of identity conflict had several implications for the participants, some of which were psychological. The attempt to assimilate a lesbian identity also had implications for other identity components (i.e., race and gender) and on their relationships with their families and communities.

The experience of identity conflict by the participants in this study illustrated the theoretical standpoint of Breakwell's (1989) threatened identity model. She postulates that identity conflict occurs when the psychological processes of assimilation, accommodation and evaluation are unable, for some reason, to comply with the principles of continuity, distinctiveness and self-esteem. In the case of this study's participants, the component of sexuality which needed to be assimilated into the identity structure seemed incompatible with the pre-existing components of racial identity and sexual identity. This posed a threat to the participants' identities. Breakwell (1989) suggests that when an individual experiences this threat or conflict, they may adopt strategies which will move them into a social position which is less threatening. Alternatively, an individual may adopt strategies to revise identity structure to operate in accordance with the principals which guide the identity framework. The participants in this study described a number of strategies which they employed to negate or address identity conflict. These included concealment of the lesbian identity (inter-personal coping strategies), graded disclosure, access and attachment to strong support systems (inter-group coping strategies) and the use of Black and Black female values to inform the development and integration of a lesbian identity. The themes which emerged regarding the experience of conflict reflect other studies which have investigated the effects of race and gender on the sexual identity development of Black lesbians and Gay men (Parks, Hughes &

Matthews, 2004; Rosario, Scrimshaw & Hunter, 2004; Greene, 2000; Bowleg Craig & Burkholder, 2004; Bridges et al 2003).

Transferability

Although the themes which emerged from participants' accounts in this study indicate the evolving journey of the experiences of Black British lesbians within a British context, conclusions drawn from this study must be tentative as they may not be representative of all Black lesbians living in Britain today. The findings of this study must be comprehended in relation to the limitations of small sample size and the specificity of location. These factors decreased the external validity of the findings. Additionally, there are other limitations in this study which warrant acknowledgement and comment.

The researcher attempted to recruit participants across a wide age span; however, the participants were aged between 22-49, with the majority being above the age of 30. Although the participants in this study relayed rich and detailed experiences, the research may have benefitted from gaining the perspectives of older Black lesbians who may have had a more diverse and different perspective on the topic explored in this study. Hall and Fine (2005), who have conducted one of the few studies exploring the experiences of older Black lesbians, acknowledge the dearth of research into this demographic. Their study gives a detailed insight into the lives of two older Black lesbians whose experiences span over two decades. The study offers a different perception on the experience of identity negotiation in the context of the civil rights era when gay rights were not as prevalent as they are today. Such insights and

experiences are missing from this study. An equal number of participants in each age group may have offered a more balanced analysis by giving an insight into the experiences of Black British lesbians over a sustained period of time.

Except for one participant, all of the individuals who took part in this study had disclosed their sexual orientations and considered themselves to be 'out' (although the degree to which they were 'out' varied from one participant to another). The difficulty in recruiting participants who identified as lesbian but who had not disclosed their orientation is identified limitation in this study. The experiences of such participants, particularly with regards to their inability to disclose their sexual orientations, would have provided another insight into the role of identity conflict in the lives of Black British lesbians. Despite the limitation, it is hoped that this research will enable or aid these individuals in their sexual identity journeys by providing a degree of visibility for Black British lesbians.

The role of the researcher also served as a limitation in this study. As a Black British heterosexual female researcher, the manner in which meaning and understanding were extracted and analysed was directly influenced by the researcher's background. To some degree, the heterosexist bias of the researcher may have hindered the full understanding of issues related to homosexuality. Black feminist epistemology stresses the importance of lived experience as a criterion of meaning; however, the researcher was unable to stringently adhere to this due to her own sexual orientation. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the researcher's interactions and engagement with Black lesbians and gay men in her personal life and through her past research and clinical work may have aided this process. The racial and gender similarities between the participants and the researcher were both a strength and limitation. The commonality of being Black British may have contributed to a sense of complacency and an

assumption that the researcher may have a shared knowledge about issues pertaining to race and gender experiences. The researcher's apparent race and gender also evoked a good rapport, and to some degree, a sense of comfort with the participants. One pointedly said she would not have granted the researcher an interview or been so open if the researcher had been a White male or female. She attributed this to what she thought would be a lack of understanding on the part of a researcher from a different race. The importance and reflexivity of the researcher's role in the research process is a concept that will need to be consistently addressed in future qualitative research in this area, particularly in regard to the role of sameness and difference between the researcher and the participant.

The researcher's choice to employ an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method within this study also presented certain limitations regarding transferability. The limitation of IPA and its use within qualitative research is summed up by Willig (2001) who suggests that in utilising phenomenological methods such as IPA several limitations must be acknowledged. These include the role of language in IPA, the suitability of accounts and the concept of explanation versus description. Within this study, the limitations of language played a significant role. Employment of an IPA method depends on the utilisation of texts in the analysis process. In this study, semi-structured interviews were used as a data collection technique in order to gain a perspective of participants' experiences. This therefore suggests that language was the means by which participants attempted to communicate their experiences. Semi-structured interviews can give rise to power-based differences between the researcher and the researched, which may have may have an influence on the information which is shared by the participants and the language which is used by participants (Merriam, Johnston-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane and Muahmad, 2001). To an extent, the interviewees subtly negotiated the researcher's power during this study by determining where and when

interviews would be held and what kind of information they chose to divulge. Additionally, for some participants, the researcher's race and sexual orientation may have influenced the power balance. During informal pre-interview discussions, two participants inquired about the researcher's sexual orientation, which may have been their way of ascertaining the researcher's motivations for conducting the study. The researcher's decision not to disclose sexual orientation was a personal one which was perhaps guided by a fear that it may adversely affect the interview process. This caution stemmed from experiences with two individuals who had previously shown an interest in taking part in the study but later refused upon learning that the researcher was a heterosexual woman. They felt that their experiences would not be fully understood or adequately represented. As a result, the language of these participants during the initial stage of the interview process was at times vague or unrevealing. This altered as the interview went on, but nonetheless, may have prevented the participants from divulging certain experiences which would have been crucial to the analysis. Future research in this area may need to employ alternative qualitative research methods in order to address the limitations of IPA analysis and present different perspectives with the use of alternative analytical methods.

All the participants in this study were recruited in the London area where they lived, apart from one participant who lived outside the city and kindly agreed to travel to London to take part in this research. Additionally, a majority of the participants were recruited from urban areas of London. The culture of London may have had an effect on the perceptions, views and experiences of the participants, particularly as there is a large concentration of Black individuals in London. This may have had an impact on the socialisation of the research participants. It would have been interesting to attain the experiences of Black British lesbians who came from or resided in different parts of the country as this may have contributed even further to the rich and diverse experiences of the participants in this study. It would also have

been interesting to see if the experiences from individuals in other areas differed or held commonalities with the accounts presented here. This is a limitation which could be explored in future research.

Substantive Findings

Impact of conflict

All the participants in this study experienced identity conflict at some point, but to varying degrees and at different points along their journey. Identity conflict arises as a result of several factors which can include the inability of a lesbian identity to interact with other identity components - in this case, Black and female identity components. For the individuals in this study, certain attributes associated with their female identities (e.g. Black female expectations, motherhood, and sexism) and their Black identities (representation of the Black community, the experience of racism) conflicted with a lesbian identity. This intrinsically contradicted the values, concepts and expectations associated with existing as a Black female individual. Additionally, for a majority of the participants in this study, conflict also stemmed from the fact that as Black British lesbians, they were oppressed on multiple levels; as Black individuals, as females and in regards to their sexual orientation. As a result, they were all subjected to varying degrees of racism, sexism and homophobia, and these factors prompted identity threat (Breakwell, 1989).

Several mitigating factors contributed to the degree of identity conflict they experienced. One of these was the heterogeneity of the participants. All of them came from

diverse cultural backgrounds. Although they shared commonalities regarding the socialisation of their Black female identity, no two individuals purported to have the exactly the same experience in their sexual identity development journey. Some participants attributed their ability to eventually assimilate a Black lesbian identity to the strength of their racial identity. Their experience of racism, and the resilience which seemed to be synonymous with being a Black individual, were transferable tools used to manage identity conflict. Others credited the support of family members, friends, organisations and professional interventions as mitigating factors of identity conflict. The components of a Black female identity were also cited as a reason for the variation of conflict in participants as again, they utilised the values and components of Black female identity to assimilate a lesbian identity.

The described experiences in this research correlate to other findings by researchers who have explored the concept of identity conflict in Black Lesbians (Jones and McEwan, 2000; Pope, 1991; Bowleg et al, 2004; Gibson et al, 2007). Models by Reynolds and Pope (1991) and Jones and McEwan (2000) have attempted to illustrate the possible difficulty that may be faced by individuals who have to negotiate multiple identities. They suggest that individuals who have to negotiate multiple identities may identify with one aspect of themselves passively or they may identify with different aspects of themselves in a segmented fashion. Alternatively, they may consolidate their personal identity by integrating all identity components and utilising strengths from each to aid this assimilation. These models are important in demonstrating the ongoing construction of identities of individuals, the influence of changing contexts on the experience of identity development and the variation of conflict that each individual may experience. Studies by Bowleg et al (2004), Bridges et al (2003) and Breakwell (1986) all support this point and identify several mitigating factors which may contribute to variation in identity conflict, or the avoidance of identity conflict. In their

research, Bowleg et al (2004) suggest that lesbian identification was positively associated with social support on multiple levels. Furthermore, they concluded that support from available sources may further enhance active coping amongst Black lesbians, particularly because they facilitate internal factors such as self-esteem.

It is important that health professionals do not assume that identity conflict is attributable to all Black British lesbians. Furthermore, the variation of conflict may be representative of the point at which each is in the sexual identity journey, and must be acknowledged as such. Whilst the availability of resources for Black British lesbians may be small, it is important to maintain an awareness of mitigating factors such as support from family and organisations which may all aid the process of addressing identity conflict. It might be useful for future research in this area to specifically explore the experiences of Black lesbians who have been successful at negotiating their multiple identities in order to inform therapeutic work. Future research might also explore the experience of identity conflict over a time span as a way of exploring other factors which may contribute to varying degrees of conflict.

Evolving Journey

It emerges in this study that identity definition is ever evolving and that for a majority of the participants, the journey to self-definition did not cease at disclosure and the declaration of Black female lesbian identity. Even during the course of their journeys, more than half of the participants spoke of how their self definitions changed to include a lesbian identity, and then to acknowledge all the aspects of their identity. These variations reflect research by Kinsey et al (1953) and Brown (1995) who assert that sexual orientation is prone to change

over time and across situations, and as a result, a lesbian identity may or may not be displayed by overt behaviour during the lifespan. Additionally, the variables which make up an individual's self-definition may hold prominence at different stages in their life as circumstances change. Emergent themes in this study are consistent with this assertion. For example, during the course of their sexual identity development journeys, many participants engaged in relationships with men or commenced relationships with women following long-term heterosexual relationships. One participant spoke of her self-definition as a lesbian but acknowledged her continued attraction to men, even though she would not act on it. Another participant alluded to the idea that although she defined herself as a Black British Lesbian, this might change in terms of her sexual behaviour and the weight she gave to her sexual identity.

It must be noted that the successful assimilation of a lesbian identity did not denote the cessation of identity conflict. Many participants described their journeys as ongoing - new challenges and directions meant that their self-definitions held different meanings for them at different stages in their journeys. Emergent themes in this study reflect work by various scholars which has acknowledged the fluidity and malleability of a woman's sexuality and recognised its ability to evolve over time (Baumeister, 2000; Diamond, 2000; Peplau and Garnet, 2000; Weinberg, Williams and Pryor, 1994; Rust, 1993; Kitzenger and Wilkinson, 1995). For example, a study of 6395 lesbians in America found that 77 percent of self-identified lesbians had experienced a heterosexual encounter over the course of their lifetime (Diament, Schuster and Lever, 1999). Kitzenger and Wilkinson (1995) documented the experiences of married women who identified themselves as lesbians and later engaged in relationships with women. Additionally, Blackwood (2000) has pointed out that women's sexuality and its variance can be affected by cultural, racial and historical contexts, as is the case with many of the participants in this study. It is important that in viewing the experiences

of Black British lesbians from a psychological perspective, professionals do not regard sexuality and sexual orientation as stagnant, since this may have several implications for their treatment of identity conflict. Future research in this area may need to explore the multiple pathways to sexual orientation and the influence that cultural, racial, religious and historical contexts have on the consistency of sexual identification. This may hopefully provide an increased insight into the role and impact that sexual evolution has on Black British lesbians' ability to manage identity conflict.

Psychological Implications

All of the participants spoke of the psychological implications which arose as a result of their triple oppression and identity. Depression, low self-esteem, low confidence and alcoholism were just some of the mental health issues that participants in this study disclosed. Only two of the participants spoke of seeking and receiving help from mental health professionals to deal with the issues that arose from their identity conflict. Other participants credited other Black lesbians and family members with helping them to address these psychological issues and also suggested that mental health professionals may not have an informed awareness to help them address their conflict. These experiences reflect data from studies which have found higher rates of major depression (Gilman et al, 2001; Sandfort et al , 2001), suicide attempts (Gilman et al, 2001), some anxiety disorders (Gilman et al, 2001), and alcohol and drug dependency disorders (Cochran & Mays, 2000b) in homosexually active women when compared with their heterosexual counterparts. Additionally, research by Greene (2000) and Boyd-Franklin (2003) suggests that whilst psychological implications of conflict are prevalent amongst Black lesbians, they are also less likely to seek help due to a fear of

judgement or an assumption that their needs would not be met by a health professional. Three participants suggested that in the early stages of their identity conflict, they would have benefited from support from a professional and that the initial absence of support triggered severe depressive symptoms.

Participants in this study also described positive psychological implications of coming out as Black British lesbians. Some participants spoke of an increased sense of self-worth, a clearer self-definition and a sense of liberation as a result of resolving identity conflict. It would appear that there is a paucity of research supporting the notion that Black lesbians with multiple oppressed identities may, in fact, emerge with positive mental health functioning as displayed in the comments by some of the participants in this study. Their positive mental health functioning seems to suggest a resilience and establishment of active coping skills which allowed them to exist as Black lesbians despite their triple minority status. Such themes reflect limited previous research which has looked at positive mental health functioning in Black lesbians (e.g. Bowleg et al; Beals and Peplau, 2005) and has suggested that this can arise as a result of identity support, and the meaning that individuals attach to their identity status.

The counselling psychology community needs to be aware of the psychological implications which may arise as a result of identity conflict, and the factors which may trigger or contribute to this phenomenon. Research has suggested that Black lesbians are less likely to seek help in health areas because of fear of discrimination or lack of understanding on the part of the health care providers (Bridges et al, 2003). It is important that practitioners are aware of these issues in order to seek the best method of exploration and treatment with the client. Future research may need to specifically focus on mental health issues that may arise as a result of identity conflict and the coping, safety and avoidance behaviours which Black British

lesbians employ. Similarly, the exploration of the psychological well being of Black lesbians who display healthy psychological function is another area that needs further research, as it cannot be assumed that all Black British lesbians will experience identity conflict. Research which incorporates the experiences of active coping amongst Black British lesbians will give an idea as to the strategies and skills which may be employed in order to address identity conflict and the psychological impact of conflict. Another area which needs further examination is the development and utilisation of therapeutic strategies which might be utilised in the treatment of Black Lesbians who experience identity conflict. Previous research into this area (e.g. Savin-Williams and Diamond, 2000; Cochran, Mays and Sullivan, 2003; Peel, Clark and Drescher, 2007) has neglected to include the perspectives and experiences of Black British lesbians to a degree which acknowledges their difficulties and devises therapeutic strategies to address potential issues.

Heterogeneity of populations: The UK and the US

According to the described experiences in this study, the Black British experience seems to differ from that of the African American experience, even though researchers have often tended to group individuals from these two different sets under the label of 'Black', thereby assuming a homogenous experience (e.g. see Reynolds, 2004; Bush, 2000). Although commonalties exist such as the experience of homophobia, the experience of sexism, the experience of racism (see Greene, 2004; Bowleg et a 2004), it cannot be assumed that Black British lesbians and African American lesbians ever have or will be similar in the same experience of identity negotiation. This may depend to a large extent on the cultural difference in African American society and Black British culture. Three of the participants in this study spoke of the fact that they had been to cities in America and found the acceptance of Black

lesbians to be more prevalent than that in the UK. They spoke of African American lesbians who existed in 'sisterhood' communities and contributed to the higher visibility of Black lesbians within the wider society. Certainly it seems that within the African American culture, the visibility of Black gay men and lesbian women in mainstream society is more prominent than in the Black British community. The recent election of American president Barack Obama - a supporter of some gay rights - may further increase the visibility of African American gay and lesbian individuals. His campaign trail and his election certainly seemed to unite individuals of Black communities in America and around the world, regardless of sexual orientation, cultural background, age or gender. This unity seemed to encourage tolerance, acceptance and unity amongst the American population (Kaba, 2008). However, the recent rejection of Proposition 8 (a Californian ballot proposition that changed the state constitution to restrict the definition of marriage to a union between a man and woman and eliminated the right of same sex individuals to marry) somewhat counteracts this feeling, but it has highlighted the campaign of Black gay men and lesbian women to attain certain civil rights, a struggle which perhaps has been less visible in Britain.

Difference within population: Black British community

The emergent themes in this study also point to the considerable differences within the Black British community. As described earlier, the Black British community is made up of diverse individuals who have their roots in various cultures and defy description as a homogenous group. Their differences are also displayed in their skin colour, the languages with which they communicate and even the places where they reside in Britain. The discourse in this study showed that this has an effect on the way in which Black British Lesbians construct their various identities. For instance, two participants of Nigerian descent spoke of

the fact that hetero-sexism was very much prevalent in Nigerian culture and society, and to disclose a lesbian identity in Nigeria was punishable by law. Other participants of African descent spoke of how their various African cultures varied in terms of the customs, belief systems and values, and how these differed from the customs and cultural values of participants of Caribbean culture. Participants of Caribbean descent alluded to the homophobic lyrics that are often present in indigenous music, and how this affected their perception and construction of a Black lesbian identity. This contrasts with the experiences of Black African participants who found homophobic messages to be more prevalent in religious teachings. The importance that these individuals ascribed to their cultural backgrounds, and their need to assimilate or maintain these specific cultural components affected the degree of conflict they experienced. For example, a majority of the Caribbean participants did not identify religion as a contributor to their identity conflict as it did not attach as much importance to it as the African participants.

Implications of Heterogeneity

Several researchers have documented an inherent difference between African American Black individuals and Black British individuals, and acknowledge that within Black British society, the diversity of cultural roots and location of residence can have an effect on identity formation and socialisation (Bush, 2000; Carby, 1997; Mama, 1995; Mirza, 1992; Phoenix, 1997; Smith and Lamb, 2008). Greene (2004) also points out regardless of the shared experience of slavery, Black women as a group have never been homogenous, and as a result, the development of a Black female identity varies considerably based on cultural and historical context. In their exploration of Black British Identity, Hall (1993) and Gilroy (2002) have both acknowledged the need for research into Black Britishness and identity formation to take into

account the wide Diaspora from which it has grown. They particularly advocate the exploration of experiences which pertain to Black individuals within a British context. Professionals in the counselling psychology field need to be aware of these differences because of the effect they may have on the experience of conflict. In the case of Black British lesbians who do not experience identity conflict, their cultural context may also indicate the factors which contribute to their robustness and ability to successfully negotiate triple oppression. This may be important in helping to develop management strategies which may therapeutically aid a Black British lesbian experiencing identity conflict. Research in this area will need to diversify the inclusion of Black lesbians from a variety of backgrounds and cultures in order to illustrate the issues faced by these individuals and the strengths that they possess.

The Professional Practice Component of this thesis has been

removed for confidentiality purposes.

It can be consulted by Psychology researchers on application at

the Library of City, University of London.

Section D

Critical Review of Literature

Intra-racial Discrimination in the Black Community: Psychological Implications

A Critical Literature Review

This critical review of literature examines intra-racial discrimination (also referred to as 'colourism') within group stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination based on skin tone. A literature review of skin tone bias, drawing largely from populations within the United States, reveals that individuals with skin tone or features more typical of their racial category are treated more negatively by members of their race. This negative treatment can have implications for psychological health. Despite this, unlike the many other racial issues which have been explored in the psychological literature surrounding race, there is a distinct lack of studies which address the issue of intra-racial discrimination and its implications for psychological well-being

The research in this area has focused on the relationship between intra-racial discrimination and mate selection, job attainment, racial identity and self perception. These studies have been riddled with methodological difficulties pertaining to instrument use and sample selection. Limited case studies in this area, which explore the therapeutic implications of intra-racial discrimination, have given broad overviews of the issues that might be presented in therapy. However, they lack the detail needed to fully comprehend the impact of such an issue in psychology and the interventions which need to be utilised to address it.

This critical literature review aims to critically assess the validity of the empirical research that has examined the phenomenon of intra-racial discrimination and its psychological

implications. Research in the areas of intra-racial discrimination and its impact on the self concept, self esteem, and beauty will be critically reviewed. Attention will also be paid to research which has explored the relationship between intra-racial discrimination and the therapeutic relationship, particularly with regards to suggestions for interventions, for working with this specific issue. Based on the review of this area, suggestions for future research are given.

Search terms: *colourism, intra-racial discrimination, Black identity, skin tone bias, skin tone stratification, self-esteem, self-concept, identity conflict, therapeutic relationship*.

If you're White, you're right

If you're yellow you are mellow

If you're brown, stick around,

If you're Black, get back.

-Parrish (1944 p.90)

The saying quoted above aptly captures the complexity of skin tone issues within the Black community. A popular saying in the earlier half of the century, it represents the different levels of discrimination experienced by Black individuals. The first line represents inter-group racism- a concept that has been explored to a great degree in the psychological literature (e.g. see Blake and Darling, 1994; Boyd-Franklin, 1993; Jones, Cross and Defour, 2007). The last three lines depict the concept of intra-racial discrimination, otherwise known as colourism, skin tone bias, or colour consciousness (The terms 'colourism', skin tone bias', 'color consciousness' and intra-racial discrimination will be used interchangeably throughout this review).

Unlike the many issues surrounding race which have been explored in the psychological literature such as racial identity, racism, race in the therapeutic relationship and the relationship between race and mental health; colourism/intra-racial discrimination has received less attention. This is particularly intriguing, as existing literature (e.g. Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Collins, 2000) suggests that intra-racial discrimination can have several psychological implications for individuals within the Black community, predominantly around areas of self esteem, self efficacy, identity formation and identity validation.

Intra-racial discrimination may be expressed as a "general, effect-driven preference or dislike for Black individuals with specific skin tones or as stereotypes about individuals possessing light or dark skin" (Keith and Herring, 2001, p.765). Unlike inter group racism (which occurs between two different ethnic groups) this dislike or preference occurs within a specific ethnic group. Research has shown that specific preferences and dislikes have been found in Black children (Seeman, 1946; Porter, 1991), adolescents (Goering, 1971; Robinson and Ward, 1995), and adults (Bond and Cash, 1992; Hall, 1992). Maddox and Gray (2002) suggest that the general trend is a preference for light individuals and a dislike for dark individuals. These preferences may be shaped by the individual's own skin tone (Bond and Cash, 1992; Hall, 1992), individuals' justifying their judgments (Seeman, 1946; Robinson and Ward, 1995), attributing characteristics based upon skin tone (Marks, 1943; Anderson and Cromwell, 1977) or revealing particular preferences (Hill, 2002).

Studies in this area reveal Black individuals' ascription of numerous positive stereotypes to light skinned individuals which for the most part are favourable. Among other qualities, light-skinned Black individuals are seen as 'intelligent', 'clean', and 'attractive' (Hill, 2002). Negative characteristics (i.e., dumb and dirty) are generally reserved for dark-skinned Black individuals (Breland, 1998). Brown, Ward, Lightbourn and Jackson (1999) posit that two aspects of skin tone bias – preference/dislike and stereotypes - are key elements in a process leading to different socio-economic and psychological outcomes for Black individuals. These outcomes cover a wide variety of phenomena, including mate selection/attraction (Bond and Cash, 1992; Porter, 1991; Hughes and Hertel, 1990; Udry et al., 1969; Freeman et al., 1966; Drake and Cayton, 1945), job attainment and economic advancement (Hill, 2002; Maddox and Gray, 2002) and racial identity (Hughes and Hertel, 1990; Edwards, 1972; Ransford, 1970; Freeman et al., 1966; Cross, 1991).

Tummala–Narra (2007) contends that intra-racial discrimination can have several psychological implications which may present themselves in therapeutic settings or contribute to mental health issues. She posits that there are four areas in which psychological function and outcome are related to skin colour. Skin colour is a gauge of one's sense of belonging to a particular cultural or ethnic group and thus psychological function is related to ethnic or racial belonging. Skin colour can also reflect one's cultural ideals of good and bad, beauty, and intellectual/social competence which contribute to self image and self esteem (Mehta, 1998). Beliefs about skin colour play an important role in racial and cultural identity development through 'identification with or disengagement from one's ethnic group and/or the mainstream culture" (Helms and Cook, 1999, p.69). Additionally, experiences of intra-racial discrimination can have an effect on intra-psychic processes.

This critical literature review aims to present a review of the existing literature and critically assess the validity of the empirical research that has examined the phenomenon of intra-racial discrimination and its psychological implications. A brief history will be given in order to illustrate the roots of colourism, its development and emergence in Black culture. This review will critically review research which has explored the psychological impact of intra-racial discrimination specifically around areas of self concept, beauty, self esteem, and the relationship between colourism and the therapeutic relationship.

A Brief History

Bond and Cash(1992) stated that "Black history provides considerable evidence that the ... skin tone of African Americans has exerted powerful and persistent influences on societal attitudes toward and treatment of Black persons within both Black and White cultures" (p.

874). Although movements have taken place to eradicate the notion of colourism (e.g. the Black is beautiful movement of the sixties), the phenomenon still exists. However, Breland (1998) points out that despite the existence of colourism and the integral part it plays in the lives of Black individuals, coupled with its historical roots, most research has been devoted to inter racial discrimination and is usually rooted in the theory of racism and stereotypes as opposed to colour consciousness. She posits that there are several reasons for this. It is possible that the subject is too painful and difficult a topic for public discussion among the multitude of Black individuals affected by it (Breland, 1998). Furthermore, there may be a fear that discussing this issue in culturally mixed groups will lead to misinterpretation and will be used to "defeat much of the positive civic and political change for which so many Black individuals fought and died for" (Breland, 1998, p.296). There may also be a fear that the maintenance of the skin tone issues in the Black community stems from an attempt by some group members to detach themselves from their African or Caribbean cultural roots (Wiltz, 1995).

Black individuals' issues surrounding skin tone are rooted in European colonialism and early slavery (Hunter, 2007). Both systems operated as forms of White domination that "rewarded those who emulated whiteness culturally, ideologically, economically, and even aesthetically" (Hunter, 2007 p.238). Light-skinned people received privileges and resources that were otherwise unattainable to their darker-skinned counterparts. White elites ruling the colonies maintained White superiority and domination by enlisting the assistance of the 'colonial elite', often a small light-skinned class of colonized people (Hunter, 2007; Fanon, 1967).

Breland (1998) echoes the suggestion of the connection between slavery and colourism and gives detailed reasons as to why this type of skin hierarchy existed and continued within

the Black community. During the era of slavery, it is believed that African women who were favored by slave masters were light skinned. These women were afforded social and to some extent, economic privileges that other enslaved Africans were not, particularly the darker skinned Africans (Okazawa-Rey, Robinson and Ward, 1986). Individuals with lighter skin were often freed from slavery and afforded formal and informal education and training for certain skilled jobs. When slavery was deemed illegal and eradicated in 1865, lighter skinned individuals who had been placed in high status occupations were placed in an interracial liaison class. As the former slaves moved from plantations into cities and towns, this colour based skin system followed, therefore cementing the idea that light skinned individuals were of a higher status. These attitudes were also perpetuated by White individuals in society who afforded light skinned individuals more opportunities in terms of education, economic status and job positions (Seltzer and Smith, 1991; Edwards, 1972).

In contrast Gabriel (2007) posits that colourism has significant roots in chattel enslavement and colonialism, but the idea that darker skinned individuals are inferior to lighter skinned Black individuals may have started even before slavery. Black skin was a strong signifier of evil and unintelligence; even before slavery started, historians and philosophers equated inferiority with Black (i.e. dark skin). In her descriptive explanation of this phenomenon, Gabriel (2007) contends that historical accounts by Victorian explorers dubbed Africa the 'dark continent' and described individuals who lived there as 'barely above consciousness' and savage. Additionally, scientific racism which denotes the use of scientific or ostensibly scientific findings and methods to support or validate racist attitudes and worldviews (Fryer, 1993), began in the 18th century and served to build associations of unintelligence with Black skinned individuals. Initial racism between Black and White skinned individuals eventually filtered into the Black community. Individuals who were closer in

colour to White individuals were deemed more desirable, smart and better able to assimilate into society. The association of Black skin and inferiority created skin hierarchies in colonised countries, and when migration occurred in the 1950's these ideas, ideals and attitudes carried across the Atlantic by Caribbean and African immigrants were used to socialise their families and children. Gabriel (2007) suggests that colourism "undermines efforts of African Diaspora to shake shackles of its past and is "the legacy of dehumanising process of chattel enslavement and colonisation" (p. 67). She also contends that in the present day, its effect on Black individuals' self perception, self concept and self worth is a sine qua non of Black identity development and experience.

Colourism and Self concept

One of the areas in the psychological literature where the effect of colourism has been explored is the relationship between colourism and self concept. Breland (1998) suggests that Black individuals may need to integrate identity development, racial identity development and self concept in order to develop a healthy personal identity which exhibits emotional and social strengths. However, consolidation of a personal identity and development of a healthy self concept for Black individuals may be complicated by racial identity issues, and more specifically, skin colour consciousness.

Black racial identity has been cited by researchers as an underlying reason for the continued existence of colourism within the Black community (West, 1995; Greene, 1994). It may serve as a mechanism for the internalisation of cues of colour consciousness by Black individuals during the development of their self concept. According to Black identity models, (Cross, 1995; Helms, 1990; Parham, 1989) individuals progress through a series of stages in

order to develop and assimilate a positive Black identity into their overall identity structure. In adopting a Black identity, individuals also internalise and adopt the cultural and ethnic ideals of their reference group via socialisation, and this may include attitudes in regard to colourism/intra-racial discrimination (Parham, 1989).

Both Helm's (1990) and Cross's (1995) models demonstrate that racial identity development is a dynamic process that develops within the interaction between an individual and his or her context (Rockquemore and Brusmama, 2001). Clinical Case studies by Tummala-Narra (2007), Breland (1998) and West (1995) attempt to demonstrate the link between racial identity, colourism and mental health. Breland (1998) suggests that because Black individuals are influenced at some level in the identity formation process by ideals of Euro-centrism. They are likely to have internalised at some point the belief that lighter skinned individuals are more competent as this is an ideal that may be perpetuated by both the Black community and the larger community as a whole. Repercussions of this can include self- hatred or an inability to consolidate a personal identity or develop a healthy self concept.

Psychological literature which has explored the relationship between colourism and self concept has shown significant evidence to suggest that Black individuals aspire to or would prefer to look like or attain the characteristics of light skinned individuals (Clark and Clark, 1940; Powell Hopson and Hopson, 1988; Thompson and Keith, 2001). These particular preferences have been equated with psychological issues such as low self esteem and a problematic identity formation (Tummala- Narra, 2007; West, 1995).

One such study was the work conducted by Kenneth and Mamie Clark (1940) whose now infamous doll study attempted to address several mediating variables from past research in

this area. In their study, they showed seventy four Black children a White doll and a Black doll and asked questions such as 'which doll is the pretty doll?' They controlled for age and skin colour, and avoided controlling for order effect in the presentation of the questions, in order to maximise a desired outcome. The children overwhelmingly chose the White doll, thus showing that the children had a preference for the White skin and a negative attitude toward their own skin colour. They suggested that these findings could be as a result of the Black community and the wider community as a whole perpetuating attitudes and ideas surrounding light skinned ideals. From a psychological point of view, Clark and Clark (1940) also equated this finding with low self esteem and unhealthy self concept in Black children. They further point out that negative remarks made by a handful of the children in their study and in their clinical practice represent pervasive themes in the psychodynamics, not only of Black children in general, but also of the average Black teenager and adult. Although the doll study was significant in revealing the possible psychological issues that Black children may face as a result of intra-racial discrimination, there are several variables within this study that must be questioned. The presentation of inappropriate or unrealistic dolls may have had an effect on the results. Furthermore, the fact that the children were given forced-choice questions calls into question the validity of their responses. There is also the question of researcher bias, the Clarks'(1940) conducted this study as a result of the flaws in a previous study (Horowitz 1939) and may have presented results that seemingly favoured their hypothesis regarding skin tone bias. This calls into question the interpretation of the results.

Interestingly enough, despite past methodological and interpretative limitations, studies which have replicated the doll study have yielded similar results (Barnes, 1980; Powell–Hopson and Hopson, 1988; Cramer and Anderson, 2002; Davis, 2005). Cramer and Anderson (2002) examined 411 children from urban and rural areas of Jamaica and rural New England

for their skin colour, body size preference and self identification using a modified version of the doll test. Each child was interviewed by a Black Jamaican or a White American female. Their ethnic/racial and body size bias and their awareness of their ethnic/racial and body size group membership were assessed by having them respond to drawings of Black, White, average sized and 'chubby' children (Cramer and Anderson, 2002). This was achieved by interviewing the children for fifteen minutes and subsequently administering four tasks, these comprised of several short stories which had both Black and White characters. They were then asked to match a set of paper dolls that differ in size and skin colour to the characters in the stories. The children were asked which doll looked like them and which one they would like to look like. Results showed that correct self identification was greater amongst the White New England children than the Jamaican children. Additionally, the Black children overwhelmingly favoured the White paper doll when they were assessed for colour preference. However, like the Clark et al (1940) study, the experimenters used a forced choice method, therefore encouraging the children to show some favouritism in their responses. Furthermore, the use of figure drawings and paper dolls instead of real dolls or even real life figures may have had an effect on the elicitation of attitudes about real people from the children. Additionally, the use of a White and Black examiner may have had an influence on the participants' responses in the study. Results from both studies show that there appear to be prevalent self esteem issues in Black children, in regard to the colour of their skin colour and racial identity. This is reinforced by the Black community through the messages, attitudes and preferences that they pass on to the youth.

These studies are important in demonstrating the relationship between intra-racial discrimination and self concept, and more importantly how racial identity formation can be influenced by cultural and environmental context. The attitudes, ideals and norms that are

ingrained in the Black community concerning skin tone and colour seem to be adopted by individuals in the development of their identity. However, most of the studies in this area have been conducted with children and it has been suggested that "it is an absurdity to ground a discussion of Blackness across the life span on the uniformed, naïve and cognitively inconsistent and unstable racial preference choices of Black pre-schoolers" (Cross, 1991, p.118). This is an important point to consider as results from these studies cannot necessarily be translated to the general population. However, they do give an insight into the psychological implications of colourism at this stage of development and why this needs to be addressed in order to foster a positive self concept and racial identity within Black individuals. In the studies presented here, the authors suggested that the psychological implications of colourism can affect self esteem. This will be further explored in the following section.

Colourism and self esteem

Self- esteem, a component of the self-concept, refers to a person's total positive evaluation of self (Gecas, 1982). Underlying this definition is an individual's sense of competence, the belief that one has control over events (self- efficacy) and the degree to which an individual feels they are valued (Gecas, 1982; Caste and Burke, 2002). Thompson and Keith (2001) emphasise that the development of a self concept and underlying self esteem is partly based on environmental context for social comparison. They also contend that dissonant and conflictual racial environments can have a negative effect on self-esteem. Thus, the heterogeneity of skin tone hues and colourism can create a dissonant racial environment and become an instigator of negative self evaluation.

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Thompson and Keith (2001) used data from the national survey of Black Americans (a probability household survey of 2,107 African Americans ages 18 and older) to examine the way in which gender socially constructs skin colour for evaluations of self worth, self esteem and self confidence. In the survey, participants were asked to respond to questions which measured self esteem and self efficacy. Subsequently, the interviewers rated respondents on their attractiveness and their skin tone. Thompson and Keith (2001) analysed this data using a multiple regression strategy and concluded that skin colour is an important predictor for self esteem in Black women and not Black men. The effect of skin tone was not statistically significant for Black men; however, skin tone had a positive association with self esteem for the Black women in this study. They attribute this finding to gendered characteristics, that is, skin colour is important in self-domains that are attributed to femininity. However, this is questionable, given their non involvement with the collection of the original data; and as such, such an overwhelming conclusion cannot be drawn. Whilst their analysis did show a link between skin colour and lower levels of self esteem and self efficacy, it is possible that their analysis may or may not be replicated if the survey were more recent. There are a rising number of ethnic minorities in the United States, and the current attitudes and views regarding skin colour seems to be changing. There also seems to be a larger representation of a variety of Black skin colours in the media, and more recently, in politics, a factor which was, for the most part, absent at the time this survey was conducted. Additionally, one might call into question the use of interviewer ratings (in the original survey) for participants, as this could be considered to be subjective and not a true representation of the participants used in this survey.

Using a more direct approach, Coard, Breland and Raskin (2001) examined the role of skin colour and how it pertains to racial identity and self esteem among 113 African American college students. Participants were administered several questionnaires and a self esteem scale

in order to gauge colour preference in relation to racial identity, skin colour preference and self esteem. Findings revealed that the sample preferred skin colour of a medium tone, rather than exhibiting self-preference for either lighter or darker skin tones. There was also a significant relationship between participants' perceptions of and preferences for his or her skin colour and the skin tones idealized by others (e.g., opposite gender, family). Lighter skin colour was positively related to higher levels of positive racial identity; the more satisfied darker skinned individuals were with their skin colour, the lower their self-esteem. Gender differences existed in perceptions of others' preferences for skin colour. Whilst the results from this study gives an insight into the relation between colourism and self esteem, the experimenters own skin colour and gender may have had an impact on the responses of participants (the experimenters were Black). Additionally, the use of college students is not representative of the community at large and therefore limits the generalisation of the results. The experimenters state that they recruited participants from various colleges, however, in the United States; there are a plethora of colleges who belong to a conglomerate of historically Black institutions. These institutions usually have a predominantly Black student population and promote positive Black identity and achievement (Stephen and Shafer, 2004). It is possible that participants who attended historically Black colleges and participated in this study may have been more comfortable with their skin tone and racial identity as a result of the positive validation they may receive in their scholastic environments and this may have affected the outcome of the results. The measures used in this study must also be questioned. Participants were asked to rate their perceived skin colour based on a limited scale, one that may not have encompassed the variations of skin colour within the Black community and as perceived by the participants. This contrasted with another skin colour measure used in this study where participants were given a wider range of options in terms of skin colour; however, this may have had an adverse effect on the results.

Adopting a more unique approach in the study of self esteem and colourism, Gold (2002) conducted a study where she looked at the perceived similarities of albinism and colourism as experienced by African Americans in relation to self esteem. Using three groups of participants (one group who were devoid of identified disabilities, another with visual impairments and a third group who had oculocutaneous albinism), she administered three measures to assess levels and differences in self esteem amongst 30 African American teenagers ranging in age from 14-19. There were no differences in the levels of self esteem between these three groups, which suggests that African American individuals with features of albinism did not suffer from low self esteem. This is in direct contrast to previous research (e.g. Noah, 1996) which has suggested that individuals with albinism suffer from the same prejudice of colourism as they are accused of trying to 'pass' for White and afford themselves greater privilege because of their lighter skin tone. Additionally, the subject pool used in this study was limited, as was the sample size. Furthermore, participants who took part in this study by the researcher's own admission came from stable homes, and this may have had an effect on the levels of self esteem. This also lends questioning to the measures used in this study, as the instruments may have been unable to measure a response large enough to lead to an effect.

Perhaps adopting a more unique approach in the exploration of colourism and its effect on self esteem, Dixon, Zhang and Conrad (2009), explored a group of hip-hop videos for the presence of Afrocentric features and the impact it may have on Black individuals self-concept and self esteem. Using a group of diverse coders, the authors conducted a content analysis which examined controversial themes, gender differences and skin tone differences. Their analysis suggested that current hip–hop videos have placed an emphasis on misogyny and materialism. In regards to colourism, they found that African American females in these videos are more likely to have Eurocentric features which they suggest may have an adverse impact

on viewing audience. They link past studies of self esteem and colourism to this finding. They imply that these videos may have a negative impact on Black female viewers in particular because of their glorification of Eurocentric features and further perpetuation of these stereotypes by viewers and artists. They also suggest that Black individuals may not be able to dissociate from these images as easily as they might with other music genres because hip-hop music is predominantly created by Black individuals, individuals from whom sources of self esteem may be drawn.

Whilst this is a study which is unique in its approach, and comparatively different to other self esteem research pieces, certain factors negate its validity. The coders used in this study whilst diverse, lacked the participation of African American individuals, the very subject group for whom this analysis had direct implications. The authors state that the coders enrolled in a training programme which socialised them with the literature and theory pertaining to this topic, but they do not specify what this training programme consisted of. Additionally, although the authors hypothesise about the impact on lack of Afrocentric features these videos on participants self esteem, they did not actually include a tool which specifically measured this. The data analysed was somewhat limited as videos over a very tight time period were used, even though the authors discuss the lengthy existence of this bias in hip-hop videos. Analysis which included hip-hop videos over a time span and an exploration of self esteem factors in relation to this, would have given this study more depth.

The connection between self-esteem and colourism is one of the better researched areas within the psychological research; however there seems to be a paucity of qualitative studies which have examined this concept. This could be due to the resistance of individuals affected by this phenomenon to speak about their experiences as alluded to earlier in this review

(Breland, 1998). Whilst quantitative approaches have provided an important insight into the impact of colourism on self esteem, in the interest of developing evidence based and sound psychological interventions, it would be beneficial to gain an informed and rich discourse on how colourism positively or negatively affects self esteem and self concept.

Intra-Racism, Physical Attractiveness, Beauty and Psychological Implications.

> Wouldn't they be surprised when one day I woke out of my Black ugly dream, and my real hair, which was long and blond, would take the place of the kinky mass Momma wouldn't let me straighten? My light-blue eyes would hypnotize them...
> Angelou (1970, p.74)

As illustrated in the above quotation, another area where intra-racial discrimination has a significant effect is in the area of physical attractiveness/beauty. The concept of intra-racial discrimination and its effect on physical attractiveness is best depicted in the books 'I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings' by Maya Angelou and 'The Bluest Eye' by Toni Morrison. In both books, the lead characters aspire to the White ideals of beauty, largely because of the messages that they receive from the Black community in regard to the positivity of light skin. In Morrison's book in particular, the character of Pecola Breedlove truly believes that if she had blue eyes and lighter skin that she would be accepted, she would be deemed beautiful, and that the world would be a much bearable place to live in. This is because as a dark skinned Black girl, she is regarded as ugly and irrelevant. She prays to God everyday asking for blue eyes, blond hair and light skin in the hope that this will relieve her of all the atrocities she had been subjected to which included sexual abuse, bullying and name calling.

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Bond and Cash (1992) give an insight into why Pecola Breedlove may have developed the notion of light skin equating to superiority and why 'colourism' influences Black individual's concept of beauty. They suggest that preferential treatment given by both Black and White cultures to Black individuals with light skin and other Eurocentric features has conveyed to many Black individuals that the more physically conformed to the White majority standard of beauty, the more rewarding their lives will be. Research and literature have explored the ways in which darker skinned individuals aspire to this through various methods, the most common and documented being skin bleaching which has become increasingly popular, widely available and created a thriving industry (e.g. see Charles, 2003; Charles, 2009; Maddox, 2004; Lyang, 2006). Research in this area seems to suggest that even following the Black Pride Movement in the 1960's there still seems to be little change in the traditionally ingrained values of beauty still perceived by many Black individuals, particularly African Americans (Hughes and Hertel, 1990; Neal and Wilson, 1989). Iijima-Hall (1995) posits that dark skinned women may feel pre-determined by these stereotypes. Furthermore, psychological consequences as a result of these stereotypes include a development of self hate, low self esteem, and anger towards the Black and larger community as a whole. This is because of the feeling of being unable to attain financial, political, social and personal satisfaction or happiness. This is echoed by Boyd-Franklin (2003) who points out that feelings of inadequacy and inferiority about personal beauty as a result of intra-racial discrimination are major themes in the treatment of Black women in psychotherapy.

Colourism and its impact on self image, beauty and attractiveness is one of the more developed research areas within psychological literature (e.g. Keith and Herring, 1991; Urdy, Bauman and Chase, 1977; Leeds, 1994; Hunter, 2002; Hughes and Hertel, 1990; Bond and Cash, 1992; Iijima Hall, 1995; Tate, 2007). Bond and Cash (1992) conducted a study where

they examined skin colour as it pertains to body image measures. They interviewed 66 African American female undergraduates at a south-eastern urban university. Results showed that a majority of the participants felt satisfied with their skin colour. However, personal skin colour preference varied. Light and dark skinned women tended to choose an ideal skin colour close to their present colour. However, medium skinned individuals had ideals which were significantly lighter than their own. 36 percent of the participants reported that they would make their complexion lighter and only 17 percent would like to be darker. Although this study sheds some light on the link between skin colour and body satisfaction, again the issue of the chosen sample arises. In addition, in this study, a colour palette was used (by a 'trained' examiner) to determine the skin colour of all the participants, which calls into question whether this palette truly accounted for all the possible shades of Black that existed within this participant sample.

In one of the few qualitative studies conducted in this area, Tate (2007) used a discourse of Black 'mixed race' women who engaged in "unsettling Black anti-racist aesthetics, to theorize the place of dis-identification, melancholia, shame, and interception in performatively producing Black beauty" (p.300). Her analysis "uses everyday talk on Black beauty to look at how women's readings of experiences mediate racializing discourses of belonging and exclusion while simultaneously articulating subjectivity and agency" (p.301). The extracts she uses in her discussion about colourism were derived from a bigger research project which was conducted in 1990. However, what was interesting about this analysis was her choice to use discourse from the mixed race participants, thereby giving a different view on colourism from individuals who are rarely studied in the exploration of the negative effects of colourism. The participants in this study spoke of the difficulties they experienced as light skinned individuals, this included narrative about the psychological implications of trying to

assimilate into the Black community. Their shame stemmed from the negative reactions and perceptions of individuals in the Black community because of their own feelings of identification as Black individuals and their attachment to the Black community. Their need to be to be seen as the embodiment of Black beauty, even though they knew they were marginalized because of their shade and hair, triggered feelings of shame and resentment. Whilst this research is relevant partly because of its qualitative component, it would have been interesting to compare the discourse of these individuals with other participants in the larger study who were darker skinned or not of mixed race heritage. It would have given a diverse insight into the perception of beauty and colourism from both perspectives. Also, Tate's (2007) analysis is based on the discourse from two individuals which gives a somewhat narrow insight into the psyche of individuals who experience colourism in the Black community. Therefore, generalised conclusions cannot be drawn from this study as a result.

This is captured to some extent by Debbie Weekes (2003) and Amina Mama (1995) who also explored colourism as part of their wider studies on Black identity. Weekes (1998) adopted a qualitative approach and interviewed women of varying shades about their sense of beauty and identity. As part of a wider study on identities of 31 young black women, Weekes (2003) interviewed 31 Black women aged 14-16. Her inclusion of both darker skinned and lighter skinned individuals highlights the rejection of European standards of beauty by darker skinned individuals who do not aspire to lighter skin and their dislike of the pedestal on which lighter skinned individuals are sometimes placed. This correlates directly with the experiences described by participants in Tate's (2007) study. Reponses from women in her study suggest that Black women speak about their identities in a highly gendered manner and their womanhood is signified by the length and texture of their hair, shade of their skin and nature of their parentage. She also purports the notion that the complexity of Black female constructions

of beauty is highlighted in two extremes; at one end there is a rejection of European ideas of womanhood and at the other end, there is an underlying 'whiteness' as a yardstick for beauty.

Unfortunately this study did not include colourism as a main component of the work and considering the information which emerged, particularly around the different insights from different shades of Black women, it would have been beneficial to explore this on a longer and wider scale. Nevertheless, most studies have concentrated on the dialogues of individuals who are 18 plus. Weekes (2003) participants were in the early- mid teens, therefore gaining a perspective from individuals who may still be formulating their identities.

Mama's (1995) study explored the construction of subjectivity in Black women. She and 14 other women of different shades and cultures participated in discussions which lasted between two and three hours. Mama (1995) also revealed there was a pool of secondary participants, mostly women she knew or was acquainted with who were mentioned as being influential in the research process although not directly quoted. She was able to draw from the discussions that a concern with being attractive features strongly in Black women's femininity and thus affects their perception of beauty. She also makes a link between beauty/attractiveness in Black women and the influence of Black males in this perception suggesting that Black men share dominant racialised notions of female attractiveness. This can have an adverse impact on Black women, particularly in their pursuit of relationships with Black men.

Mama's (1995) study does highlight the notion that colourism is a problem which can affect all Black women of all shades, not just darker skinned individuals as many articles on this topic seem to suggest. Furthermore, her inclusion of a variety of women from different cultural backgrounds and different shades of Black adds a different perspective to the debate

on this issue. However, again, the topic of colourism is not a main feature of this study, and Mama's (1995) discussion around colourism does not give enough about the implication of or the impact of colourism on the self and subjectivity, even though this is the main thrust of her research. Additionally, Mama (1995) had a dual role in the research process as a participant and researcher which may have affected her reflexivity in the analysis of the discussions which took place.

The studies discussed here are important in demonstrating the link between intra-racial discrimination, beauty and psychological implications. However, research exploring the psychological effect of having light skin by a Black individual is scarce. The study by Tate (2007) clearly shows that there is a need for this, as insight and perspective from light skinned individuals demonstrates psychological difficulty and identity conflict. Ijima–Hall (1995) suggests that light skinned individuals may also experience psychological stress as a result of being stereotyped by the Black community as being privileged and immune to the consequences of intra-racial discrimination, and racism. Furthermore, they may be accused of not possessing a Black consciousness or a positive Black identity. This could be explored in a study which incorporated both quantitative and qualitative measures in order to gain some insight into intra-racial discrimination from the perception of a light skinned individual.

Colourism and the therapeutic relationship

As discussed throughout the course of this review, colourism can have numerous psychological implications for individuals who are affected by this dynamic on an intra-psychic level. It is quite possible that an individual may question his or her authenticity in a particular racial group and develop feelings of guilt, shame or pride about their skin colour.

Additionally, it is also possible that an individual affected by colourism may internalise oppressive images of their skin colour held by mainstream culture and carry this image into the realm of their interpersonal relationships. (Tummala-Narra, 2007; Hunter, 2002; Atkinson, Brown, Parham, Matthews, Brown and Kim, 1996)

Tummala-Narra (2007) suggests that intra-psychic processes related to skin colour have important implications for therapy and the therapeutic relationship, because the client and therapist share interactions which mirror the larger social structure, and as a result, this can have implications for the dynamics in the therapeutic relationship. She further suggests that whilst skin colour is often experienced as a precarious topic of discussion it can be useful in helping the client to access "memories of difficult and racially traumatic experiences which may contribute to their current ongoing psychological distress and social adjustment" (p. 263).

In an exploratory article, West (1995) identifies three historical images of Black women and describes the impact of these images on aspects of Black women's psychological functioning. One of the connections she presents is the link between the Mammy image (depicted as a bandana clad obese dark complexioned woman) and concerns about skin colour. She postulates that among Black women with African features, physical characteristics such as dark skin and kinky hair, which are associated with the mammy image, may perpetuate shame and feelings of unattractiveness. She also points out that lighter skinned individuals may be confronted with inquiries about heritage and racial identity and may experience guilt and shame based on their features; this was representative in a previously discussed article in this review. She suggests several therapeutic interventions and skills that therapists should employ when dealing with issues of colourism in therapy; these include cultural sensitivity, proper exploration and collaborative engagement. However, West (1995) fails to identify or touch on

the way in which colourism may play out in therapy, particularly when the therapist is Black and of lighter or darker skin tone in relation to the client. It may be possible that a client may feel reluctant to disclose information to a therapist whose skin colour affects the therapeutic dynamics.

Tummala-Narra (2007) takes her exploration a step further in her discussion about skin colour and the therapeutic relationship by illustrating her argument with clinical vignettes. In one of the clinical vignettes she describes the dynamics that arose as a result of her identity as an Indian American therapist and her client's darker skin tone. In the vignette, her client expresses his fear that the discussion of his issues with his skin colour might offend her because she is of a darker complexion than him. Tummala-Narra (2007) explains that her counter-transference involved her identification with both the devalued and idealised projections of her own skin colour which she has experienced. She admits that skin colour for both her and her client was a symbol of deeper conflicts and self worth. However, she fails to clearly present the way in which she dealt with these transference and counter-transference issues, and also, the way in which she helped the client to address his concerns about colourism. This may have given a deeper insight into the therapeutic process and would have further exemplified the suggestions for therapeutic interventions which she presents at the end of the article.

In her paper 'Racial Enactments in Dynamic Treatment' Leary (2000) also presents a case concerning racial enactments in therapy. The aim of her paper is to present and to discuss "racial enactments for what they might contribute to our understanding of the inter-subjectivity of race and racial experience" (p. 639). She also presents a clinical vignette which demonstrates an interaction between herself and a client who amongst other issues has

problems related to colourism in the form of her preference for light skinned men. The client also questions the authenticity of Leary's race, at one point asking her if she is 'really Black'. These questions were of course signposts for much deeper underlying issues; the patient saw herself as inferior to light skinned Black individuals and questioned the therapist's authenticity because of her own insecurities (Leary 2000).This produced a certain dynamic in therapy; where the client tried to develop an element of control over the therapy in order to validate herself. Unlike Tummala-Narra's (2007) case presentations, one developed a sense of the interventions that Leary (2000) used within therapy to address the issue of colourism both as a client issue and also in the way it affected the therapeutic relationship. She gives specific examples of the probes and interventions she used and how this affected her role as the therapist. It is a very descriptive and reflective piece and gives an insight into the transference and counter transference issues that may arise in therapy as a result of skin tone.

It is interesting that the issue of skin tone is such an under researched area within the psychological literature, when it is apparent that it is an issue that presents itself in therapy even if it is not the main presenting issue. With regards to the effect skin tone bias has on the therapeutic relationship, it would be useful to explore the way in which a therapist of a different race or cultural background would help a client who needed to address issues related to colourism and indeed, how this would affect a client's choice to disclose or even attempt to explore such a sensitive issue. Various researchers (e.g. Sterling, Gottheil, Weinstein and Serota, 2001; Porche and Banikiotes, 1992; Farsimadan, Lorenz and Ellis, 2007) have looked at racial similarity and dissimilarity in therapy and the effect it has on therapeutic outcome and therapeutic dynamics, and as skin tone bias falls under this umbrella, this area needs more attention.

The studies reviewed here suggest the broad scope and impact of intra-racial discrimination. Most importantly, the studies also reveal and demonstrate the effect intra-racial discrimination can have on psychological well-being. It is apparent that the variation of skin tone within the Black community has a significant impact on individual beliefs, feelings, evaluations and treatment toward others. These may have consequences for their interpersonal and intra-psychic functioning, their development of a salient racial and personal identity and physical and psychological health outcomes.

Thompson and Keith (2001) make several important points regarding the literature on intra-racial discrimination and the psychological implication it carries. They suggest that the literature in this area, although significant, is riddled with methodological limitations. One of these limitations is the ability of all studies to employ objectiveness of skin tone. They suggest that this limitation can have an effect on the observed effect of skin tone and self concept. They further contend that most of the research in this area is based on data from relatively small sample sizes or homogenous databases and is therefore not a true representation of the ideals and attitudes of the people they purport to be studying.

Unfortunately, most of the research reviewed here, and indeed most of the empirical research which exists has been conducted with African American participants and this may have cross cultural implications. The Black race is a culturally diverse one which is represented all over the world. It would not be ecologically valid to translate the results from these studies to a Black British community or a Black African community. Furthermore, there are variations within the African American culture itself. Therefore, results from a sample of African Americans who reside in the Southern area of the United States may differ from those in a sample of African Americans who reside in the North. This is equally applicable to a Black

community in an African country or a European country. Immigration and acculturation may also have an effect on sample variation and results. It is possible that an immigrant to Britain may have different values and ideals in regard to racial identity and indeed how they perceive skin colour within their community and this must be taken into account for future studies in this area.

Most of the studies which have been conducted in this area have adopted quantitative methods and have provided important statistical evidence to support the existence and effect of intra-racial discrimination. However, it would be beneficial for the field of psychology if more qualitative studies were conducted as this would enhance upon the findings already presented in the studies reviewed here. Studies that combined both quantitative and qualitative methods would be beneficial in explaining the meaning behind preference choices and give some insight into whether intra-racial discrimination is developed or learned and how it is maintained in certain individuals.

The subject pools in many of these studies have generally comprised university students, adolescents and children. Future studies in this area need to address this imbalance as such samples are not necessarily representative of the wider population as a whole. Furthermore, the mind sets, preferences and cultural ideals of individuals at different ages will significantly differ and this must be taken into account when considering results from these studies. Additionally, although colourism is more likely to affect females (Breland, 1998), this is not to suggest that Black males are not affected by colourism. Their absence in the psychological literature must be addressed as colourism refers not just to skin tone but also to physiognomic features and thus may equally impact the self concept and self esteem of a male individual.

Finally, the influence and effect of skin tone and how it plays out in therapy is also an area that needs to be further explored. A majority of the studies reviewed here suggest that intra-racial discrimination can have psychological implications and yet it is not a widely addressed topic in the psychotherapeutic literature (Tummala-Narra, 2007; Neal and Wilson, 1989) which is somewhat surprising, considering the plethora of research which exists on the issue of race, racism and therapist-client dynamics.

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Appendix

Are you a Black British Lesbian of African or Caribbean descent?

Will you talk to me in confidence about your experiences?

I really want your story to be heard.

My name is Ohemaa Nkansa-Dwamena. I am doing this research project as part of my doctorate in Counselling Psychology at City University (supervised by Dr. Deborah Rafalin , ████████████████) . Please give me a call to find out more on [deleted]or email me at: ██████████████████.

Appendix B
Ethics Release Form

Ethics Release Form for Psychology Research Projects

All students planning to undertake any research activity in the Department of Psychology are required to complete this Ethics Release Form and to submit it to their Research Supervisor, **together with their research proposal**, prior to commencing their research work. If you are proposing multiple studies within your research project, you are required to submit a separate ethical release form for each study.

This form should be completed in the context of the following information:

- An understanding of ethical considerations is central to planning and conducting research.
- Approval to carry out research by the Department of Psychology does not exempt you from Ethics Committee approval from institutions within which you may be planning to conduct the research, e.g.: Hospitals, NHS Trusts, HM Prisons Service, etc.
- The published ethical guidelines of the British Psychological Society (2004) <u>Guidelines for minimum standards of ethical approval in psychological research</u> (BPS: Leicester) should be referred to when planning your research.
- **Students are not permitted to begin their research work until approval has been received and this form has been signed by 2 members of Department of Psychology staff.**

Section A: To be completed by the student

Please indicate the degree that the proposed research project pertains to:

BSc ☐   M.Phil ☐   M.Sc ☐   Ph.D ☐   D.Psych ✓   n/a ☐

Please answer all of the following questions, circling yes or no where appropriate:

1. Title of project

NEGOTIATING RACIAL, SEXUAL & GENDER IDENTITIES: AN EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK BRITISH LESBIANS

2. Name of student researcher (please include contact address and telephone number)

OHEMAA NKANSA-DWAMENA, 56A TEKNINGHAM ROAD, LONDON SE14, 5NW. 07947856203

3. Name of research supervisor

DR. DEBORAH RAFALIN

4. Is a research proposal appended to this ethics release form?   Yes   No

5. Does the research involve the use of human subjects/participants?   (Yes)   No

If yes, a. Approximately how many are planned to be involved? ---- 8 ----

     b. How will you recruit them? Via the internet, newspapers, bars, clubs, gyms sauna's, snowballing women who identify

     c. What are your recruitment criteria? black british lesbians of African or Caribbean descent
     (*Please append your recruitment material/advertisement/flyer*)

     d. Will the research involve the participation of minors (under 16 years of age) or those unable to give informed consent?

                  Yes   (No)

     e. If yes, will signed parental/carer consent be obtained?   Yes   No   N/A

1

6. What will be required of each subject/participant (e.g. time commitment, task/activity)? *(If psychometric instruments are to be employed, please state who will be supervising their use and their relevant qualification).*

Participation in an <ins>taped</ins> interview which will last between an hour and an hour and a half. Supervised by Dr. Deborah Rafalin. Interview schedule to be composed by myself under the supervision of Dr. Deborah Rafalin

7. Is there any risk of physical or psychological harm to the subjects/participants?

                             Yes   (No)

If yes, a. Please detail the possible harm? --

        b. How can this be justified? --

8. Will all subjects/participants and/or their parents/carers receive an information sheet describing the aims, procedure and possible risks of the research, as well as providing researcher and supervisor contact details?

                             (Yes)   No

(Please append the information sheet which should be written in terms which are accessible to your subjects/participants and/or their parents/carers)

9. Will any person's treatment/care be in any way compromised if they choose not to participate in the research?

                             Yes   (No)

10. Will all subjects/participants be required to sign a consent form, stating that they fully understand the purpose, procedure and possible risks of the research?

                             (Yes)   No

(Please append the informed consent form which should be written in terms which are accessible to your subjects/participants and/or their parents/carers)

11. What records will you be keeping of your subjects/participants? (e.g. research notes, computer records, tape/video recordings)?

tape recordings, research notes

12. What provision will there be for the safe-keeping of these records? No identifiers will be used, tape recordings locked away, stored on laptop to which only I have access

13. What will happen to the records at the end of the project? They will be kept in a safe place which only I will have access to

14. How will you protect the anonymity of the subjects/participants? Use of pseudonyms, All identifiers will be changed (e.g. places, people, names).

15. What provision for post research de-brief or psychological support will be available should subjects/participants require?

Verbal debrief and information pack which will contain appropiate sources for psychological support

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(Please append any de-brief information sheets or resource lists detailing possible support options)

If you have circled an item in bold print, please provide further explanation here:

Signature of student researche ██████████████ Date **7/12/06**

Section B: To be completed by the research supervisor

Please mark the appropriate box below:

Ethical approval granted ☑

Refer to the Department of Psychology Research Committee ☐

Refer to the University Senate Research Committee ☐

Signat ███████████████ Date **6/12/6**

Section C: To be completed by the 2ⁿᵈ Department of Psychology staff member *(Please read this ethics release form fully and pay particular attention to any answers on the form where bold items have been circled and any relevant appendices.)*

I agree with the decision of the research supervisor as indicated above ☑

Signature ███████████████ Date **14/12/06**

3
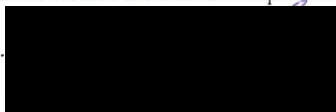
Information for participants

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this study is to explore the construction of a lesbian identity within a British context. Interviews will be conducted with 10 Black British females of African or Caribbean descent who identify as lesbian.

What will be done if you take part in this research study?
If you choose to take part in this research study, you will be interviewed by the Researcher (Ohemaa Nkansa-Dwamena) Each interview will be approximately one and a half-two hours in length and will take place in a location that is convenient for you and the researcher. There will also be a brief demographic questionnaire to fill out. This Questionnaire will ask brief questions in relation to your background. I will use this the information you give me to demonstrate variety within my participant pool.

What are the possible discomforts and risks?
As a result in participation in this study psychological or emotional issues may arise from discussing your experiences as Black British lesbian woman. A list of community resources will be provided in case of psychological distress. If you do encounter any psychological or emotional discomfort or wish to discuss the information above (or any other risks you may experience), you may contact the researcher (Ohemaa Nkansa-Dwamena) on (deleted)

What are the possible benefits to you or to others?
Participants will be able to express their experiences, issues, and concerns as a Black British lesbian in a safe and supportive environment. Participants may also benefit by the knowing that they will be informing educational researchers of the needs of Black British Lesbians

If you choose to take part in this study, will it cost you anything?
There will be no cost to participate in this study.

Will you receive compensation for your participation in this study?
There are no monetary benefits to this study.

If you do not want to take part in this study, what other options are available to you?
Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to refuse to be in the study

Who should I call if I have questions?

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or if you have complaints, concerns, or questions about the research, please contact: Ohemaa Nkansa-Dwamena on [deleted] or Dr. Deborah Rafalin, City University on [deleted]

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study, Your involvement is greatly appreciated.

The aim of this project is to explore the construction of a Lesbian identity in a Black British context. This research is being carried out under the supervision of Dr. Deborah Rafalin (Chartered Counselling Psychologist and Lecturer, Department of Psychology, City University, London EC1V OHB)

You will take part in an interview which will last approximately an hour and a half- two hours. Your experiences will be audio taped and transcribed within this project. Your real name will not be used at any point; instead, you and any other person and place names involved in you will be given pseudonyms that will be used in all verbal and written records, reports and publications. No audio tapes will be used for any purpose other than to do this study, and will not be played for any reason other than to do this study. Audio-tapes will be kept in a secure place (e.g. in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home) and retained for future analysis.

If the results of this research are published or presented at scientific meetings, your identity will not be disclosed.

Your participation in this research is voluntary; you may withdraw at any time without being penalized or disadvantaged in any way.

I (Ohemaa Nkansa-Dwamena) will maintain confidentiality and will adhere to the code of ethics set by City University and the British Psychological Society.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the researcher, Ohemaa Nkansa-Dwamena on (deleted) or Dr. Deborah Rafalin, research supervisor on 020 7040 4592

I have read the above statement and had the opportunity to ask questions. I have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and I have received a copy of this Form. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and I been told that you can ask other questions at any time. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Name:	.... (Please print)

Signature: ....……Date: ....

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:

Name of researcher………………………………………………………….. ……...
Signature…………………………………………………..Date:……………………

Thank you.

Background Information.

I'd like to get some basic information about you in order to demonstrate to those who read my research report that I managed to obtain the views of a cross section of Black Lesbians. The information you give will be entirely confidential. However, if you would not like to answer some of the questions, please do not feel that you have to.

1. How old are you? ……… years

2. What is your highest educational qualification? (please tick)

    GCSE(s)/O Level (s)/CSE(s)   ………….
    A levels(s)   ………….
    Diploma (HND, SRN, etc)   ………….
    Degree   ………….
    Postgraduate degree /diploma   ………….

3. What is your current occupation (If you are no longer employed, what was your last occupation?)

4. What is your legal marital status? (please tick)

    Single   …………..
    Married   …………..
    Divorced/ separated   …………..
    Widowed   …………..

5. a) Do you have any children? (please tick)

    Yes …..   No………

    b) If yes, how many children do you have?

    Number   …………..

6. How would you define your ethnic background? (please tick)
    Black African   ……………
    Black Caribbean   …………...

Black British   …………..
Other (please specify)   ……………

7. In general, how important is your sense of being black?

  Important   …………..
  Not important   …………..
  Quite Important   …………..
  Very Important   …………..
  Indifferent   …………..

8. How would you currently define your sexual orientation? (please tick)

  Lesbian   …………….
  Bisexual   …………….
  Heterosexual   …………….
  Other (please specify)   …………….

7. a) I would like to explore this question further. According to the Kinsey scale(1948), in terms of sexual feelings and activity, some women are completely homosexual, some are completely heterosexual and some fall somewhere in the middle. Considering what you do, how would you define yourself in terms of sexual activity? (please tick)

……. Exclusively heterosexual
……. Predominantly heterosexual, with a small degree of homosexuality
……. Predominantly heterosexual, but with a large degree of homosexuality
. ……Equally heterosexual and homosexual
……. Predominantly homosexual, but with a small degree of heterosexuality
……. Predominantly homosexual, but with a large degree of heterosexuality
……..Exclusively homosexual

 b) Using the same scale, how would you rate yourself in terms of your sexual feelings? (please tick)

……. Exclusively heterosexual
……. Predominantly heterosexual, with a small degree of homosexuality
……. Predominantly heterosexual, but with a large degree of homosexuality
. ……Equally heterosexual and homosexual
……. Predominantly homosexual, but with a small degree of heterosexuality
……. Predominantly homosexual, but with a large degree of heterosexuality
……..Exclusively homosexual
8. Are you currently in a relationship? (Please tick)

Yes…….   No…..

a) If yes, is this relationship with a man or a woman?

…………..

b) What is the ethnic background of your current partner?

…………..

9. If you currently have more than one partner, approximately what percent are men or women?

Men   …………….
Women   …………….

10. Please indicate their ethnic backgrounds.*

Partner A   …………..
Partner B   …………..
Partner C   …………..

* Please add on if necessary

Thank you very much for your co-operation.

If you would like to receive information in regards to the results of this Research, please tick here ……. and please provide your contact details.

Name:

Address

Contact Number

1. Can you tell me about your experiences of growing up as a girl?

(What were the messages you received? How did this make you feel? How did this affect your behaviour? What importance did it give to your perception of what the future would hold? What values were instilled in you? How did this make you feel about being a girl? How did you feel about yourself in relation to others? (e.g. family, the community)

1a). How did you come to define yourself as Black?

1b). As a Black Girl?

(What were the ideas and messages that you received? How did you feel about yourself? How did you feel about yourself in relation to others? (i.e. family, community)

2. I'd like to talk a little about your transition into womanhood. Can you tell me about 'when you moved into womanhood'. what was going on for you at the time? (What messages did you receive? What were the key events in your life at that time? How did you feel about yourself as a Black person? How did you feel about yourself as a woman? How did you feel about yourself as a Black woman?)

2b. How did being a Black woman make you feel about yourself? How did this make you feel about your community? (How did you feel about being a Black woman in the wider community? How did your sense of being Black develop?)

3. Can you tell me about your first sexual feeling and experiences?

(How did you feel about yourself? How did you feel about yourself in relation to

other people?)

3b. If your first experiences were not with women/not with men

(How did this make you feel about yourself? How did this make you feel about

other people? How did you make sense of this? How did you construct your

experiences?)

4. What role did your Black identity play in the feelings you had?

(Did your feeling about being Black change? Did your feelings about being a

woman change? How did these feelings impact upon your perception of yourself?

How did your feelings impact upon your relationship with others? Family? Your

friends? Others?

5. How do you define yourself now?

(How did you come to define yourself that way? (Have you struggled? How does

the label

make you feel about yourself? How does this impact upon your relationship with

others?

(i.e. wider community, other women, family, the Black community)

5b. Upon carrying out the background research for this project, I came across

research which suggested that some Black Lesbians may experience difficulties with

being Black and identifying as a Lesbian. Have you experienced any difficulties in

being both Black and Lesbian?

6. How have you managed these difficulties? (What has been helpful? What has been unhelpful? Who has been helpful? Who has been unhelpful?)

7. I'd like to talk a little about disclosure. Have you disclosed to your family of origin?

   (If no-decision not to? If yes reactions? What happened? What do you think made them react this way.)

   7b. Have you disclosed to people in the wider Black community? Have you disclosed to

     people in the wider community?

   (If not-What if anything have you done to hide this?

    If yes-Have you shared widely among black family? Friends? What was the response?)

8. You told me that you currently define yourself as x,y and z. How do you feel about yourself now? (intra-psychic, interpersonal, intergroup)

9. Can you tell me about your current behaviours?

  (i.e. Social life, work context, (within the wider community and the Black community).How does this affect your life? How does this affect your partners?

How does this affect your relationships?)

10. Is there anything else you would like to add?

I would like to thank you for taking the time to participate in this research. Given the unique and sensitive nature of this research, I have included in this section various sources of support and information. The following organizations are all located within the London area.

Asian & Black Community Group for People Who Identify as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual

Culturally sensitive and confidential service offering access to a range of services including information, health awareness, support and counselling; a chance to access groups where you can explore what it means to be Asian or Black and LGB, make valuable contacts, have your say, share ideas and build up a personal network.

Telephone: 01274 744 798
(Sundays 14.00 – 16.00).

BLUK

Black Lesbian UK (BLUK) is a national voluntary social network for lesbians of African and African-Caribbean origin who live in the United Kingdom. BLUK works in alliance with the wider gay and lesbian community to advance equality based on sexual orientation, gender expression and identity, and other concerns including workplace, family, parenting, discrimination and health issues

Unit 10, 10-11 Archer Street, SOHO, London. W1D 7AZ

Tel: 0870 737 9165, 0870 134 2385

Blackliners

Black-led voluntary organisation working on enhancing the quality of life of BME people living with HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, with a view to empowering them to make informed decisions about their sexual health and lifestyle. Their gay men's counsellor works with individuals to explore issues around their sexuality.

Central Office Unit 46, Eurolink Business Centre, 49 Effra Road, London SW2 1BZ
Telephone: 020 7738 7468
Fax: 020 7738 7945
Web: www.blackliners.org

Black Lesbian and Gay Centre

5 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7XN
(Saturday 2.00-5.30pm)

Tel: 020 7620 3885

www.ukblackout.com

Provides a space to disseminate information and for Black LGBT people to interact and discuss issues that are relevant to them. To provide a one-stop, comprehensive resource portal where users can get information

Outzone
Jackson's Lane Community Centre
Jackson's Lane, Highgate
Tel: 020 8348 1785
info@outzone.org
www.outzone.org
Advice, information and support for all young people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or maybe
exploring their sexuality. Fri weekly meeting for men under 25.

PACE
34 Hartham Rd , London N7 9JL
Tel: 020 7700 1323
Workshops for Black gay men 020 7281 3121
pace@dircon.co.uk
www.pacehealth.org.uk
Offers Training, counseling, employment, youth work, advocacy.

Terrence Higgins Trust

This Trust offers a wide range of support services around London.

For information on your local Trust location

Call THT Direct on: 0845 12 21 200 or visit their website at: http://www.tht.org.uk

 FRIEND

This service offers counselling to the Gay and Lesbian Community amongst other services.

 Member of staff during office hours on 020 7833 1674

 Helpline: 020 7837 3337 between 19:30 and 22:00

Table of Superordinate Themes

MASTER THEMES			
1. Developing A Black Identity			
	Quotation	Participant	Page/Line No
Socialisation in The Black Family	*'I think I grew up very aware of my blackness I think in our house there was always discussion'*	Cassandra	2:86-87
	'my father was quite sort of a pan Africanist I think that must have had an influence'	Dana	4:170-173
	'She would take me to Black conferences and Black speaking'	Lisa	2:87-90
	'You know he had really good conversations with us and would talk about us as black people'	Amber	5:240-242
Socialisation in non-Black family	*'I was a bit isolated from being black because there wasn't anyone to be black with'*	Wanda	8:360-361
	'So in terms of me growing up as a girl…ummm…yeah…as a girl and as a black girl, it was very different'	Mechelle	1:18-20
	'the weirdest thing is that my foster parents made me know where I was from, and so I actually never felt that I couldn't identify with black people'	Paige	1:26-28
Socialisation in the Black community	*'I think you have to be like a representative…I feel like I have to show this other side of Black culture'*	Lisa	8:348-349
	'As a Black woman, it was important that I was a decent role model, that what I did and how I was perceived reflected on all Black women'	Wanda	9:411-413
	'For me sometimes it's about putting on this front, so to make everything	Amber	2:66-67

	look good on the outside'			
	I wasn't accepted. Because I was brought up in a white family, I was different	Mechelle	6: 301-302	
	Never felt anything but fine in my skin…when I am with my community I am with Black people, so it became acceptable	Paige	8: 392-395	
Experiences in the wider community	'generally we got called names again , so that wasn't a very good experience there'	Dana	1:44-46	
	I am from a time where the signs in clubs would say no blacks allowed	Priscilla	1:27-29	
	I was like hey, they are talking about me [ ] they are saying something discriminatory about me because of the colour of my skin.	Cassandra	8:398-400	
	I am the only Black person there and I feel I stick out like a sore thumb	Paige	6: 406	
Intra-racial Discrimination	'And also there is this whole thing in... within the black community ourselves with this whole light skin dark skin'	Cassandra	9:409-411	
	'I wasn't black enough, I wasn't white anyway, but I wasn't black enough for some black people'	Mechelle	16:793-794	
	'I did have issues that I was lighter than everybody else, my whole family is darker than me'	Harlow	3:142-143	
2. Experience of growing up as a female				
Constructs of Black female Identity	'I remember my mother saying, [ ] you know you have to be strong as black women'	Cassandra	5:214-215	
	'You had to be strong [ ] there were expectations in somehow being stronger, being independent'	Wanda	2:8-85	
	'Have you ever heard of Yaa Asantewaa? A warrior yeah? That's my mom my mom is a strong Black woman'	Amber	11:546-557	
		Mechelle	14:724-	

	'You have got to carry the whole world on your shoulders'		725	
	'I just noticed that I was….it felt to me like there was a lot of responsibility coming towards me'	Lisa	10: 446-448	
	'You know you have to be a good wife, and the woman is supposed to cook and clean, and the woman is supposed to be in the kitchen, make sure you get the chores done'	Harlow	1: 58-63	
	'marriage….education, family, tolerance and not to be outspoken'	Paige	4:186-188	
	'Girls do this, guys do that, girls have to be more careful, girls should be handy around the house, got to be a good girl'	Priscilla	2:64-65	
	'My nan, she told me, you have to be a lady'	Jennifer	5:246-247	
Expectations	*'It was just so funny, so my mom wanted a girlie girl and I wasn't it, she used to give me bows and dresses ad there were periods I went through to try and please her'*	Priscilla	2:94-99	
	'my mom, they were like you have to behave like this , or you have to, my mom was always making me wear high heels, there was always dresses and makeup'	Paige	3: 134-136	
	Sit at the table, cross your legs, sit like a lady, straighten your back. Such a bother	Harlow	2:84-85	
	'I think I kind of looked at my sisters as well, and saw how they were as women, how they were mothers to their children'	Cassandra	16:786-787	
	'The whole thing from my parents was about marriage and family from my birth family, it wasn't so much about them telling me anything, it was about seeing the situation'	Mechelle	7:356-358	
	'now motherhood I didn't enjoy and	Amber	4:199	
			5:214-	

286

	never ever wanted children'		216	
	'Because the expectation was that I would go to university and not just get a degree and a postgraduate'	Dana	4:216-218	
Construction of identity in wider community	*'I dealt with racism, prejudice, I dealt with fascist pigs'*	Amber	18:859-860	
	'now within the work place, it is the same everybody kind of looks down on you because obviously they expect you to fail, they don't particularly want you in the workplace'	Lisa	5:21-215	
	'It was quite interesting, because it was this dichotomy of, I have got this banner to wave and I have got this cause to fight for, I'm talking about women's earnings, not having control of our sexuality'	Wanda	9:402-407	
	'I think overall, society are always forever pushing boys than girls'	Cassandra	3:124-126	

3.Experiences of Lesbian Identity Development				
Developing a lesbian identity	*'maybe it was a phase, not knowing I was gay, so again I was very confused about that'*	Cassandra	4:185-187	
	'I can remember being dismayed when I realised I was attracted to girls, because I thought perhaps I was turning into a boy, and I really didn't want to be a boy'	Wanda	15:719-721	
	'And just like those experience,. I can remember at school, the American supply teacher put me in her lap, and I was like, "ooohhh"	Priscilla	11:506-508	
	'You know, that's not right, how could another girl fancy another girl? You go to church and it's Adam and Eve [ ] so yeah, it was wrong, but I just couldn't help that'	Amber	10:483-485	
	'In retrospect, I always sort of had crushes on girls in school. But there was never...not an option, there was	Dana	8:361-363	

	never any consideration in my mind of that being sexual, or pursuing it'		
	'I didn't, and the other messages I picked up about my sexuality was that it was going to be hard'	Paige	14:709-711
	'I did feel still actually feel somewhat weird in relation with everybody'	Jennifer	9:420-421
Embracing a lesbian identity	*'I reflected, I did a damn good job reflecting and I decided that needed to tell them the truth, and also my mom was pretty shocked'*	Cassandra	13:659-661
	'I'm like, this is who I am, and you either take me the way I am because I am your daughter. Ummm...you know, I am just a lesbian, I like girls'	Harlow	17:817-819
	'How did she find out? She walked in, not on me and a lover. I was painting a banner, and she walked in furious'	Wanda	16:750-751
	'That's where the tolerance and understanding stopped, with my friends'	Amber	22:1068-1070
	'Because now the conversations change, you know, my straight girlfriends, when we are talking, they want to talk about men and stuff. And that's...I have nothing to say'	Mechelle	38:1922-1924
	'My mom read my diary and she actually came to my house[ ] so we had quite a big showdown and [ ] she was trying to fight me'	Jennifer	5:212-214
	'When it came down to it, and I just realised, it came down to my responsibility, because this is my life. And if it meant losing my mother, because that was the ultimate fear'	Priscilla	8:381-382
Experience of sameness and difference	*'I would have been the only Black woman ever to say she liked Black women'*	Priscilla	3:232-233
	'I was the only person in the family that was gay'	Cassandra	14:662-664

	'I'm not allowed to be proud of what I am, but everybody else is?'	Lisa	23:1013-1012
	'So in this one way I was completely alone, in that there was no one who was responsible for me, but on the other hand, I was completely buoyed up by the community'	Wanda	20: 968-960
	'I hung out with other lesbians and gays, and started to get more comfortable with the idea that, "yeah, this is me, there are other people like me, I'm not the only one'	Harlow	8:358-357
	'I think that had a very positive effect really, because first of all they were Black women and they were lesbians, so I think it had a very positive effect in terms of confirming my own feelings'	Dana	10:497-499
Exploration of sexual behaviours and relationships	*'sexually, it is like a revolution for me...yeah it is, in terms of my sex life now, it is a lot more adventurous'*	Cassandra	33:1640-1642
	'I mean I felt comfortable being with a woman, sexually'	Mechelle	23:1779-1781
	'I think that's when my freakiness just stemmed from there, kind of thing, I was like ok, doors have opened, what's next'	Lisa	15: 681-682
4. Triple Jeopardy			
Psychological Impact	*'I think part of me was shut down. There is just something you just shut down, and I think part of me shut down, and I always used to say to my counsellor, it felt like I was breaking my soul in a lot of ways, or damaging myself in some ways, my inner self'*	Cassandra	13:659-662
	'I found myself'	Mechelle	39:2002
	'I had my own self esteem and myself worth and the whole Blackness thing –pick yourself up and you can do it, so that's what I had'	Lisa	31:1413-1415
	'I was feeling quite low at that stage	Amber	27:1309-

	because I had cut myself off from my friends'		1310 1	
	'Because I have been through some shit, where I have tried to kill myself, as a young woman, a young lesbian woman with nobody to identify with'	Harlow	9:964-966	
	'It led to me drinking, I had issues around drink for two years	Priscilla	13:621-622	
	it's that psychological impact on you, and you are in a constant state of anxiety because you don't know when it is going to hit you next'	Dana	21:1044-1046	
	'There was a girl who killed herself two months ago[ ] she told one of her parents about her sexuality and they said they would take her home'	Paige	21:1065-1067	
Impact on Black Identity	*'Black and being lesbian, because the two don't necessarily go together'*	Amber	33:1602-1603	
	'Being a Black woman slowed my coming out as a lesbian'	Wanda	16:696-698	
	'I think my Blackness became an issue, more in the gay culture because I felt alienated to the expression of gayness'	Priscilla	12:594-595	
	'It's got to be broader than that. It is about defining myself. I am Black regardless of what you think of me'	Mechelle	30:1530-1532	
	'There is one thing I will say about my Blackness. It has never been an issue about anything, it's always been a second skin'	Paige	17:831-835	
Impact on Female Identity	*'I can't imagine being anything else. I could never have imagined being anything else'*	Wanda	15:713-715	
	'They didn't change, a new perspective came to mind kind of thing. it didn't hinder my womaness'	Lisa	24:1098-1100	
	'I still define myself in the same way,	Dana	15:726-	

	as a Black woman and as a lesbian'		727	
	'But I wouldn't want to lose my female identity, because that's what makes me the gentle woman I am today. I still identify as a Black woman'	Harlow	12-568-570	
	'I'm not afraid and I don't care if I'm a certain lesbian, If I want to have children, then it has nothing to do with what I am doing in my bedroom'	Jennifer	11:533-534	
Impact on relationships with others	*'There was no support groups for me to go to, I needed...I had to go it alone'*	Amber	22:1079-1081	
	'even though he is very laidback, and cool and everything, sometimes there is some underlying stuff going on, he is not ready to talk about yet'	Cassandra	15:742-744	
	'I mean once people know that you are a lesbian they completely back off'	Dana	12:598-599	
	'But when I say positive, they say, you, why didn't you tell me that, it's not an issue. But then they say, it is not an issue, you don't hear from them'	Mechelle	40:2048-2050	
	'I think most responses were couched in terms of, it's a sin, it's a sin, it's not natural, it's against God. You know most of it was couched in those terms'	Wanda	20:971-973	

5. Managing Identity Conflict			
Living a heterosexual life	*'I think the one thing I wanted to do because I felt that I had disappointed them was to conform to what society wanted me to be and to live something through their eyes'*	Amber	16:753-756	
	'I played it straight for twenty years'	Mechelle	23:1493	
	'Definitely by lying. Because like, when you talk to the hairdresser, like you talk and whatever, and you make up some men...it's really tricky sometimes'	Jennifer	15:732-733	

	'I lived the life of a heterosexual woman'	Cassandra	13:615-619	
Graded Disclosure	'Some people like to put it out, and when they put it out, they don't really like the response that they get. I don't put it out there. Unless I really trust you'	Paige	18:869-870	
	'So I might not disclose to everyone, if you ask me, I'll tell you, if you know, you know'	Priscilla	14:689:670	
	'but then you get to know them even more and then I'm fine, but it's not something that I discuss'	Cassandra	25:1257-1258	
	'So in terms of strangers on the Black community, definitely keep it close to our chest[ ] I feel like there is an automatic armour we need to put up'	Jennifer	17:827-829	
Support Systems	'I got involved with this woman who taught me so much about met taught me what it was like to be me and accepting of me'	Amber	23:1117-1119	
	She was very significant, in that, in me coming to terms with my sexuality. She had no idea.	Mechelle	21:1083-1084	
	I think her mom helped us out quite a lot in particular[ ] she still doesn't want certain people to know, but I that is just for safety as well	Jennifer	15:760-761	

6.Reconciling a Black Female lesbian identity				
Current self definition	'I am a Black woman who loves other Black woman[ ] and yeah, if I want to get deep, I am a Black African woman who loves other Black Diaspora women'	Amber	26:1279-1281	
	'Black lesbian mom. I see myself as a Black lesbian mom[ ] it's been a struggle[ ] the journey has been a struggle. I am happy to say that I am a Black lesbian woman'	Cassandra	30:1507-1509	
	'The three defining things are female,			

	lesbian and Black, I think that those are the three most important aspects' *'I'm lesbian, it's not the first thing that comes out of my mouth, it's like I am a Black woman, that is the first thing that comes out of my mouth '*	Dana Lisa	16:773-775 28:1265-1267	
Ongoing Journey	*'what I felt inside wasn't being reflected on a daily basis. [ ] My identity is changing as I grow, but that is fine, because my sexuality will grow with that, and I've got lots to learn, different things, but I feel whole.* *You know, you have your own journey. I say I am on the first step of a very long ladder. And I am not rushing. I am taking my time*	Priscilla Mechelle	23:1142:1144 46:2344-2345	

Themes	Quotations	Page nos/Line Nos
Black Identity		
Pride	How do I feel about being black? I love it	7:317-320
Negativity(racism)	I remember not being able to play with certain children….	6:251-52
Colourism	I've always known that I was different…to the ones who were lighter	6:252-254
Belonging	The African community, very strong in terms of togetherness and belonging	2:56-58
Gender Identity		
Expectations	The expectations of you as a woman..motherhood	4: 4181-183
Values and Morals	We had high standards and morals,..	3:142-143
Traditional roles	I mean getting to grips with learning how to cook..	3: 173-175
Lesbian identity		
Early Attractions	I didn't like the feeling I had of fancying her…	10: 475-476
Dislosure	She was upset..we stopped talking	19: 945-946
Religion	She brought out her bible…she was praying it out	29: 1404-1406
Homophobia	People in the Black community tend to be more homophobic	31: 1518-1519
Experience of Conflict		
Triple Jeopardy	Being a Black woman and being a lesbian…they don't go together	33: 1598-1600
Implications	I cut myself off….i was feeling low	23: 1114-1116
Management	Its because of her I got to this point	25: 1221-1222

151 school , and you still lay there? Oh try not she would beat you, or
152 something would happen to you that I couldn't even say nowadays ,
153 people say that is child abuse, but it wasn't. for me, it was more about
154 growing up. When my mom called you, you come downstairs and
155 you stand to attention, you saluting her when you are standing her.
156 My mum is militant. My dad now, he was softly softly spoken, but
157 values, morals, they were high on the agenda for him.

(Obedience)
Respect

Values &
Morals

158
159 I: and how did you feel about being a girl at that time, because you
160 were young, you know you're in Islington , you're in a Ghanaian
161 family, what was it like being a girl?
162
163 P: It is hard to answer that because I don't know being anything else
164
165 I: mmmm
166
167 P: Ummm…if I was a girl who felt like a boy, then I could answer
168 clearly, but how did I feel being a girl?
169
170 I: I mean were there any particular messages attached to that, or any
171 particular values as a result of being female?
172 P: oh- absolutely! I mean getting to grips with the leaning how to
173 look, learning how to wash your knickers, I mean all the good
174 grounding you should get as a black African woman
175
176 I: mm HMM
177
178 P: You know, knowing how to wash your cuffs and the neck of your
179 shirt because you know you have that many shirts to take to school
180 and cleaning, the expectations of you as a woman, its very much a
181 stereotypical thing what a woman should be or what a young girl
182 should be. If I was in Ghana, I would probably be fetching water,
183 from here to there
184
185 I: yeah… I mastered that you know
186
187 P: (laughs). I tell you what I mastered, having a baby at the back of
188 your back
189
190 I: Ahhh
191
192 P: I mean I enjoyed being a girl, I enjoyed being a woman, and I think
193 I will continue to enjoy being a woman, I don't know any different
194 and the things that come with being a woman and there were
195 stereotypical things
196
197 I: like mother hood?
198
199 P: no. now mother hood I didn't enjoy, and never ever wanted
200 children

Traditional
role as
a black
African
woman

→ Cleanliness.

Stereotypical
expectations

Enjoyment
in
being a
woman.

Motherhood
(rejection of)

4

Appendix K
Participant Profiles

Cassandra

Cassandra is a 38 year old divorced mother of four who resides outside of London. She works in the health field and is also involved in the arts. She identifies as a lesbian and describes her sexual behaviour as exclusively homosexual. She is of Black Caribbean descent and describes her sense of being Black as important. She is currently involved in a relationship .

Wanda

Wanda is a 49 year old woman of Black African descent. She resides in the London areas and is a self employed company director. She identifies as a lesbian and describes her sexual behaviour as exclusively homosexual. She is married and describes her sense of being Black as important.

Harlow
Harlow is a 29 year old musician. She currently resides in the London area. She describes her cultural background as 'Black Caribbean.' She identifies as a Lesbian and describes her sexual behaviour as exclusively homosexual. She is currently involved in a relationship She describes her sense of being Black as very important.

Prisciilla

Priscilla is a 40 year old business development consultant who resides in London. She is currently single and describes her cultural background as 'Black Caribbean'. She identifies as a lesbian and describes her sexual behaviour as exclusively homosexual. She is currently in a relationship and describes her sense of being Black as very important.

Amber

Amber is a 35 year old woman of Black African descent. She is a mother of two and resides in the London area. She works in a managerial position. She identifies as a lesbian and is currently in a relationship.

Dana

Dana is a 48 year old woman of African descent. She works in the arts and resides in the London area. She is a mother of three who describes her sense of being Black as important. She identifies as a lesbian and describes her sexual behaviour as predominantly homosexual with a small degree of heterosexuality. She is currently single.

Paige

Paige is a 40 year old woman of African descent. She resides in the London area and works within the arts. She describes her sense of being black as important. She identifies as a lesbian and describes her sexual behaviour as equally homosexual and heterosexual. She is not currently involved in a relationship.

Jennifer

Jennifer is a 22 year old woman of Black Caribbean descent. She works in media and resides in the London area. She identifies as lesbian and is in a committed relationship. She describes her sexual behaviour as exclusively homosexual

Mechelle

Mechelle is a 45 year old female of African and Caribbean descent who resides in London. She works in the health sector and is a mother of three. She identifies as lesbian and describes her sexual behaviour as exclusively homosexual. She is currently single. She describes her sense of being Black as important.

Lisa

Lisa is a 23 year old woman of African and Caribbean descent. She also defines herself as Black British. She works in communications and resides in the London area. She defines her sexual orientation as lesbian and describes her sexual behaviour as exclusively homosexual. She describes her sense of being Black as important