

Black LGBTQ+ Identified Young Adults in the Southeast United States Experiences of Identity Disclosure within Their Family Systems

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Introduction

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) individuals experience varying degrees of acceptance from region to region, or person to person. Individuals with similar intersecting identities can have different experiences that shape their reality and social cognition (McGuffey, 2018). Researching disclosure practices can increase understanding around why these differences exist.

In many African American families, coming out as LGB can be considered an attack on traditional gender roles (Trahan & Goodrich, 2015). This sentiment is especially true within the Baptist church as many LGB members have been shunned after disclosing their sexual orientation (Trahan & Goodrich, 2015). Rosario (2004) found that the identity disclosure process for LGB individuals may be complicated by cultural factors including gender roles, religious values, and the importance of family. Similarly, Pastrana (2016) found that family support was considered a critical determining factor in an individual's decision to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity. Parents and families with greater cognitive flexibility were more likely to provide social support and acceptance after disclosure (Gilbride & Goodrich, 2010). Pastrana (2016) found that having positive previous experiences with members of the LGBT community can be beneficial for the disclosure process, potentially increasing family support.

Alternatively, when family members held negative perceptions of the LGBT communities, the LGBT family member was more likely to have a tumultuous experience and may have even lost contact with their family (Pastrana, 2016). Parent and family rejection after disclosure was strongly associated with mental health issues, substance use, and sexual risk (Newcomb et al., 2019). Relatedly, McGurrey (2018) found that Black LGBT individuals had an increased risk of experiencing shaming and violence and were significantly more likely to be homeless and the target of hate crimes. They were also at a higher risk of contracting HIV/AIDS (McGuffey, 2018).

In an effort to ameliorate the risk factors associated with identity disclosure and increase the potential for family support, the researchers hope to further understand the phenomenon of identity disclosure within Black family systems in the Southeastern United States, a space in which the sociopolitical context has uniquely created further barriers to this disclosure.

Purpose of the Study

Currently, there is a dearth in literature focused on identity disclosure experiences with participants who do not identify as white, high SES, and college educated (Beals & Peplau, 2001; Knoble & Linville, 2012; Todosijevic et al., 2005). Additionally, in many existing studies addressing identity disclosure, researchers have not frequently included Black trans individuals within their samples (Pastrana, 2016), failing to explore and understand disclosure experiences at the intersection of race and gender identity, specifically.

In the proposed research project, the researchers focus on experiences of identity disclosure of Black LGBTQ+ populations and seek to understand the nuances of this disclosure within family systems and larger communities. Through the proposed photovoice study, the researchers aim to explore intersections of gender identity, sexual/affective orientation, and race while offering participants the opportunity to depict their experiences through words and images, defining their identities, communities, family systems, and lived experiences in their own words and through their images. Additionally, participants will have the opportunity to engage in social action to transform their surrounding communities and be able to directly communicate with mental health care professionals.

Research Question

Research Question. How do Black LGBTQ+ identified young adults in the Southeast United States experience identity disclosure within their family systems and social communities?

Sample

Desired sample size: 14-20 individuals (2 Groups of 7-10)

Inclusion Criteria

Participants will:

- Be between the ages of 18-25
- Identify as LGBTQ+ and will have disclosed sexual/affective orientation and/or gender identity to at least one family member
- Be living in the Southeastern United States (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee)

Recruitment: Snowball sampling through online social groups, community organizers, counseling centers and practices, personal connections within communities.

Photovoice Methodology

What is Photovoice?

Developed by Wang and Burris (1997) as a means of social advocacy and a participatory action research strategy, photovoice evidences a foundation of participant-centered ideology in research and counseling (Alegría, 2009; Wang & Burris, 1997). Photovoice aims to transition the power of self-depiction and self-definition into the hands of people who experience oppression and discrimination, flipping the lens of the dominant society's view in exchange for participants defining the needs, strengths, and aims of their communities (Wang, 1999).

Photovoice Theoretical Principles: critical consciousness, feminist theory, documentary photography, and participatory action research

Goals of photovoice:

- "to enable people to record and reflect their personal and community strengths and concerns;
- to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about personal and community issues through group discussions of photographs; and
- to reach policymakers" (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 370)

Potential Outcomes:

- social justice awareness** which illuminates and offers insight into systems of oppression, privilege, and marginalization and the impact on lived experience within these systems;
- social justice amelioration** which reduces, diminishes, or alleviates ways in which oppression presents in specific contexts, not eliminating oppression, but rather changing acute manifestations of power hierarchies; and
- transformative action** which changes or shifts systems of oppression through implementing larger policy and systemic changes. All outcomes can either involve or highlight the need to involve policy makers in this action toward change. (Sanon et al., 2014)

Procedures

- Complete demographic questionnaire survey
- Watch web-based photovoice training
- Begin photographing
 - 2 weeks to take 10 photographs
 - Select 3 photographs and develop accompanying titles, captions, and complete modified SHOWED paradigms
- Online focus group meeting
- Data analysis
- Facilitating social action

Modified SHOWED Paradigm

S: What is the Significance of this photograph?

H: How does this photograph depict your experiences of identity disclosure within your family system?

O: How does this relate to Our lives as Black LGBTQ+ young adults in the southeastern US within our communities (e.g., church, neighborhood, school, social organizations)?

W: What does this photograph say about how your family/community responded to your identity disclosure?

E: How would you describe your Experience and Emotions taking/selecting this photograph?

D: What feels important for us (participants, researchers, families, lawmakers, religious leaders, counselors, the general public, etc.) to Do now?

Data Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009)

- Team: 2 coders and 1 auditor (Brocki & Wearden, 2006)
- Bracketing experiences and biases as related to LGBTQ+ identities, identity disclosure within our own family systems, perceptions around identity disclosure within Black family systems and communities, and intersectional identities

Analysis procedure:

- Multiple readings of focus group transcripts and reviewing of photographs, titles, captions, and SHOWED paradigm answers
- Develop themes
- Connections among themes
- Presenting themes; 2 coders
- Transcripts to auditor
- Member-checking
- Constructing final table

Implications

Clinical: Findings could reduce barriers to affirming and appropriate integrated health care by advocating for the dismantling of systems of oppression that silence Black LGBTQ+ narratives. Findings could also inform counselors as to how to best support Black family systems in which a member identifies as LGBTQ+, offering a breadth of experiential realities from which to provide care. Furthermore, this research could dually inform Black clinicians around the multiplicity of experiences of LGBTQ+ identities within family units while also offering non-Black clinicians a perspective that counters reductive notions of Blackness, queerness, and transness often present in counseling literature.

Research: The current study can offer insight into experiences of Blackness within queer and trans communities, a seldom addressed experience within the current literature. Specifically focusing the participant sample in the Southeastern United States, findings can illuminate the nuances of Black queer and trans individuals' experiences of identity disclosure within their family systems and the unique sociopolitical context. This study could enhance the body of qualitative literature, yielding transferable results that could also inform future research.

Systemic Shifts: Through participant-devised means, results could incite policy and community change through reaching policymakers, thus impacting the immediate worlds of the participants. The intersectional lens of this study recognizes the interconnectedness of all oppressions and works to challenge the systems of power that uphold racism, heterosexism, and cissexism.

Additionally, participation in this study could allow space for community-building, connection, and advocacy amid a racist, homophobic, and transphobic sociopolitical context. Furthermore, this study can offer participants a platform that uplifts their voices and experiences in a holistic manner, acknowledging trauma, challenges, affirmation, strengths, and resiliency associated with identity disclosure.

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Contact Information

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Thank you for your time and interest!

