IN THEIR OWN VOICES: LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCES OF VISIBLE-MINORITY GAY MALE YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

The objective in this research was to illuminate and understand the experiences of visible-minority gay male youth. In an attempt to contribute to the minority youth literature in social work, four visible-minority gay male youth from the ages 19 to 22 were interviewed. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed, informed by a phenomenological approach. This method was used as it allowed these youth to describe the essence of their personal experiences. Analysis of the participants’ data produced the core themes of (1) Coming out, (2) Family dynamics, (3) Ethnic community, (4) Gay, lesbian, and bisexual community. These themes as framing the essential characteristics of the participant’s experiences as visible-minority gay male youth were discussed, as well as implications for social work practice. The findings of this study allow the experiences of visible-minority gay male youth in this research to be heard and to contribute to a better understanding of the strengths and challenges of these youth.
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Chapter One

Introduction

Visible-minority gay male youth make up roughly upwards of 10% of visible-minority youth (Johnson & Johnson, 2000). Studies suggest that a greater percentage of these populations seek supportive social services, as compared to the heterosexual population (Johnson & Johnson, 2000). Research has demonstrated that youth struggling with issues around their sexual orientation who do not receive appropriate supportive services, accurate information, or support from their family, school, and community can be in jeopardy of serious emotional, social and physical difficulties. Some of these youth often turn to unsafe activities such as alcohol and drug use or high-risk sexual behaviors to deal with their sexual orientation (Garofalo, Wolf, & Kessel, 1998).

Research on sexual minority youth suggests that a formation of a negative gay identity is associated with the value and privileges that society puts on heterosexuality (Ghindia & Kola, 1996; Savin-Williams, 2001), rather than on the gay, lesbian, bisexual, two-spirited or transgendered individuals.

The experiences of visible-minority gay male youth can often be different from that of white gay men or youth. These youth may often experience difficulty at multiple levels, including oppression from their own ethnic community. These individuals may or may not identify primarily with the group most discriminated against, that is, either their visible-minority status, or same-sex orientation. In addition, racism and classism within the larger gay, lesbian, and bisexual community, are often stumbling blocks to the interaction and
cooperation between gay male youth belonging to visible-minorities, and those who do not.

The objective of this study was to illuminate and gain a better understanding of the experiences of four visible-minority gay male youth. Central to this research was to hear the stories of visible-minority gay male youth, to build on the paucity of qualitative literature relating to visible-minority gay male youth and to encourage the social work profession to become more inclusive and aware of the needs of this group.

The personal

My experiences of coming out as a gay youth myself, issues of disclosure to family, attending various gay youth groups, participating in the GLBTT community and working as a social worker with gay and lesbian youth were important factors in moving me towards doing this thesis.

As a youth my coming out in some ways paralleled that of the youth in this study. Although not experiencing the profound and unique issues surrounding being a visible-minority, issues of isolation, depression and confusion were present.

Being raised by my great grandmother who was a recent immigrant to Canada, who had no concept of what being gay was, and did not speak a word of English, made disclosure to her not an option. Due to the need to keep her respect, issues of her advancing age, and not to hurt her, I made a decision not to tell her.

During my youth and over the years I had the opportunity to attend and benefit from various gay youth groups as well as participate in the GLBTT community. What became apparent and emerged as a common theme was the experience of racism by visible-minority gays, subtle at times and overt at other times. Individuals due to their visible-minority status were being isolated, not included, and stereo-typed.

Over a number of years, through volunteer and paid positions, I have had the
opportunity to experience and work with a wide variety of visible-minority gay youth. The following assumptions based on my work and experiences with gay male youth who belong to visible-minorities have shaped this project:

- There are few if any services/organizations that can be considered totally ‘inclusive’, and respectful of multiple ways of being gay, lesbian, and bisexual in the world.
- Difficulties in coming out to family and friends are often expressed.
- Finding a niche in the ‘predominantly white middle class’ gay, lesbian, and bisexual community in the face of discrimination is often difficult and alienating.
- Reconciling same-sex orientation and ethnic-racial identity often poses unique issues.
- Visible-minority gay youth are often silenced, or their existence is often ignored.

Field of Social work

If required the profession of social work has the potential of being helpful for visible-minority gay male youth. Social work focuses on people and the social environment in which they live and participate, as well as between individuals and societies. Visible-minority gay male youth, to an ever-increasing extent, appear, and identify themselves, in the wide spectrum of settings and agencies that social workers are involved in. A better, more comprehensive understanding, as defined in their own words, can only have a beneficial impact in understanding the possible needs of this group.

Study Delimitations

A deliberate choice was made to recruit only visible-minority gay male youth as research participants. Input from visible-minority lesbian youth or adults, visible-minority gay male adults, may have differed and produced different results, it was decided to exclude members
of these groups in order to avoid the possibility of confounding the experiences of these various individuals. In addition due to the complexities of the current and historical oppression of Aboriginal individuals it was decided that this group needs to be looked at in a way that this current research was not able to honour.

Definitions

For the purpose of this project I did not use the term “homosexual”, as it is associated with a long history of stigma, clinical coldness, and oppression, as well it emphasizes sexual behaviour over other aspects of being human. I prefer the terms gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered & two spirited (also referred to as GLBTT) and/or same-sex orientation. Although not perfect, they involve more than just sexual contact with persons of the same sex. Romantic feelings, emotional attraction, fantasies, and definition of self are also involved. A gay person is an individual “whose primary erotic, psychological, and social interest is in a member of the same sex, even though that interest may not be overtly expressed” (Martin & Lyon, 1972, p.1). In addition these are the terms that are used by the youth interviewed for this study.

For the term youth I used the definition used by (Statistics Canada, 2001) which defines youth as falling between, and including, the ages of 14 to 24.

According to Statistics Canada visible-minority is defined as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour” (Statistics Canada, 2001). Ethnic origin as defined by (Statistics Canada, 2001) and refers to the ethnic or cultural group(s) to which an individual belongs. Ethnic origin pertains to the ancestral “roots” or background of the population, and should not be confused with citizenship or
nationality (Statistics Canada, 2001).

Heterosexism refers to “the belief that everyone is or should be heterosexual” (Rhouds, 1995, p.69). More specifically, “heterosexism denotes an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationship, or community. Like racism, sexism, and other ideologies of oppression, Heterosexism is manifested both in societal customs and institutions, such as religion and the legal system…and in individual attitudes and behaviours” (Herek, 1990, pp. 316-317).

Homophobia refers to a hostile attitude toward and prejudice against lesbians, gay, bisexual, two-spirited and transgendered individuals. The phenomenon has both affective and cognitive aspects (Herek, 1985) and “operates on four distinct but interrelated levels: the personal, the interpersonal, the institutional, and the cultural” (Blumenfeld, 1992, p.3).

Coming out refers to the process by which lesbian, gay, bisexual, two-spirited and transgendered individuals disclose their sexual orientation (Rhoads, 1995). Often, coming out is not a discreet event, but “a lifelong process of information management” (Cain, 1991, p.67).

Structure of the Paper

This qualitative study documents the results of interviews that were conducted with four visible-minority gay male youth. Interviews were conducted in order to better understand the experiences of these youth.

The first step in this research process was to go back to the literature related to the purpose of this study; this was done in chapter two. Chapter three describes the research design and methodological framework for the study, from background information on
phenomenology to specific steps of the Moustakas (1994) research method. In Chapters four, five, six and seven the stories of each participant are summarized as a whole. In Chapter eight I present and analyze the data, based on interviews with the four research participants. Chapter nine follows with a discussion of what was learned while conducting this research.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

Due to the paucity of literature relating directly to visible-minority gay male youth, this chapter reviewed the literature related to visible-minority gay male youth, as well as what has been done and not done. This chapter then examines models of coming out and the process of self-identifying as gay, lesbian or bisexual. Studies show that gay youth in general may face a multitude of social problems during their development into gay adults. This chapter outlines street involvement, suicide, rejection, substance misuse, unsafe sexual activity, and violence as issues facing some gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth. The experiences of visible-minority gay adults and what research was available on visible-minority youth are also included to assist in providing a backdrop to the particular population in this study. From this review there appears to be a lack of literature that uses the voices, and speaks from the real life realities of visible-minority gay male youth, especially in Canada.

Coming Out: Development of Identity as Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual

Numerous models, focussing on the development of gay, lesbian, and bisexual identities have dominated the literature over the last two decades (Cass, 1979a; Coleman, 1982; Maylon, 1982; Schafer, 1976; Troiden, 1989; Troiden & Goode, 1980). The process of self-identification as gay, lesbian, and bisexual and the disclosure of that identity to significant others, notably friends, and perhaps family, has traditionally been labelled as “coming out” (Cass, 1983/1984; Coleman, 1982; Ponse, 1978; Troiden, 1989).

Models of coming out and identity development often tend to be similar in the stage-like process they describe. These theories relating to the process of self-identifying as gay, lesbian or bisexual begin with an awareness of the hostile environment for their new identity.
This may be followed by denial initially, but acceptance follows and the individual begins to make contacts within the gay, lesbian, and bisexual communities, thereby integrating their sexual orientation into other areas of their life. Not everyone agrees with these stage theories, as the process of coming out is not a simple one. Many social variables can influence the process of self-identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. A significant number of male youth often take until their early twenties, or longer, to openly acknowledge these feelings or self-identify as gay. (Herdt & Troiden, 1989).

Troiden, in his many years of work, offers one of the most comprehensive and most often cited models of mainstream identity development, building upon the work of Cass (1979a; 1983/1984) and others. His model includes four stages: sensitization, identity confusion, identity assumption, and commitment. Troiden (1989) focuses on five following themes:

1. Gay and lesbian identity formation takes place and is influenced by a less than supportive often a hostile environment.

2. Identity formation usually proceeds through a stage like process.

3. Gay and lesbian identity formation usually involves a growing acceptance of being gay or lesbian.

4. Disclosure of a gay or lesbian identity takes place in various ways: to self, to other gays and lesbians, to straight friends/peers and to other public entities.

5. Contacts with other lesbians and gays increase and become more meaningful (p.48).
Identity Models Integrating Ethnicity

(Atkinson, Morten, and Sue, 1979) proposed a model of identity development for ethnic minorities that captures the back and forward movement of identity development. They noted the following ‘stage like’ pattern:

1. **Conformity** - There is a preference for dominant cultural values. Feelings of shame and blame are directed toward one’s own culture, as well, positive feelings are likely directed toward the dominant culture.

2. **Dissonance** - This stage is marked by cultural confusion and conflict. Experiencing new things and learning, give to the inquiry regarding the dominant culture and its way of being.

3. **Resistance and Immersion** - Marked by the rejection of the dominant culture, there is a desire to be immersed in one’s own culture and worldview. A negative value for the mainstream society may be present. The reference group reverts to the original group.

4. **Introspection** - In this stage there is a reaction to the constricting nature of stage three. Self-autonomy and loyalty to one’s own group pull at each other.

5. **Synergetic Articulation and Awareness** - Feelings of self-accomplishment, distinct respect for one’s identity may appear. There may also be a desire to eradicate other forms of oppression present.

(Espin, 1987) notes that the above model as well as Cass’s (1979a) model describes a journey which:

... must be undertaken by people who must embrace negative or stigmatized identities. This process moves gradually from a rejected and denied self-image to the embracing of an identity that if finally accepted is positive. Both models describe one or several stages of intense confusion and at least one state of complete separatism from, and
rejection of, the dominant society. The final stage for both models implies the acceptance of one’s own identity, a committed attitude against oppression, and an ability to synthesize the best values of both perspectives and to communicate with members of the dominant groups (Espin, 1987, p.39).

(Morales, 1983) proposed the following five-state model that attempts to take into consideration the dual status of visible-minority gays and lesbians:

1. **Denial of Conflicts** - discrimination with a basis of ethnicity is denied; sexual orientation may or may not be defined.
2. **Bisexual versus gay or lesbian.**
3. **Conflicts in Allegiances.**
4. **Establishing Priorities in Allegiance** - identification with ethnic community overrides that of the gay and lesbian community in the face of discrimination, resulting in anger and resentment.
5. **Integrating the various Communities** - adjustment to a state where there is insufficient options for visible-minority gays, lesbians and bisexuals may ensue.

(Martin, 1982) provides a fitting ending to this section. He states:

> Every child learns not only what is expected of the various social identities he or she is being raised to but also the groups that society abhors. In adolescence, young homosexually-oriented persons are faced with the growing awareness that they may be among the most despised. They are forced to deal with the possibility that their actual social identity contradicts most of the other social identities to which they believe they are entitled. As this realization becomes more pressing, they are faced with three possible choices:
they can hide, they can attempt to change their stigma, or they can accept it (p.57).

Gay Youth

Most research into the experiences of gay youth identify the various social problems they have. Such research is essentially about a troubled population rather than on gay youth in general. The literature suggests gay youth are at greater risk for the various social problems such as street involvement, suicide, rejection/depression, substance misuse, unsafe sexual activity, and violence.

Street Involvement

Various studies in the United States have noted that the percentage of homeless youth, who are gay and lesbian, is between 25 and 40 percent of all such youth (Los Angeles County Task Force on Runaway and Homeless Youth, 1988; Seattle Commission on Children and Youth, 1988). These figures are much higher than the estimated population of gay, lesbian and bisexuals in the United States, probably about 5-10% (Johnson & Johnson, 2000). A significantly higher percentage of runaway and throwaway teens are gay, lesbian, and bisexual.

Many homeless youth suffer from such health issues such as poor living conditions, malnutrition, lack of medical care, and increased rates of violence (Yates, Mackenzie, Pennbridge, and Swofford, 1991) studied 620 street youth who used a youth medical clinic over a period of 12 months and found that approximately 13 percent of the youth indicated that they were gay, lesbian, or not sure. Often, homeless youth are forced to engage in survival sex in exchange for food, money, shelter or safety. (Kruks, 1991) indicates that
survival sex is particularly a problem with gay youth, citing an unpublished study from the Children's Hospital of Los Angeles, whose data shows that 72% of males involved in survival sex self-identify as gay or bisexual.

**Suicide**

(Remafedi and French, 1998) and (Garafolo, Wolf & Kessel, 1998) found that gay and bisexual male youth were especially susceptible to suicidal ideation. Similarly, (Safren & Heimberg, 1999) found that environmental variables were adequate to explain not only suicidality in gay, lesbian and bisexual youth, but also increases in depression and hopelessness. Their data indicates that after the external factors of stress, social support and acceptance coping were controlled; the rates of suicidality, hopelessness and depression fell to non-significance. (Hershberger & Pilkington, 1997) found that gay youth suicide attempters all had a significantly greater incidence of verbal insults, property damage, physical and sexual assaults and physical abuse. Further, they found that relational problems, alcohol abuse and self-esteem were all highly correlated to suicide attempts. All of these data suggest that sexual orientation is not inherently related to suicidality. Rather, external factors such as stress, social isolation, feelings of hopelessness and victimization seem to be more useful predictors of suicidality among gay, lesbian and bisexual youth.

**Rejection and Depression**

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual who come out, often end up being isolated from their peers. Family rejection and backlash is a reality for many of the youth who disclose their same-sex orientation to their parents (Herdt & Boxer, 1993; Hunter & Schaecher, 1987). (Uribe & Harbeck, 1992) indicate that gays and lesbians are sometimes forced to leave school due to
fear of physical abuse, verbal abuse, peer rejection, and isolation. The pressure, self hate and blame that high numbers of gay, bisexual, and lesbian youth go through, often leads to depressed states (Martin & Hetrick, 1988; Rothblum, 1994).

Substance Misuse & Mental Health

Gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth have higher rates of psychiatric disorders, substance abuse and high-risk sexual behaviors (Remafedi & French, 1998). The reasons for this are complex, but do not seem to be related directly to sexual orientation issues. The primary factors related to these increased rates seem to be similar to those described above regarding suicidality. It is clear that this population suffers significantly more victimization and violence than their peers. Further, as will be seen below, they also suffer from social stigmatization and isolation to a degree not experienced by their heterosexual peers. These factors seem to combine to cause a multiplicity of problems within the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community, both youth and adults.

( DuRant, Krowchuk, & Sinal, 1998) found higher rates of both alcohol and marijuana use in gay, lesbian, and bisexual teens (Garafolo, Wolf & Kessel, 1998) found that gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth were almost twice as likely to have smoked or to have used alcohol prior to the age of thirteen, 1.4 times as likely to have used marijuana, almost five times as likely to have used cocaine and almost fourteen times more likely to have shared needles as compared to their heterosexual counterparts.

Unsafe Sexual Activity

Finally, gay youth tend to engage in higher risk sexual behaviors than heterosexual youth (Garafolo, Wolf & Kessel, 1998) found that gay youth were almost twice as likely to have
engaged in sexual intercourse and were almost three times as likely to have had three or more sexual partners. (Stronski-Huwiler & Remafedi, 1998) indicate that, regarding gay youth, "about two thirds had at some time engaged in unprotected anal intercourse" and that "in about half of recent encounters, the partners were not well acquainted before having sex" (p. 126). Though no comparative data is presented with heterosexual youth, it is still clear that this represents a medical risk experienced by gay youth.

Violence

In their studies, (Martin and Hetrick, 1988) found that up to 40% of their participants reported violence, often at the hands of their own families. Other studies show that one-half of gay adolescents surveyed had experienced harassment, been threatened, or were assaulted in school as a result of being supposed as homosexual (O'Conner, 1992, p.10).

( DuRant, Krowchuk, & Sinal, 1998) correlated the number of male sexual partners of gay youth with several of these factors. He found a significant correlation between the number of sexual partners and "the frequency of having been threatened or injured with a weapon at school, the number of days the students did not attend school because they felt unsafe, and the number of times they had been injured in a fight that required medical treatment" (p. 115). (Faulkner and Cranston, 1998) found similar results. His data indicates that gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth were more likely to have missed school because of feeling unsafe, that these youth are more likely to have been threatened or injured with a weapon, had property stolen or damaged at school and to require medical treatment from peer physical abuse (fighting).
Gay youth are also likely to experience violence and victimization and to feel unsafe at their schools (Garafolo, Wolf & Kessel, 1998). Such studies indicate that school systems are not only doing a poor job at protecting students from interpersonal violence, but that there may be differential rates of protection in favor of heterosexual youth. Further, it appears that these youth are not made to feel as though they can utilize standard means of social and legal support to protect themselves against aggressive and homophobic peers, possibly due to blatant heterosexism and homophobia on the part of school administration.

Visible Minority Gays

Until recently the study of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals in North America has been generally limited to the examination of the middle-class, “white” experience (Tremble, Schneider, & Apathurai, 1989). However, over the last few years, concerns of racial and ethnic minorities have been identified. These concerns include the individual worries in coming out to family, finding a place in the gay and lesbian community while facing discrimination, and the obstacles involved in incorporating an ethnic or racial identity with one of sexual orientation. Browning, (Reynolds, and Dworkin, 1991), provide an excellent opening statement for this section. They state, “visible minority gays and lesbians are polycultural and multiply oppressed” (p.181).

Same-sex orientation has different meanings in various cultures (Blackwood, 1985). The experiences of visible-minority gays, lesbians, and bisexuals are often different than those of “white” gay, lesbian, and bisexual people. There is need of a model for same-sex orientation based on various ways of being, rather than sameness that examines the reality of individual identity and status in regards to gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality (Cohen, 1991).
Documentation on the identity development of Asian-American lesbians and gay men found that self-identification depends on various factors. These include choice of community, choice of terms (such as Asian-American lesbian or gay as opposed to lesbian or gay Asian-American), factors such as disclosure of a lesbian or gay identity to family or to the Asian-American community, as well as their perceptions regarding how others in the gay, lesbian and bisexual community feel about them (Chan, 1989). Chan also noted that the majority of the respondents in her study had a stronger identification with their lesbian-gay identity than with their Asian-American identity.

(Loiacano, 1988), in his exploratory-qualitative study of gay and lesbian identity among Black Americans identified the following three themes/issues in his study:

1. Finding validation in the Gay and Lesbian Community.
2. Finding validation in the Black Community.
3. The need to integrate Black and Gay/Lesbian identities.

Loiacano (1988) states that “being out in a predominantly white gay and lesbian community may not have the same day-to-day payoffs for Black Americans that is does for White Americans” (p. 372).

(Morales, 1990) provides a good statement which sums up the themes running through the available literature regarding the struggle to integrate various identities:

Ethnic gay men and lesbians need to live within three rigidly defined and strongly independent communities: the gay male and lesbian community, the ethnic minority community, and the society at large. While each community provides fundamental needs, serious consequences emerge if such

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communities were to be visibly integrated and merged. A common feeling engendered by this complexity in lifestyle is one of being unable to integrate the pieces of one’s life. It requires a constant effort to maintain oneself in three different worlds, each of which fails to support significant aspects of a person’s life. The complications that arise may inhibit one’s ability to adapt and to maximize personal potentials (p.219).

(Ratti, 1993) highlighted several themes other writers have expressed when sharing the experiences of coming out as a visible minority gay or lesbian. He states that:

Each one of us can recall the sense of isolation that we felt when we first realized that we were gay or lesbian. We were certain that no one else harboured such feelings. We also knew that the South Asians around us - our family, friends, and acquaintances - would not react well to the truth of our sexual orientation. So most of us chose to hide our true nature, at least for a time. When some of us entered the lesbian and gay subculture of the West, our feeling of isolation did not fade as we had assumed it would; it only changed face. It took us a bit longer to identify a new dimension to the sense of alienation. In our burgeoning gay and lesbian world, we were still anomalies. None of our newly found gay or lesbian friends and acquaintances spoke our languages, shared our history, or really understood our culture (p.12).

A major issue brought up by the literature, for visible minority gay, lesbians, and bisexuals is being objectified as an exotic sexual object in Western society. Many minority
gay Asian men find that in North America, visible racial or ethnic features are eroticised “in sexual terms for the primary consumption of the white male voyeur” (Leong, 1996, p.3).

Visible-Minority Gay Youth

Visible minority gay youth face all of the problems that other gay and lesbian youth face growing up in a hostile and condemning society. They also face the same economic discrimination and prejudice confronted by other visible minority youth because of racism. Visible minority gay youth additionally face racial discrimination from white gays that is a reflection of their treatment by the majority culture. Finally, visible minority gay youth must contend with discrimination from their own ethnic group because of their sexual orientation.

Many professionals have noted that youth belonging to visible minorities need the support of their group to effectively cope with the negative effects of white racism in North America. It has also been recognized, however, that visible minority gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth (like their white counterparts) often lack the support of their ethnic or racial groups, and even lack support in their families.

Often, youth have tremendous fears of losing their extended family and being alone in the world. This is particularly true for gay, lesbian, or bisexual youth as a result of the isolation they already face in our society as people who are of a non-dominant sexuality. This fear is greater when the double minority is considered for visible-minority gay, lesbian and bisexual youth.

(Sears, 1991) interviewed Southern black and white gay, lesbian, and bisexuals along with heterosexuals, all of school age. An exploration of sexuality, gender, race, and social class is presented utilizing the biographies of 13 participants. (Sears, 1991) formulates an argument
that "sexual identities are socially constructed" (p.18). This study, as a precedent for my narrative study, used the narratives of its participants to create a backdrop to the lives of its participants.

**Critique**

The literature is dominated by the study of groups within the United States. Differences in Canadian policy and variations in Canada’s ethnic makeup may yield different results utilizing the same study methods.

As has been shown, the literature has been dominated by stage-sequential theories and models. Although of some use, these models fail to take into consideration the complexities of the everyday lived experiences of visible-minority gay male youth, additional research regarding how ethnicity/race, gender, class and same-sex orientation interact in their lives is needed. Another problem with these theories is the linear, stage-sequential framework itself. (Eichberg, 1990) stated that, in part due to the anti-gay prejudice and discrimination, progress through stage-sequential models is not linear but cumulative. (Kirk and Madsen’s, 1989) coming out research found that some gays find it easier to come out to friends before family members, while others claim it’s easier to come out in their respective work settings before they come out to family members. (Bell and Weinberg, 1978) used a social psychology perspective to critique the stage models, and claimed the models ignore alternative pathways to the same identity and ignore the possibility of multiple identities by presupposing a uniform development process. (Coleman, 1982), in critiquing his own work, was in agreement with Bell and Weinberg by identifying how individuals do simultaneously work through developmental tasks of different stages.
Another issue to consider is the context for how gay identity is defined. Although several theorists (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Dank, 1971) defined gay identity in relation to sexual identity, it is a mistake to do so for two reasons. One, it limits a gay identity to a sexual identity and does not acknowledge nor incorporate critical cultural values and concepts that effect identity formation differently. To understand sexual orientation, one needs to look at the social construct, the culture, and norms in a specific society.
Chapter Three

Research Design and Methodology

The following is a discussion of theory, design and methodology I used when looking at the experiences of visible-minority gay male youth in this study.

As highlighted by the literature review there is a lack of Canadian research about visible minority gay male youth, particularly their experiences, viewpoints and worldview. In a discussion of a research agenda for visible-minority gay men in the U.S., (Icard, Longres, & Williams, 1996) indicated there is no one type of research that is appropriate to these men and that it is more a question of being sure that visible-minority men are heard in the various questions asked.

For the purposes of this thesis, I used a qualitative approach. As this project was exploratory in nature, a qualitative approach was best suited to tap into and gain a deep understanding of these youth. According to (Ponterotto and Casas, 1991) qualitative methods of research lend themselves particularly well to studying areas that involve multiplicities of race, class, and gender.

There is strength in a story. The power of narrative in culture has been demonstrated through the ages. Theory from the humanities suggests to us that narrative is a critical and defining component of the human experience. Stories can communicate facts and feelings, values, and cultural norms.

The desire to understand human experience is what motivates a qualitative researcher. (Creswell, 1998) reviews five different qualitative research traditions: biography, grounded theory study, ethnography, case study, and phenomenological study. "A phenomenological
study describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or phenomenon” (p.51).

As my research project developed, I realized that this quest to understand lived experience was in keeping with my own desire to understand the experiences of the visible-minority gay male youth in this study. My question indicated a study with a phenomenological backdrop. I continued to browse the literature on phenomenological research. (Creswell, 1998) cited a book by (Clark Moustakas, 1994) titled Phenomenological Research Methods, and it was this book that informed this research.

(Moustakas, 1994) develops a rationale for a phenomenological study based on a review of the development of phenomenological ideas and writings. The aim was to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions general or universal meanings are derived, in other words the essences or structures of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

In addition to defining more specifically the intention of the phenomenological study, Moustakas proceeded in subsequent chapters of his book to lay out a systematic approach to phenomenological data collection and data analysis, with the goal of the study to discover the essence of the participants’ experience.

The description of the method, the specific steps of data gathering and analysis, and Moustakas’ suggestions regarding the style of the research report were all elements that attracted me to this model. Phenomenology’s emphasis on the human aspect of research, as well as the strong interpersonal nature of the data collection, suggest a narrative-type
approach to the description of the research study and to the report (Moustakas, 1994). “In phenomenological research, the question grows out of an intense interest in a particular problem or topic. The researcher’s excitement and curiosity inspire the search. Personal history brings the core of the problem in focus” (Moustakas, 1994, p.104).

**Phenomenology**

Phenomenology, simply put, is the study of the essence of lived experience. The phenomenological study attempts to discover and describe the lived experience as explained by the person who has lived that phenomenon. This study attempts to discover the essence of the experience of visible-minority gay male youth, as revealed by the youth who have lived that experience.

**Method**

**Moustakas’ Phenomenological Method**

The task of the phenomenological method is to create a structure for this investigation. There exist some general principles of phenomenological research, such as the concept of bracketing and phenomenological reduction. In addition, some researchers have presented detailed and rigorous structures for phenomenological data analysis (Moustakas, 1994) emphasizes two broad aspects of the phenomenological method: 1) bracketing and phenomenological reduction, and 2) an emphasis on intuition imagination, and universal structures in analysis.
Recruitment and Sample

During selection of participants, I used a purposeful sample process. This process involved my deliberate choice of participants who were able to illuminate the experiences of visible-minority gay male youth (Osborne, 1990; Wertz, 1984). With an emphasis on the nature of the relevant experience, not making inferences about a population based on the characteristics of a sample, “the point of subject selection [in phenomenological research] is to obtain richly varied descriptions, not to achieve statistical generalization” (Polkinghorne, 1983, p.48).

Self-identifying visible-minority gay male youth from 15 years old and up to, and including, 24 years of age, living in a large urban area were recruited. A ‘criterion-based’ sampling method was used for selecting research participants. The purpose was to obtain participants, who were likely to be connected to, or at least exposed to a gay, lesbian and bisexual community, and were able to contribute to the development and understanding of the issues of visible-minority gay male youth. I attempted to achieve diversity in relation to education, class and ethnicity.

Participants were contacted via postings at a local gay and lesbian community center, two community centers with youth programs; and through personal referral or “snowball” sampling (Dean et al., 1992).

Data Collection

(Moustakas, 1994) recommended methodology for a phenomenological study is the in-depth interview. It is only through this style of information gathering that one
can truly hope to arrive at an understanding of the essence of the experience, since evidence from phenomenological research is derived from first-person.

Audio-taped, face-to-face interviews were used. Little structure was used in hopes of allowing for information that was important to the participant to surface in a rich detailed fashion, allowing the participants greater flexibility to discuss in the context of their present lives. In a phenomenological study the interview should be open-ended and unstructured.

(Mellon, 1990), (Creswell, 1998), (Moustakas, 1994), and (Seidman, 1991) emerged as the most instructive sources for this particular study. These authors were particularly helpful in describing the unstructured interview style and in crediting that style as being not only acceptable but actually necessary for a phenomenological study. (Moustakas, 1994) describes the phenomenological interview as "an informal, interactive process [which] utilizes open-ended comments and questions" (p. 114).

Open-ended interview research explores people's views of reality and allows the researcher to generate theory by interviewing, and offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher (Reinharz, 1992, pp.18-19).

Interviews were approximately one hour in length, with breaks acceptable at any time; in addition I made sure refreshments were on hand. Participants were informed as to the nature of the study on an ongoing basis; as well participants were given copies of their written consent forms.
A monetary award of some type seemed appropriate in appreciation and also in the case the youth might have acquired some type of expense due to participation in the project, such as transportation costs. These youth were not in need, so the award was seen as a way to honour their participation.

The youth were assured on an ongoing basis that they were free to withdraw anytime. The setting needed to be comfortable, feel safe and be flexible, determined by the youth, or mutually agreed upon. Following transcription and reading of the first interview I conducted a second interview to discuss the interpretation of the first interview, clarify and validate data, and ask how it fit into their experiences.

Data was generated as a result of one primary question and when necessary a variety of sub-questions. They included:

1. From the point of view of visible-minority gay male youth, what are your unique experiences and perceived needs?

   - What does coming out/being out mean for you?
   - How would you define or describe your family?
   - Is your family aware of your orientation?
   - Do your friends know about your orientation?
   - What is it like being with friends who are from your “community” as well as those not from it?
   - Was there a difference in how they respond to your orientation?
   - Do you have a different relationship with friends who are lesbian or gay, who are from your culture/not from your culture?
   - Experiences, both positive and negative, of contact with a youth group/lesbian and gay community?
   - If you could change anything, add something in the community at large, your cultural community, the lesbian and gay community what would your suggestions be?
   - Concerns, questions, that we have not yet covered in relation to what it is like to be you?

The taped interviews were transcribed verbatim.
Data Analysis

The procedural steps that were used in this study were similar to those steps proposed by (Colaizzi, 1978) and (Moustakas, 1994).

- Interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Characteristics of the participants during the interviews were noted, such as tone of voice, the speed at which they spoke and emotion.
- Each transcript was then read several times in order to develop a sense of each of the participants overall experiences. Attention was focused on the similar statements that each participant used as well as common descriptors that the participants used to describe their experiences.
- Each transcript was reviewed and all of the key phrases or sentences that each participant used to describe his experiences were selected. (Colaizzi, 1978) referred to this step as “extracting significant statements” (p.59). In transcripts where repeated sentences and phrases illuminated the same aspect of the phenomenon, only one statement was selected for that aspect in each transcript.
- The selected phrases and sentences were then transformed into themes to describe their overall meaning. This process was completed for each transcript and (Colaizzi, 1978) labeled this state “formulating meanings” (p.59). Consequently, a theme as developed to capture the meaning of each
matching phrase or sentence. This process of selecting the key statements and then formulating themes was completed for each of the participants and this procedure is known as a within persons analysis (Osborne, 1990).

- All the key statements and formulated themes, which were derived from each transcript, were combined and grouped into more abstract themes. These themes were labeled first order clusters or first order themes. Subsequently, these later themes were clustered into even more highly abstract themes called second order clusters or themes. The process of clustering each of the participant’s key statements and themes into first and second order clusters is known as between person’s analysis (Osborne, 1990).

- Through data analysis, one group of final themes emerged reflecting the meaning of the participant experiences.

- In order to validate the group of final themes, the first and second order themes were referred back to the original transcripts.

**Ethical Considerations**

I made sure of the following:

- The purpose and objectives of my research, and how the data was to be used, was communicated verbally and in writing to the participants.

- I obtained written permission from the participant before I proceeded with any aspect of the study.

- Transcripts of participant interviews and interpretations were shared openly with each participant.
• Issues of anonymity were discussed directly with the participant and were ensured. The names of the participants have been withheld. The names used were chosen randomly for the purpose of anonymity.

• Participants were involved when decisions were made about the reporting of data.

• The process of being interviewed, talking about issues that have potential to be emotionally distressing required that certain precautions be taken. It was important that the participants were given an opportunity to debrief, asked if they felt all right with the process and if they had any questions. In addition I made sure they were able to contact me afterwards should they have required anything additional, or need of support.

• Participants had the option to choose whether to participate in the research after being informed about the details of the study.

• It was emphasized to the participants that participation was voluntary and that participants could withdraw at any point without penalty or loss of benefits.

• The research proposal was reviewed by the University of British Columbia Behavioral Sciences Screening Committee for Research and Other Studies Involving Human Subjects.

• Data (e.g., tapes, transcripts) have been kept in locked storage and will be destroyed.

• Participants have received copies of the results when requested.

Validity

In order to maximize validity, individual interviews were taped and transcribed. Findings were reviewed and considered valid by the research participants as representative of their experiences. In addition coherence between findings and the existing literature was present.

Interviews were presented as a whole, making every attempt to use the words of the participants.
Michael's Story

Michael is a nineteen-year-old native of Taiwan living in Canada. He immigrated to
canada four years ago to study science at a Canadian University. During the course of my
interview with Michael, he brought up many issues related to coming out, about family and
GLBTT support systems, and what it means to be Asian and gay.

Coming out for Michael was a time of great anxiety. He was afraid of publicly
acknowledging his attraction for the same sex. By hiding out in known gay areas, Michael
was able to participate in the gay community. Michael said:

Basically in public, unless I know that area is gay, I don’t feel comfortable.

Somewhere on Davie Street or something in the gay community, I’m really
comfortable with. I don’t have to worry about . . . wonder who’s looking over my
shoulder and stuff.

Michael also expressed anxiety in going into the Gay and Lesbian Centre because he was
afraid someone might recognize him as he walked in.
Another issue Michael faced during his coming out process was finding gay friendly medical services. He felt that his family doctor was not able to deal with his health concerns related to being gay. As the family physician, his doctor had treated and had a close relationship with his family. For this reason, Michael was not able to discuss his fears about HIV, and other STD’s:

My family physician I asked him about how you get a blood testing and he’s like are you fooling around with HIV? And he said are you fooling around with a female? A male? I said no. Said I don’t feel comfortable talking to you. My family doctor and gay, being gay and everything because he’s very close with my mom.

Michael also raised a concern, with regards to coming out, of the fear of abuse or harassment by society. He felt that by coming out, he would be subjecting himself to the public observation. The fear of abuse or harassment was especially close to Michael, as a student:

I don’t have time to even worry about who’s watching or like, thinking that we might get beaten up or harassed or things like that. That’s why I’m always conscious of what I do and stuff. It’s always in the back of my mind, all those hassles.

A major issue for Michael was discovering what being gay meant. Michael had developed a notion that being gay is limited to a number of characteristics that all gay men share. He believed that when someone discloses their sexual orientation, they begin to “eat, sleep, drink gay”. Michael felt this was a concern in his coming out process because these characteristics were synonymous with his weekend social life. Michael thought that being gay was like having a split personality. For him, gay was something to be on the weekend.
when he can be around his gay friends:

I go out in the gay community, do things . . . shopping, eat, shopping, food, dance, movies, and hang out with gay friends. But, I’m different . . . I don’t think . . . my thinking is not gay-directed basically. I’m not coming out out . . . it’s just that I realize that there’s a part of me that I’m interested in at certain times, like I want to know more about that part of myself. I guess I would say that I’m gay but not to the full extent. Like . . . I don’t let just gay run my whole business– it’s just a part of me.

It’s not like I’m deeply into it or deeply out of it.

School occupied a lot of Michael’s time and he viewed his education quite seriously. During the week, Michael regularly attended classes, but found it difficult. He felt that his same-sex attraction was a distraction, and that only gay people have this distraction:

Tends in class you glance your eyes around at the cute guys. And you pay less attention to school so . . . yeah, if I was heterosexual, I would be able to concentrate more on school.

Having friends was an important part of Michael’s life. He had many friends from the Asian community, the university community, and people he had met in the gay community. Often these different communities interacted with one another. During the interview, Michael distinguished his gay and straight friends and worried about interaction between them. He recounted an incident where a straight friend may have overheard a conversation between himself and a gay friend:

I made a fool of myself the other day when I was talking to a gay friend. I didn’t know that my straight friend was sitting at the computer. We were talking about gay
relationships and what’s happening and that. Then, when he finally stood up, I said hi and he said hi and it seems as though he understood or was overhearing what we were talking about.

Although Michael is not out to his straight friends, he doesn’t think they would have had a harsh reaction to his disclosure. Michael was more concerned that his friends would contact him less rather than become violent towards him.

Having gay friends was important to Michael as well. Using chat groups, via the internet, is one way that he made friends. His first experience with the gay community was through a friend that he met on a gay channel in a chat room. From there, his group of gay friends had expanded. Michael felt that he could be more open about his feelings with his gay friends because they had a common bond. When Michael needed someone to talk to, especially about relationships, he turned to his gay friends:

So I try to go to my friends who are gay and we tend to talk about it with each other and to describe what type of people there are and describe what they’re looking for and all this stuff.

Michael valued the support system his friends provided. He also placed a great deal of importance on the family as a support system. He found it hard to disclose his same-sex orientation to his family even after they have confronted him about it. Michael recounted an incident where his family found pictures of him with his gay friends. When they asked Michael if he was gay, he denied it. He lost control of himself and argued with his grandma, which he regretted deeply. He was raised to respect his family:

We had a long argument and that’s the only time I actually argued with my grandma.
I lost control of myself because I shouldn’t have done that and . . . it’s sort of regret now. I went to apologize to my grandma but she doesn’t think I am ‘gay’ but she says that I hang around too many gay people and eventually I’ll turn into one.

Michael found conflict between being out to his family and respecting his family’s wishes. One major point of contention was arranged marriage. Michael’s mother wanted to see a woman taking care of him and his father wanted him to carry on the family name because Michael is the eldest son:

This family next door is honourable and stuff and they want to arrange a marriage. My mom just wants someone to take care of me basically. But with my dad it’s different. I have a younger brother who’s eighteen and a baby brother who’s six. There’s other males in the family who can worry about carrying on the family name and all that stuff.

Michael attempted to deal with the issue of arranged marriage by simply saying that each prospective partner was not suitable for him. In the most recent case, Michael claimed that the girl was too young for him to even consider, that he knew nothing about her, and that there was too much cultural difference between them.

Culture and ethnicity played large roles in Michael’s daily life. The way he was raised affected the way he interacted with others. During the interview, Michael discussed his feelings about older men pursuing younger men, especially those of Asian lineage, as sexual partners. Although Michael was not attracted to these men, he felt a cultural prescription to speak to them:

It’s like men who are over forty they try to . . . because sometimes when well some of
my friends are dancing, I’m tired just sit there drinking then they assume that you are like there and they approach you and they talk and . . . for me it’s hard for me not to talk back because of my background and everything I tend to talk to everyone who talks to me. Although I don’t like them I still have to . . .

Although Michael was raised in a different cultural background from the mainstream culture of North America, there were some aspects of his culture that he wished he could change. Being part of the gay community was hard for Michael to reconcile with his cultural background as he finds the gay community is much different than his family experience:

I can’t enjoy certain things. I can’t even behave like, in a certain way. I can’t let loose if I’m around my parents basically. Or around everyone else because I’m always saying this is proper behaviour. I would like to do things without worrying about if its right . . . if it’s proper to do. Basically let loose and do whatever without always having to worry about what other people think.

When he could not integrate being gay and being Asian, his same-sex attraction lost out: "in that sense, I tend to block a lot of my contact with other people. Like the gay community and stuff".

When asked what could be done to help promote understanding of GLBT issues within his cultural or ethnic community, Michael suggested that communication and discussion of sexuality would be a great first step:

I think they should be more open. There should be more things in the community talking about being gay and what they’re like . . . because a lot of families don’t understand what it means to be gay. I think they should be more accepting of gay
people because they... they’re willing to accept like, street kids and bums and all that stuff... I know they say they’re accepting but their actions and things are different.

He also felt that using forms of media would help educate his community:

Kids learn all through school and everything would be there but then, for their own parents probably have some like, commercials or some pamphlets that are sent out to the family or something like that... or something on T.V. or something like that, something more through the media.

Another support system that Michael utilized was the GLBTT community. As he came to terms with his identity, Michael found himself noticing more about the gay community. One aspect that he found particularly disturbing is that of stereotypes. Michael notices that when someone attempted to address issues of being Asian and gay, most often Asians “seem to be somehow collectively absorbed into that”. Although he thinks that stereotypes and generalizations are wrong, Michael finds himself using them as well:

I feel it’s wrong to categorize and to stereotype and to generalize about people. I mean ethnic group or race, certain type of good people or bad people that most of the bad things tend to stick out and you tend to group them and to generalize. I tend to this quite often myself... generalize non-Asian people having no class, no morals, no principle, or some upbringing.

There’s a tendency for people to group certain people together with other people and their characteristics and assume that everyone is like that. Like having an accent, can’t speak English properly... easy and all this stuff like that. And that happens a
lot in the bar scene and stuff like that.

Another stereotype that Michael noticed was that of older men pursuing younger men, especially Asians, as partners. Michael was frustrated and sometimes angry when these men attempted to pick him up at the bar. He felt these men were only after sex:

I don’t think that anything long term will happen because there is such an age gap and it’s hard to find any, like, anything in common. And you basically end up you are sort of sexual needs and all that stuff.

Michael felt that there are good and bad sides to the gay community. Stereotypes and generalizations are part of a negative attitude he felt should be avoided. Despite these negative aspects, Michael felt that the gay community had helped him, and continued to help and support others during their coming out process:

If you get to know the community there it’s . . . they’re very welcoming . . . like into the sort of gay scene. They try to show you . . . like help you tell who’s who and not to get involved with certain things.

I’m happy that there are a lot of things related to gay stuff. Like people supporting gay rights and all that stuff. I’m pretty happy with that and I think in the future they will achieve quite a lot, like gay marriage and stuff.

Stereotypical physical appearance seemed to have had a lot of importance to gay men by Michael’s observations. Clothes and attitude seemed to be major determining factors in fitting in with a particular group within the gay community. Michael observed:

Everything is basically about looks. If you aren’t a certain type or whatever and it’s hard to get into the sort of group of people. It depends on your . . . what you like...the
certain groups of people who just like . . . into ummm grungy, dancing scene...and there is those who just go out and like . . . dress to look good to try to impress and they just stand there . . . and those who look at other people and all that stuff you know.

Michael lamented the lack of community between Asian men within the gay community:

But there tends to be a lot, like, for certain ethnicity groups, like Asian people, they tend not to talk to each other very much. Unless they know each other as friends right? They see each other, it’s like they see like that attitude like you’re competing for a certain type of people.

Michael attributed the sense of an ideal image to the media. Body type and fashion are constructed and projected to the gay community to promote an ideal image most men would find nearly impossible to attain. Michael felt this led to a sense of low self-esteem within the Asian community:

Everything is like T.V. and everything and an idea in the media and stuff of what the perfect type of person looks like. That’s why so many people you see so many people going to work out and trying to look good and all that stuff.

I think that . . . a lot of [Asian] men have self-esteem problems and they think that since they, say, some guy is attracted to them they are afraid someone else might take that person away because in their mind, that person’s better looking and that, and the person that’s going out with them or something might be attracted to another person.

Michael discussed his views on integrating an Asian and gay identity in terms of a conservative Asian background. He felt that being Asian should be more evident than being
gay. This could be shown by setting an example to the rest of the community:

Sometimes I feel shameful of Asian guys. Because they... I don’t know... they like... they act a different way and then they... like some of them are like...

although they know they shouldn’t they display, public display and sometimes they have a tendency to group together to gossip about people or put people down.

Michael put a double standard on the conduct of his fellow Asian men compared to the rest of the gay community. He felt that Asian men should know not to act out in public because of they have a more conservative upbringing.

When asked how being gay and being Asian correspond within the gay and lesbian community, Michael responded, "what makes us the same, well we both... we all have the same sexual preference. We participate in certain gay things like pride and stuff".

At the end of the interview, it became apparent that Michael was having a lot of difficulty reconciling a gay and Asian identity. Michael felt that despite the support he received from his various community groups, he was restricted within each one by traits he feels he has in common with the others. He repeated himself saying, “if I had a chance...if I had a choice, I would not want to be gay".

John’s Story

John is a twenty year-old gay man. He was born in Malaysia to Cantonese parents. His primary education was in Singapore and was studying literature at a Canadian University. John readily identified as a gay man because he is attracted to men rather than women.

During the course of the interview, we spoke about his personal and other societal challenges related to coming out.

John was unique in that he had almost completely disclosed his sexual orientation to both his family and friends. He said he had always been attracted to men, but he never identified as gay:

I had those feelings since really young. Like, I’ve always been attracted to men. I don’t know. Like, I felt that I am attracted to guys and stuff, but I just kept in the closet.

After arriving in Canada, John noticed a major difference in attitudes about sexuality. In Singapore, where he went to school, and in Malaysia where he was born, sexuality was not
discussed. Knowing he was attracted to men, and living in a new atmosphere allowed him to come out:

It’s more open up here, I guess. Open as in like, the whole sexuality and stuff, they kind of like, talk about it.

Being in a different place, where no one knows who you are allowed John to discover himself in terms of his sexual identity. He found that he could be more open about his sexuality when he was away from those people who knew him best:

It was really different, like, and then I could be really out because nobody knows me there. Something I like doing, which I’d never been given the chance to do. And so I had that chance and . . . just being really out there and it was kind of fun.

Being open about his sexuality made John feel better about himself as well. He described his feelings as relieving a sort of burden:

I felt really good about myself there because it was a sense of liberation. And from that, ummm . . . well, I learned from that I was being true to myself, I guess. And that’s what eventually leads to coming out to your friends.

Having disclosed his sexual orientation to family and friends, John felt a great sense of relief in being open about his sexuality. He noted that coming out is a permanent identity change for him:

It’s very hard to keep it from people. Even when you talk you just bring it up, because it’s just natural to say something like, oh I met this guy the other day and umm. . . da da da and so on. So if people are like, you know, getting all freaky and homophobic or whatever, like, I don’t care.
I am quite open about it. Because, like, well, it’s something to be proud of. Like, I’m not ashamed of myself.

Being out was a learning experience for John. He found that being open about his sexuality allowed him to take in more of the gay community. Experiences he had gone through have taught him more about himself. He realized that he had a variety of options available to him, the most of important of which was being able to refuse anything that made him uncomfortable.

It wasn’t always easy for John, however. When he first began to reconcile him same-sex attraction with his identity, his stress level was high. Coming out to his family and friends relieved that stress:

I was feeling bad about myself like, I was going through depression. You always feel so closeted if you are not out and it gets really depressing. You have this fear of going out and, like, what happens if people find out and that you’re gay or homosexual and then, it’s going to be hideous and stuff. Ever since I came out to my parents and basically society I’ve felt much better about myself. It actually eases a lot of stress off me.

John felt that his family worried about him more, after he disclosed his same-sex orientation to them. He thought that was because he did not live at home and they were fearful of his level of sexual activity:

They’re kind of uptight about, like, me being away from resident, it’s just like a different resident right now. They always call me up and see if I’m at home. I think they worry more now [after disclosure]. But right now they’re like really uptight
about that and . . . like, if I’m out, like going out somewhere, like, I’m not at home, that means I’m going to be, like, sleeping with some guy.

John also raised the issue of physical and mental health facilities with regards to coming out. During the time John was coming out, he suffered from severe depression. From this experience, he feels that the health professions should take a more active role in patient health:

I went to see that doctor when I was really down. I was going suicidal when I was coming out to myself. This campus doctor directed me to a psychiatrist on campus. I didn’t really get too much from the psychiatrist down there. The psychiatrist just sits there and then listen to you talk. I need someone to talk to me, like have a two person, a two-way conversation.

He stopped seeing the psychiatrist about two months later and felt that the gay community helped him sort through the rest of his issues:

In the summer I took a lot of stuff like going to youth groups and stuff like that. Like, hanging out with other gay people. And that helped a lot and I know most of my problems have been solved.

Disclosing his sexual orientation to his family was also important for John. He related his depression to his inability to communicate freely with his family:

Before I came out to them it was, like, just like any family relationship. But when I wasn’t feeling too well, well I was kind of depressed and stuff like that but they couldn’t understand why it was happening.

John was raised in close-knit family and his parents attempted to keep them as such. He
talks to his parents almost every day, and because his brother was also living on campus, they felt they should live together. His parents raised him in a culture where he was taught to listen to his parents' advice:

If you choose not to, you know, to do what we think, like, well is good for you, well, it’s good for, it’s okay, you have your own choice.

The extended family was also important to John and his immediate family. His parents were concerned about how they appeared to family and friends. This caused conflict for John in that it forced him to decide between a cultural or personal identity:

I hang out with my cousin and it’s like I couldn’t tell him because if I tell him, then he’ll tell my aunt and uncle and the whole family would know. My mom raised us to be concerned about what happens if your relatives or some friends of yours, you know, they would not talk to us. They’re going to think, like, I’m going to have AIDS or something like that and, like, this family’s cursed, and, AIDS infected, like, stay away from my family attitude. I don’t care because I don’t really hang with them.

John felt that to reconcile a Chinese and a same-sex identity meant that he must often choose one over the other. He stopped hanging out with his straight Chinese friends after coming out. He felt it was hard to relate to the straight Chinese community:

It’s kind of different for like, the Chinese community. My Chinese friends, like, if some of them are okay about this, they don’t care.

But Chinese men . . . somehow they just, whenever they go out they just start talking about girls and dating and then, stuff like that and it’s just something I can’t really
relate. I think if I tell them it’s going to be like . . . oh my god, it’s just like, they’re going to be like homophobics . . .

When discussing further action the Chinese culture needs to take with regards to being gay, John feels the community need to be more open and talk about sexuality:

The thing is that people are really homophobic I think. They don’t talk about homosexuals at all. It’s basically like, a straight community. Like a man is for a woman and a woman is for a man and you don’t date [same-sex].

John hoped that the Chinese community would eventually accept his gay identity. In Canada, he notices he is different from the majority:

Being Chinese is always in your face . . . well, I know I’m Chinese. But since it’s a different culture here, like in Canada . . . like since I moved here, like three years ago, it’s like different. The culture is different, and I just don’t see as many Chinese people, like, it’s predominantly white society.

Responding to comments by his friends that they see him as a person and not necessarily as Chinese, John said he was proud of his ancestry and wished to be seen as both Chinese and gay. He wanted to be distinguished by his culture and heritage:

Why can’t you see me, like, I’m Chinese, look at me, and I’m proud to be Chinese.

Like if I see, when you say you don’t see me as Chinese, then that’s an insult.

John believed in individuality, that everyone should feel free to do what they feel is right for them. He thought that people too often follow societal prescriptions rather than resolving their identity as he did:

Usually people are just, like, what society wants them to be. It’s just, you know,
there's nothing there. It's very nice to like, to know, you achieve . . . kind of in tune with yourself . . . like in the Tao so to speak.

His Buddhist connection stemmed from his childhood religious upbringing. However, he converted to Christianity while in Singapore. In Canada, John felt that a Christian identity is too restrictive for him:

What happened was that I ended up converting to Christianity from Buddhism. But ever since I came over here I stopped going to church and stuff. I know there's a growing tendency for me, like . . . I don't know . . . it's more open up here. Open as in like, the whole sexuality and stuff.

John felt alienated from society as a result of his gay identity. He felt that coming out to society had given him a goal to work towards, that of helping others:

Last year I was skipping school and stuff for no reason. I guess it's something to relate back to coming out to society. Now I'm doing something else, like getting enrolled in student activities. You live in society, you identify with society, but, like, you're not sure, like, what's going to come from them.

During his time in Singapore, John learned a lot about respecting other people for who they are, especially respecting those he didn't understand. He noted that Singapore had many different cultures and even the languages had many different dialects. He enjoyed the tolerance of living among a great diversity of culture. His hope is that others in the gay community will follow this example:

The diversity you get. Just tolerance going on, like, people are tolerant of each other.

Like, they respect each other's culture and stuff like that. And, just mutual respect
I couldn’t understand the culture here. The culture was really different. Then you have this fear that you’re going to do something wrong, or like, you have to keep to yourself. You need to see the person underneath coming from that person, their personality.

The GLBT community is a very diverse community and has many positive and negative aspects to it. John related some of the positive aspects of being supportive and allowing people with a common bond to unite. A common struggle allowed gay men to develop closer friendships:

We have something in common. We can relate to each other, like, what we’re talking about, and you don’t have that so-called barrier. Meeting people, and youth groups and stuff like that, it’s a really good way to know people, so, like, they understand each other. It’s like a support thing . . . going on. I’ve made a lot of friends. A lot of good friends too.

Working in known gay areas also increased his exposure to the gay community. John spoke about the time when he worked in a popular gay area; a lot of people recognized him and would talk to him as a friend.

John also discussed the issue of stereotypes within the gay community. One such stereotype that John noticed is that of older gay men pursuing younger Asian men:

There was this guy was really freaky, like freaky as hell. He’s like, come over, you know . . . he’s like thirty-one year old and he’s just . . . and I’m just . . . and then he start talking to me like, he’s like oh, would you like to go for a beer or something like
He felt a prescription against being assertive in fending off their sexual advances:

I was just standing, like, you know there and he was standing across at the table and he started walking towards me and I was so scared because this is really freaky so I started walking away. Everyone came back to the same position and then he walked up to me and put his arms around me . . . and my shoulder and started touching my shoulder . . . I was like, uh no! Go away. Well, I didn’t say go away; I said like, uh, I think someone’s calling. Uh, bye. And then I took off.

This stereotype seemed to follow with another of Asian promiscuity. John thought that these older gay men pursued Asian men because they are supposed to be more promiscuous. He resented this stereotype and described his feelings as emotionally trying:

Maybe he thinks I’m Chinese, I’m easy to pick up. But like I say it’s a stereotype going here. Gay Asians, and other ethnic groups have this concept that older people, like, older gay men, like, so-called chicken hawks, like, will pick up, like, usually they go out for guys who are, like, Chinese or something like that, like younger Chinese guys. Because they think they are, like, easy to pick up or something like that. It’s just like totally bullshit. It’s kind of scary in another sense. It makes me feel really bad.

He feared that other Asian youth, struggling in coming out, may fall prey to these men.

The confusion surrounding coming to terms with sexual identity and integrating it with Chinese identity left him open to a coerced sexual encounter:

It was the first time I was coming out to myself. And, that was really hard because I
was all confused . . . I thought I needed one thing but I don’t. But I still wanted it. So what happened was that we ended up having sex. It was just really weird, and I didn’t like it then. But I didn’t know how to say no to it so . . . It was kind of like a forced thing. So I learned from that like, you have to say no.

Another negative aspect of the gay community John observed is that of generalized promiscuity and one-night stands. He related this to alcohol and drug use that was prevalent in gay culture:

One night stands is not, really a good, ummm . . . positive aspect of being gay. Because it’s like, gay men tend to be more promiscuous. That’s one thing that I don’t agree with right now. At first I thought I was just experimenting . . . and I thought it was just part of being gay, but it’s not.

He worried that it led to unsafe sex practices:

There was one time when I was, like, drunk and stuff. And there was this guy who was like, offering like to, his place for me to stay. Yeah, we jumped into bed and . . . it was weird. Well, I couldn’t really remember much of the stuff that went on but, I knew what I did was safe. It wasn’t anything that would put into a great risk.

John felt he had never been subjected to overt racism as a result of him being Asian and openly gay. He felt it was important to be open to new ideas, and to change when something was not right. Being open to understanding yourself and utilizing support systems helped people become self-confident and proud. John sums up his interview by saying, “I’m proud to be Chinese and I’m proud to be gay!”
Chapter Six

George’s Story

George has been in Canada for eleven years. He immigrated to Canada from Guatemala when he was only eight years old. His first language is Spanish but his education was in English. George described himself as gay because he was attracted to men. He spoke to me about coming out in terms of a gay and Latin identity and how that affected his relationships with family, friends, and society.

George pinpointed his age of coming out as fifteen. His coming out was unique from most other gay males. Not only was he quite young, he had also read a lot about being gay:

As soon as I was thirteen, I’ve been studying how to be gay. All the books I get at the library . . . because somehow I thought I was um, I don’t know, like, studying for an exam.

Through his reading, George perceived a somewhat romantic notion of what it meant to be gay. The coming out process for George was laid out in a series of steps in literature. He thought he would be like following a set of guidelines:

I thought it was going to be simple like some steps to follow. But I didn’t. It was
kind of disappointing. The people weren’t any different. It was just my childish
perception of it. The way I hoped it would be. But it wasn’t. It was just a bunch of
normal people with normal jobs.

George related his realization of a gay identity as exciting. His romanticized notion of
what it meant to be gay as set out by the literature he had read had given George something
to look forward to:

I was straight for . . . I guess it was the first year and a half of my puberty thing.

When I found out I was actually turned on by men it was kind of exciting. Something
else to be turned on about.

Coming out to family is a major step in disclosing a same-sex orientation. George
suggested that one reason there is less openly gay Latin men in the GLBT community was
because of a fear of disclosure to family, especially mothers:

One of the things, I guess the Latin’s are scared of what their mothers might think.

She would be scared to death just by saying something like about AIDS like they are
about to die.

George, along with his uncle, was out to his grandmother:

When I told my grandmother, about my uncle, and about myself, she just couldn’t
really seem to think that bad of it.

When asked how many relatives he has in Canada, George responded that he had two
types of family; one ‘blood’ family and one naturalized. George felt that family meant more
than blood ties. Family also included those people who care and are cared for by one
another. George labelled these people aunts, uncles, and cousins.
Being a visible minority and being openly gay at such a young age subjected George to overt racism and homophobia in high school. George thought that a lot stemmed from his intellectual abilities:

My teacher in high school . . . I didn’t know why, but he said to me, he said, your people are just a bunch of savages. He used to make fun of how our accent sound like. In my childhood, with my other uncles and a bunch of um, intellectuals from Guatemala, people beat up intellectuals. And so, I knew he was wrong. Because I just had experience with this before which I didn’t like very much.

George didn’t think being gay had made that much of a difference in high school. He doesn’t feel as though he had been treated unfairly. When asked what it was like in school, George replied:

Not really that bad. Um, sometimes in the halls I would hear oh there’s that gay guy.

Yeah, so stuff like that.

Being ethnically Latin and being gay was difficult for George to reconcile in terms of identity. His different culture and different slang in his first language helped define how being gay was viewed by his culture. In his culture, being openly gay was bad:

There is a word we use in Guatemala for gay which means butterfly. According to one of my uncles, who’s queer . . . being gay in Guatemala is worse than being a criminal.

After disclosing his same-sex orientation, George found that it was hard to meet people in the gay community. Sometimes he felt ostracized and uncomfortable around other gay people as a double minority:
Sometimes I avoid gay things because I’d much rather hide than meet people. Like when I first came into this youth group. Sometimes I feel comfortable, sometimes I don’t because the majority of people in the youth groups tend to be white. Being a person of race, people think I’m stupid or something so I spend a lot of time thinking and writing.

Although George was raised by an atheist mother and family, he was secretly baptized by his grandfather. George noted that the Latin culture is closely tied to the Roman Catholic faith:

My mother was atheist, and all my uncles and my other family seems to be atheists and not too religious. My mother didn’t want me to become Catholic at all. But my grandfather secretly baptized me when I was six or something. It was a secret thing.

On the topic of religion, George stated:

I believe in myself. I believe in the world kind of. I don’t really have a religion.

He also observed that Latin men were more likely to identify as bisexual than gay:

The Latin community is more Catholic. But yet . . . I guess, the Latin community, or the Latin world has a tendency towards bisexuality. So apparently sleeping with men on the side is not strange.

George felt that an issue in his Latin culture is that of machismo. He discussed and attempted to explain what is meant by machismo and masculinity. George stated:

Most of the Latin community seems to be . . . and some Latin’s here . . . in a masculine violent role. Sort of like swallowing your pain.

George felt different from this masculine ideal in that he felt he was more in touch with his
It was kind of hard for me because I was more into feelings and I was more... other people’s feelings and healing people kind of including myself, and they seem to be more of kind of... I don’t know, doing violent things or fucking to forget that... or maybe they don’t but they have that image and that mentality.

However, George distinguished between the masculine role of Latin America and that of the North American Latin community. He suggested that the true masculine role is natural and not something to be portrayed as an image:

The true machismo’s are in North America, not in Latin America. In North America there seems to be more of a way of speaking with a lower voice and... or being like, I can dominate you, kind of, facial hair. Like my uncle who grew up in Guatemala, he was intimidated by his father’s masculinity.

George also discussed being gay and being Latin in terms of what it was like within the gay community specifically. He felt that there was a lack of support for ethnic minority groups:

There should be more information on the peer groups, just in general all the peer groups in the community... in the ethnic minority groups.

George missed conversing in his mother tongue when he spoke about day to day issues in the gay community:

Sometimes I miss speaking Spanish because I like speaking Spanish a lot. It would be nice to have other Latin people come to the youth groups.

Stereotypes were very noticeable to George. There seemed to be a number of
characteristics that most gay men shared that made up a typical gay lifestyle. He felt that he noticed stereotypes more because he was an outsider:

I'm not into other things which other gays are. Let's say pop music, into pop things, or talking about Madonna's affairs. Apparently it's really trendy. We seem to set trends, but we also take trends a lot, and the thing about having the right haircut, the right shoes, the right kind of jacket, and the right kind of CD player, and the things I don't care about.

George also noticed he was sometimes treated as exotic by the gay community. He felt that there was people had a stereotypical idea of how a person of particular ethnic group was supposed to look and act:

Once I was standing next to a gay man and he treated me like I was some sort of exotic parrot or something. That's happened once or twice. There's this perception of what I'm supposed to be. You know the stereotypes people have, like you are a jungle creature or something. Or a really wild sexual savage animal or something. Or you are supposed to be the perfect Latin lover.

George thought stereotypes surrounding image are very common in the gay community. He also felt that the expectations set by these stereotypes were idealistic and impossible to attain:

Lately it kind of hit me. Sometimes we like to have to do things to match that. I find it really impossible to match stereotypes. So I try not to see myself, like, to ignore those things. I guess people tend to be attracted to the blonde, tall, buff person.

Image stereotypes did not only come from the gay community itself. George felt that his
uncles tried to push him towards attaining the ideal image:

He wanted for me to fit the stereotype and become like a jock or something and give up my books or something, all those things. It’s like I’m supposed to become something like that, and it felt like every time I walked into a room and he was there it was like, oh I’m not the person I’m supposed to be.

George said that when he realized he did not fit the ideal image, it made him very self-conscious. He began to feel depressed and tried changing his physical appearance to fit in:

I don’t know why but there seems to be this, like, if you’re not English, you’re degenerate. I wanted to be an English, upper-class boy who went to an English school and spoke perfect English but it was completely impossible. It did put me into a large depression because I couldn’t be English, or upper-class and I couldn’t have blonde hair. My dying my hair... so that’s just been really impossible to get that image.

Looking back, George felt he was foolish for being so worried:

Now that I look back and it, it seems silly to me now, that I was so self-conscious when I really had nothing to be self-conscious about really.

George spoke at great length about his personal beliefs and desires. Most of his beliefs revolved around being who you want to be and following your instincts. George realized that each person was different and liked to do things a little differently. This fit in well with his sexual identity:

If you’re born queer, you’re just queer. Many people have their whole lives avoiding what is in their head. And I think it applies to avoiding your sexuality and your own
desires and avoiding what’s in your head.

Sexuality for George was more important than conforming to society:

You should do whatever comes to your head. It could mean doing in bed what they want in their head but most of them are escaping. Just like they die their hair a certain way because they’re scared to be different and they’re copying their role models.

George raised the issue of being open about sexuality in art. He felt it was important to not hide what he viewed as a fundamental part of his identity and expression. He thought age was more important than sexuality. He discussed a colleague who hid her sexual identity and what that meant to him:

She went into hiding because she didn’t want to deal with being discriminated against and being treated like a person who is worth less than the rest of the people.

I’m just a teenager, I mean, who cares what I say. But I guess it seems to be important, in some way.

George hoped eventually to be accepted by every community for the person he was. His personal desires were very similar to that of most people. George wanted to find love; he wanted to be the image of desire for some person. George felt that he was a very unique person and hoped someday to find someone who had similar tastes. He hoped to be accepted and admired on a personal and professional level.

George felt that being Latin and being gay had changed his outlook on life. His experience in these communities had been sometimes positive and sometimes negative. George sums himself up by saying, “I seem to be odd to all the communities”.

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Chapter Seven

Samuel’s Story

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of Birth</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>First Language</th>
<th>Education/Occupation</th>
<th>Coming Out/Sexual Orientation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India.</td>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Hindi.</td>
<td>Primarily Student.</td>
<td>Doesn’t identify with the terms:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently not a Canadian Citizen.</td>
<td></td>
<td>English as second Language.</td>
<td>Graduate with Engineering Degree from a Canadian University.</td>
<td>Gay, Homosexual, Bisexual, “I really don’t know what the definition of all these terms is. What I say is that I’m strongly attracted to men”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been in Canada for 5 years, without his family.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wanting to study Logistics.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Working at University part-time, looking for a full-time job.</td>
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Samuel came to Canada five years ago from India. He came by himself to study Engineering at a Canadian University at the age of seventeen. It was scary for him because it was the first time he had been away from home. My interview with Samuel revealed his concerns about coming out with regards to many social and personal support systems.

Coming out was a difficult time for Samuel. He knew he had a same-sex attraction, but was afraid to think about it. Although he knew about, and had access to, gay literature and publications, Samuel’s desires and thoughts conflicted:

The only thing that attracted me to [a gay publication] was the pictures inside. I stopped picking that up because I thought it would confuse my mind.

Samuel felt he was very unique in the way he was coming out. He felt he was significantly older, yet inexperienced compared to most people in the coming out process. He felt his coming out also gave him a unique perspective and understanding about life:

From what I’ve read here and there I gather a lot of people are sexually active or they
had acknowledged themselves at a young age. In that sense I find myself unique. I think as a gay man I’m more kind having gone through all the rough roads. I’m more kind and sympathetic that anybody else.

The experiences Samuel had had while coming out in Canada have given him knowledge and courage to come out when he returns to New Delhi. He felt that coming out to his family was a matter of eventuality. At the same time, Samuel worried that his parents may think he had been corrupted by Western society. He thought that educating his brother would allow him to disclose his sexual orientation to his parents:

I will try to convince my brother first, show him all the articles and whatever. He’s in the warmth and security of the home so he hasn’t been influenced by anybody. Not that my parents don’t trust me, they trust me very much. But when it comes to homosexuality, they might have second thoughts about what’s going on.

Samuel admired the courage of those men who had completely disclosed their sexual orientation. He understood what it meant to come out and felt he was on the right path. He still had some hesitation, but he was sure it would disappear with time:

All the out people I’ve seen I admire them so much that they have so much courage to be who they are. So I expect to be like them one day. But there’s no point in just advertising that I’m gay. It is going to happen in time but I’m not going to do that right now.

Family was very important to Samuel. He grew up in a close-knit family and wished to remain close with his family. His family relationship had affected how Samuel dealt with his sexuality. He felt it was easier to deal with issues of sexuality away from home:
In Canada, they do come out, they just don’t care. If parents don’t like it, it’s their problem. With me it is a little different. I can not discard my family altogether. I’m not going to let them change me or make me what I’m not, but I will have to go through a long process educating them.

I think it is easier that I’m away from home, that I can deal with my sexuality, because it’s sort of easier in Canada.

When Samuel was young he realized he was sexually attracted to men. He thought it was unnatural and that if anyone found out he would be in trouble. Samuel had great respect for his parents, which was instilled in him at an early age. His culture prescribed him to allow his parents to make his decisions for him until such a time that he was able to do that on his own:

I thought my parents would know that and they would tell me if I’m gay or something. Or if there’s anything different about me my parents will decide that and they will let me know.

Samuel thought it would be hardest to come out to his mother. He felt that his mother, in a traditional manner, would want to see him taken care of:

Mothers are very hard to convince in Indian society. There is this concept of every male getting married and being taken care of by a woman. Mothers want to ensure this kind of security or safety for their sons. When it comes to sexuality or anything like that, I might have a hard time convincing her that I’m going to be okay on my own.

His desire was for his family to accept him, his identity, and his relationships:
I would like to settle down with some attractive man and have my family accept that completely, and I would like to have my parents respect my boyfriend if I have any and my boyfriend respect my family because I believe in a family thing.

Samuel never questioned his sexual identity before coming to Canada. Although he had a same-sex attraction, he didn’t know that it was any different from anyone else. Samuel thought this was because sexuality in Indian culture was not discussed:

I can recall in childhood being attracted to men. But when I was in India in high school I didn’t know what this was called what this condition is called. There is no word in [Hindi] for being gay or bisexual that I’m aware of. Nobody discusses sexuality in India, not even strange sexuality.

Society separated people into different roles based on gender, that is, masculine and feminine. Samuel recognized these roles but felt they are not acceptable. He observed that most men and women did not fit into these roles because they were very stereotypical:

I don’t accept the roles put on society. Men claim to be macho and supposed to be doing what they’re supposed to do, and they haven’t done that. Men are supposed to be powerful protectors of the feminine population. Strength is associated with men physical, outside, external. And with women internal strength.

Samuel viewed school as a place to hide away from the rest of the world and society. He felt that by submersing himself in school, and concentrating hard, he could ignore his sexual feelings. After coming out, however, Samuel found the university atmosphere is much more tolerant of difference:

I have confined myself to university, and generally the university community,
professors and the young students, they tend to mingle with each other. Tolerant.

Get out in the real world, that’s where it becomes difficult I think.

The GLBTT community is one resource Samuel used during his coming out process. He observed both positive and negative aspects of the community. Samuel discussed his observations regarding peer groups, stereotypes, and the future directions that could be taken to better the community.

The first resource that Samuel had utilized in coming out in the gay community was that of youth groups. He used these groups as an attempt to find other people with a common background in terms of experiences. Samuel found it hard to relate to the people that attended these youth groups:

I couldn’t quite relate to a lot of people there, maybe because it’s for the younger crowd. I don’t have many friends of mine in the group actually, not even in the older age group. I’m not making big efforts to reach out either. It’s not that I’m blaming anybody.

Samuel felt that a lot of people were dishonest and disingenuous within the gay community. Although he was fascinated by the gay community, he was also fearful:

I’m a very ordinary person and that’s what I try to look for. I’m very scared by the glamour and glitz. I think there is a bad side to this glitz and glamour, and a lot of these men, or people in general are quite promiscuous or shallow.

He observed that there was a certain image within the gay community that was seen as attractive. Samuel thought that he did not fit the ideal image stereotype. This recognition made him feel somewhat anxious and fearful that he would not fit into the gay community:
Sometimes I think that I’m not that glamorous myself, so that makes me fear, that makes me assume that I’m not as attractive as these guys so I don’t belong here.

Samuel did believe that most people were naturally attracted to an aesthetically beautiful person:

It’s natural to be attracted to the most beautiful person or the person who has the best body or whatever. It’s just a matter of heart and who is attracted to who. It’s not a sexual thing I think.

Samuel said that white males were his idea of beauty. He thought that they are naturally attractive. Because he found them most attractive, he compared all others to this ideal. He questions whether his attraction may have developed from the good experiences he had in dealing with white colleagues:

I find white males very attractive; so I try to use them as a benchmark for . . . For one thing they’re just attractive, plain and simple. I haven’t had any bad experiences in Canada, a lot of men have been nice to me, or maybe it’s just that I haven’t been exposed to men. Everybody was very respectful, so that has not helped my attraction.

When asked what could be done to make ethnic minorities feel more comfortable within the gay community, Samuel was somewhat unsure. He had personal feelings of what he would have liked to see, or he felt would have helped him in his coming out process, but he felt unable to make generalizations about the gay community:

I would have liked to see someone from my own background. Not so much cultural background, but background in terms of what I have gone through. I would like to see different groups get together some time.
Samuel thought that for people who were trying to hide their identity because they were ashamed, education was fundamental. He wished that information about services provided by the gay community were more available:

If somebody had given me a good description of the university group before, if I had read some things about it somewhere, I might have come out before. Thinking about it from the time that I was not coming out, what was keeping me away was lack of information. I think education, or publicity, or whatever, is a big step. To show that being gay is alright, in a positive light. That’s what you get people to come out, not going to bars or having sex in bathhouses or anything like that, they come to places like the university group or something like that.

When asked about general improvements, Samuel responded that the most important way that everyone could contribute towards the betterment of the gay community was to simply just not contribute towards anything negative. He felt that since Canada was not the place he grew up in, he could not comment on broad, social change:

I’m not living in the culture I grew up in; it is a different culture I grew up in so I don’t know how much I can get the society to change. So many things are just cultural regardless of sexuality.

A personal aspect of Samuel’s life that he felt was important was that of relationships, romantic or plutonic. He had utilized a couple of mediums to find these relationships. One such resource that Samuel found most useful was the internet. After searching the internet, Samuel found an e-mail list that dealt with specifically Indian gay people:

Now that I started coming out I began researching how it works for Indian gays and
there's a lot of information out, and in San Francisco there's a big association of
Indian gay people and I'm subscribing to their e-mail list. I find these mailing lists on
the internet are helpful. A lot of these people are quite westernized now so . . . I don't
know I learn how they come out to their parents and that type of thing and that gets
me hints or whatever.

Samuel also used a gay publication to meet people before coming out:

    I responded to one of the classifieds. I picked the least sexual, because I was trying to
    make friends or get to know somebody, not have sex so much.

He found it was difficult to make plutonic friendships that did not have a sexual undertone.
One man Samuel met became a friend but stopped contacting him after developing another
relationship:

    I saw him and had conversations on the phone, but after that he met somebody else
    and he got into a relationship, he ceased to have conversations with me. Which made
    me kind of question his character. I was only trying to be friends with him.

Samuel was struggling with issues relating to coming out. Many of these issues stemmed
from his notions of difference related to his personal being. He related his childhood fears of
being different:

    When I was a kid, or even until recently I used to have doubts about myself as to how
    I was different from everybody else and . . . Maybe there is something wrong with
    me because I don’t conform to the majority of the population’s style or whatever.
The straight community had me totally believing that there is something wrong with
the way I look or there’s something written over my face that tells people that I’m
Samuel’s sense of masculine and feminine and the roles he was socialized to believe they play in society, caused him anxiety even though he tried to forget them. He associated being gay with femininity and feared that he was ultra-feminine and for that reason he was attracted to, and attracted, the same-sex:

I used to think that it’s my problem they’re attracted to me. There’s something wrong with me. I’m feminine or whatever.

He related this to internal and external strength. He believed that his mother was internally strong and, in his eyes, the epitome of femininity. Samuel felt he was internally strong and thought others viewed him as feminine:

I think I’m strong inside for what I’ve gone through, just living alone in a foreign country, going through all the rough roads and still maintaining what I believe and not giving in to some stereotypes or whatever. I’m not very strong externally. I think that people may see femininity oozing from me or I don’t know what it is.

One thing that Samuel would liked to have had was the opportunity to discuss being Indian and gay with someone who had similar experiences as him:

I would love to speak to somebody from my school. If there was a gay person from my same culture, same class, talk about it in the same language. I don’t have that experience. I would never know if there was a gay person in my school or anywhere in my community where I lived.

Being gay to Samuel meant being physically and mentally attracted to the same-sex. He discussed many different aspects of life from both a gay and Indian perspective. The rough
road he had traveled, made him a better person, he felt. Samuel summed up his interview stating, “all I can say is that gay love is a natural form of love”.

Summary

The opportunity to tell the stories of these minority gay youth is one of the best experiences of this study. As a white gay male researcher, I find it crucial to bring to attention the issues and concerns of visible minority gay youth. George, John, Michael, and Samuel all show great courage in relating their experiences in disclosing their same-sex orientation during the process of discovering their identity.
Chapter Eight

Results - Themes

This chapter presents the stories of the youth to help us discover the essential characteristics of their experiences as visible minority, gay youth. These results represent the first and second order themes of the youths' experience. Excerpts from the interviews are integrated into the explanation of the themes to allow a better understanding of the youths' experience in coming out and being out.

The themes that are presented in this section were derived through a data analysis process of selecting key phrases and statements and creating themes. These themes were related to the questions in the interview set out by the initial research question. The first order themes were then analyzed and further grouped into second order themes that seemed to represent the common experiences of the youth.

Through this thematic analysis process, the following core themes mark the experiences of these gay minority youth:

**Coming Out**

- Realization and Effects of Same-Sex Orientation
- Decision to Disclose to Family
- Disclosure to Friends, Making New Friends
- Disclosure to Society

**Family Dynamics**

- Family Beliefs and Values
- Family as a Support

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Ethnic Community

- Coming Out to the Ethnic Community
- Language
- Cultural Rules and Changes for Acceptance

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Community

- Stereotypes
- Racism
- Support
- Advice for the GLB Community

Explanation of Themes

This section provides a detailed description of the first and second order themes derived from the interviews. Quotes from the interviews are included to allow a greater understanding of each theme. The first second order theme is Coming Out. This theme makes references to the realization of a same-sex orientation and how this new identity was dealt with in individual ways. Included in this theme is the decision between disclosing, or not, this new orientation to family, friends, and to aspects of society the youth interacts with. Family Dynamics as the second theme refers to aspects of family life the youth share in the interview, including family values and the family as a support mechanism. The Ethnic Community theme speaks to the youths' experience in their own ethnic community, their cultural values, and coming out as visible minority. Finally, the theme of gay, lesbian, bisexual Community refers to the experiences of the youth in their interaction with various
aspects of the community.

**Coming Out**

Coming out for these youth involves a self-realization of a same-sex orientation, as well as deciding whether or not to disclose their orientation to family, friends, and to various contacts in society at large. Coming out to self was the first step these youth faced in forming a gay identity. This step involved intimate reflection on oneself, reading gay literature, and was sometimes marred by depression and fears of abuse. The decision of whether or not to disclose to family was also discussed. This included stories of coming out to family, making plans to come out, or deciding not to disclose the same-sex orientation to family members. Coming out often changed friendships, either by putting up walls between straight and oneself, or changed in nature towards establishing friendships within the gay community. Other aspects of society that were discussed in coming out are to health professionals, at school, and at work. The following section discusses these themes in greater detail.

**Realization and Effects of Same-Sex Orientation**

The realization of a same-sex attraction for the participants involved a desire to understand a different way of being within them. The reaction ranged from confusion and distress to excitement. Comments such as "I want to know more about that part of myself" describe a reaction to feelings of attraction to other members of the same sex. Two of the participants said they had felt such an attraction since childhood, while one was able to pinpoint an almost exact age of realization.

Samuel and John both knew they were 'different' from the general population. For
Samuel, this caused internal confusion about whether something was wrong:

I had strong feelings toward men all the time.

When I was a kid, or even until recently I used to have doubts about myself as to how I was different from everybody else and... maybe there is something wrong with me because I don't conform to the majority of the population's style or whatever. The straight community had me totally believing that there is something wrong with me because I used to believe that there's something wrong with the way I look or there's something written over my face that tells people that I'm gay.

Conversely, feelings of excitement also were part of the realization of a same-sex attraction. George is able to identify the time that he realized his attraction to other men. He says, "I was straight for... I guess the first year and a half of my puberty thing. When I found out I was actually turned on by men it was kind of exciting. Something else to be turned on about".

Acknowledging a gay identity and accepting such an identity required some adjustments within the participants. Understanding what being gay means to these youth is important in understanding their experience. Samuel says, "gay love is a pretty natural form of love". George agrees that gay people are simply normal people who were born gay. John thinks that because being gay is natural it is difficult to remain closeted:

I think it's very hard to keep it from people. Like, even when you talk you just, you know, bring it up, because it's just natural to say something like, oh I met this guy the other day and da da da and so on. It's something to be proud
of. I'm just who I am. It's just nice. Very nice to like, to know, you achieve kind of in tune with yourself. Like in Tao so to speak.

John goes on to say that he is proud of his ethnicity and his same-sex orientation.

Michael is not proud of his same-sex orientation. He feels that being gay inside and maintaining a 'straight' image publicly is discomforting. Michael is not proud to be gay and states that if he had a choice he would not wish to be gay:

Basically in public unless I know that areas is gay... then I would feel more comfortable. Don't have to worry about... wonder who's looking over my shoulder and stuff. I don't let just gay run my whole business-- it's just a part of me. It's not like I'm deeply into it or deeply out of it. So, if I had a chance I would not want to be gay.

A same-sex orientation brings on many difficult times and requires much strength and courage to prevail. As a visible-minority gay youth, Samuel feels that he is stronger because of everything he has faced:

I think I'm strong inside for what I've gone through, and you know, just living alone in a foreign country, and you know going through all the rough roads.

I think as a gay man I'm more kind having gone through all the rough roads.

I'm more kind and sympathetic than anybody else.

Reading available gay literature also aided the coming out process for two participants. George says, "As soon as I as thirteen, I've been studying how to be gay. All the books I get at the library because somehow I thought I was studying for an exam." Literature for Samuel first confused him, but also afforded him the chance to meet other gays:
The only thing that attracted me to [a gay publication] was the pictures inside. I stopped picking that up because I thought it would confuse my mind. When I started picking it up again in January, then, nothing would stop me really. And I responded to one of the classified from that.

Now that I started coming out I began researching [on the internet] how it works for other gays and there's a lot of literature out and in San Francisco there a big association.

The more serious side of coming out is marked by depression and fear of abuse. Two of the youth spoke about their experiences with depression and two spoke about fears of abuse. John speaks about depression:

Before I came out to them I wasn't feeling too well. Well, I was kind of depressed and stuff like that. I went to see a doctor when I was down. I was going suicidal. Like coming out to myself but not to society.

Michael speaks about his fear of being abused because of his same-sex orientation:

In some certain areas or something, it depends on where I am; I'm just more of myself, more gay, like I would just be... feel more comfortable with letting down my guard.

I think our ideal thing is to be able to do what we want in public without worrying who's watching or like, think that we might get beaten up or harassed or things like that.

**Decision to Disclose to Family**

The decision to disclose a same-sex orientation to family members is one that that each of

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the participants felt compelled to make. In two cases, the participants had come out to their family and discussed their family's reaction. One of these discussed his plans for coming out. Another participant has plans to come out to his family, while one has decided not to come out.

George told his grandmother about his same-sex orientation and says, "she just couldn't really seem to think that bad of it". John relates his experience in coming out to his family. He says he felt a lot better with himself after coming out:

> Since I came out to myself, and the now the next step is to come out to society I guess. And, society means my parents too and my family. Which, didn't happen until recently. Which, it actually eases a lot of stress off me.

He says his family is more concerned for him now than before:

> I think they worry more now. Right now they're, like, really uptight about that. I'm like, if I'm out like going somewhere, like, I'm not at home, that means I'm going to be like, sleeping with some guy or dating some guy.

Planning to disclose to family is part of the process of coming out for Samuel. He is concerned that they might have second thoughts about him:

> I have thought about telling my brother first. I'm thinking that I'm going to show my brother all the literature, which is mostly in English. He's in the warmth and security of home so he hasn't been influenced by anybody. Not that my parents don't trust me, they trust me very much. But when it comes to homosexuality, they might have second thoughts about what was going on. I will try to convince my brother first, show him all the articles and whatever.
So that he can translate that to my parents. They won't be very happy right away, I know that. It takes time to understand.

Michael decided against disclosing to his family even when he was asked directly:

One day they asked me... my grandma asked me, said are you in love with these people? I said no I don't even know them so... and they said are you whatever and I said of course not.

What my parents put into me and what I was brought up, I have no... I can't enjoy certain things. I can't even behave like, in a certain way. I can't let loose if I'm around them basically.

Disclosure to Friends, Making New Friends

The decision to disclose a same-sex orientation to 'straight' friends is a difficult one. Along with this comes the fear of inadvertent disclosure. John says that most of his friends in his ethnic community do not know his same-sex orientation. He is concerned that his family will suffer if he discloses to them. Michael is concerned about an inadvertent disclosure. He relates a close-call:

I made a fool of myself the other day. I was talking to [a gay friend] and I didn't know that my straight friend was sitting at the computer. He's talking about gay relationships and what's happening and that. Then when he finally stands up, I said hi and he said hi. It seems as though he understood or was overhearing what we were talking about.

After coming out, three youth shared their experiences with meeting other gay people and making new friends. John's friends are mostly gay, many he met through interactions within
the gay community. Michael met other gay people first on Internet chat channels and then began attended gay youth groups. Samuel also used resources to meet other gay people, the first of which was through a classified in a gay publication. He also expressed some difficulty in making gay friends:

I couldn't quite relate to a lot of people there, maybe because it's a younger crowd. I don't have many friends in the group actually. I'm not making big efforts to reach out either. It's not that I'm blaming anybody. It's just.

Disclosure to Society

The final level of disclosure discussed by the youth was to society in general. This includes various health professionals, at school, and at work. Each youth relayed their experiences of being gay and deciding whether or not to disclose their identity to society. The youth were all at different levels of coming out: closeted, planning to disclose, and already out.

Coming out to health professionals takes on many levels. John and Samuel each had experience with mental health professionals to deal with depression and other issues related to coming out. Michael also had experience dealing with the medical profession:

I asked [my family physician] about how you get blood testing and he's like are you fooling around with HIV? And he said are you fooling around with a female? A male? I said no. Said I don't feel comfortable talking to you, my family doctor and gay, being gay and everything.

Being out at school is another area of society two of the youth spoke about. George says that he is out at school, “and sometimes in the halls I would hear 'oh there's that gay guy'".
Michael is not out at school:

If I was heterosexual I would be able to concentrate more on school. Then you are concentrating on school. When you're gay it's different. It's like everyone that walks into class, like you glance at them.

So for me, it's like a split personality. To be gay, I'm gay on the weekend.

And in school, on regular days, I become straight.

Work is another place some youth spoke about coming out or being out in society. John was the only youth that had held a job. He worked in a predominantly gay area and noticed that people recognized him outside of work, "People seems, tends to, seems to like, remember me. That was kind of interesting". Samuel would like to be out at work eventually, "All the out people I've seen I admire them so much that they have so much courage to be who they are. So I expect to be like them one day".

**Family Dynamics**

Family Dynamics as a second order theme, play a vital role in each participant's life. The youth spoke at length about their family in many capacities. These included extended family values, the need for a caregiver in a relationship, and the role of religion in the family. The youth all spoke of the family unit as posing a restriction on coming out. The youth also spoke about the support their family offers them.

**Family Beliefs and Values**

Family beliefs and values can influence the individual's personal beliefs and values. With regards to the extended family, caregiver values, and religion, the youth spoke of how their family's values shaped their own beliefs and values. The youth all spoke of how their family
beliefs and values restricted, in some sense, their own coming out.

The extended family was discussed by both Michael and Samuel as being an important part of the family dynamic. Michael spoke about his grandma living with his family and the respect he has for her:

That was the only time I actually argued with my grandma. I don't know I lost control of myself because I should have done that and it's sort of a regret now but then it's hard to apologize because I'm kind of stubborn and none of us have. I went to apologize to my grandma but then it was hard to get it out.

Samuel also discusses extended family values:

I would like to settle down with some attractive man and have my family accept that completely, and I would like to have my parents respect my boyfriend if I have any and my boyfriend to respect my family because I believe in a family thing and we all should be able to live together in a house. I just want to settle down and lead a good; I mean family-oriented life.

Samuel and Michael also discuss their explanation of an expected reaction by their mothers to a disclosure of a same-sex orientation. They think it is concern for the well-being of their children in not being alone and cared for in life. Michael says, "My mom just wants someone to take care of me basically". Samuel agrees:

Especially mothers are very hard to convince in Indian society, I think.

Because there's this concept of every male getting married and being taken care of by a woman. And mothers want this kind of security or safety for their sons.
The family beliefs and values can also be a source of restriction to disclosing a same-sex orientation. All of the youth were able to identify this restriction in some manner. George sees concern for maintaining a cohesive extended family as a restriction to coming out. John agrees:

I hang out with my cousin and it's like I couldn't tell him because if I tell him, then he'll tell my aunt and uncle and the whole family would know. My mom actually raised us like, concerned that if what happens if your relatives or some friends of yours, you know, they would not talk to us, or I mean like, talk to my parents then. Because like they're going to think, like, I'm going to have AIDS or something like that and, like, this family's cursed, and AIDS infected, like, stay away from my family attitude.

Samuel also believes that maintaining the family can be a restriction:

I cannot discard my family altogether. I'm not going to let them change me or make me what I'm not, but I will have to go through a long process of education them.

A belief in parents as the rule-makers also affected Samuel's coming out process:

When I was a child, when I was in India, that's what I thought that it was unnatural and if somebody found out I would be in big trouble. Sometimes I though my parents would know that and they would tell me if I'm gay or something. Or if there's anything different about me my parents will decide that. And they will let me know.

Being married into a respected and honorable family is a family value that affects Michael's
coming out? He says, "This family that is next door and the family is honorable and stuff and they want to arrange a marriage. I would not want to get involved with that".

Religion is another aspect of family dynamics that affects beliefs and values. For John religion was part of his personal life, one that he stopped after moving to Canada where he felt he could be more open about his sexuality. George and Michael noted religion as a restriction to coming out. Michael says:

Because partly of what I was brought up in because my family is also strictly Catholic and so certain things like in public holding hands, kissing is not, you shouldn't, I believe shouldn't be displayed. Those things you shouldn't share in public.

Family as a Support

All of the youth identified their family as a source of support whether or not they had disclosed their sexual identity to them. Michael notes his family is very supportive of him, even perhaps a little too much. George identifies a family of choice as a strong support. John says that even though his family pushes him to do his best he knows they support him:

After what happened last year, I was like in a depression and bringing down and stuff like that, and they would claim it was because I had problems in school and stuff like that, so it was like, oh just be whatever you want to be, and whatever classes you want to be in.

Samuel sees his family support as having a great influence on who he is today:

My mother has been a big force in making me what I am today, in terms of doing her best in protecting me and my brother from the family troubles.
Sending us to the best education and everything. And she is a very logical and straightforward person; she's not highly educated or anything like that. But she's very open-minded.

Ethnic Community

The ethnic community that each youth grew up in differs between each person; however some similarities arise thematically in this second order theme. Three of the youth discussed what coming out to one's ethnic community means as well as some of the restrictions their ethnic community places on the coming out process. Two of the youth discussed language as a barrier and an isolating factor in coming out. The youth also expressed their views of cultural rules, gender roles and what they thought their particular culture needed in order to accept their gay identity.

Coming Out to the Ethnic Community

Coming out to one's ethnic community is a big step for these youth. While John was the only youth able to describe what such a process would be like, three of the youth were able to elaborate on restrictions the ethnic community had on accepting gay identity. John begins his step to integrating his ethnic identity and his sexual identity by stating, "I'm proud to be Chinese and I'm proud to be gay". When asked about coming out to his ethnic community, John responds:

    I think it's kind of different for like, the Chinese, like, community. Like, for myself, like, my Chinese friends, like, if some of them are okay about this, they don't care. But, most of them, it's just like they are all so, well most of my friends are like, boys and stuff, well, Chinese men and somehow they just,
whenever they go out they just start talking about girls and dating and then, stuff like that and it's just something I can't really relate and so I couldn't tell them that I am gay and stuff. Because, I think if I tell them, it's going to be like oh my god, it's just like; they're going to be like homophobics.

When it comes to describing restrictions to coming out that exist in the ethnic community, John notes:

[In Canada] it's more open up here I guess. Open as in like, the whole sexuality and stuff, they kind of like, talk about it. But, like in Singapore, like, you don't see things like that happening. There's no youth groups at all. Nothing.

The thing is that people are really homophobic I think. They don't talk about homosexuals at all. It's basically like, a straight community.

George and Samuel both state that not having a word in their first language that means gay makes it difficult to understand the concept of a gay identity. That among other reasons Samuel believes, "it is easier that I'm away from home, that I can deal with my sexuality, because it's sort of easier in Canada". George says that in his native country being gay "is worse than being a criminal". These views of same-sex orientation in the own ethnic community, make it harder for these youth to disclose their sexual identity to their ethnic community.

**Language**

Two of the youth identify English as a second language results in a certain degree of isolation from their non-ethnic community, most notably the gay community. As an isolating
factor from their ethnic community, George and Samuel both identify the lack of a term to accurately depict their gay identity as barrier. Language is also an isolating factor from the gay community George points out:

The majority of people in youth groups tend to be white. I guess sometimes I miss speaking Spanish because I like speaking Spanish a lot. Yeah there's only like one ethnic person who used to come to the youth groups, so it would be nice to other Latin people.

Samuel agrees:

I would have liked to see someone from my own background or whatever. Same culture class. Talk about it in the same language. I don't have that experience. I would never know if there was a gay person in my school or anywhere in my community where I lived.

**Cultural Rules and Changes for Acceptance**

Cultural rules and values are ingrained in us from early on. These rules are difficult to break out of and even harder to change. The topic of sexuality is often a cultural taboo and is not discussed. The issue of gender roles is one of the cultural values that the youth were able to discuss. The youth were also able to identify what needs to change within their ethnic community and culture in order to accept a gay identity.

Cultural rules and values can present obstacles in coming out or being out in other communities the youth interact with. Samuel relates the lack of a term in his first language to the fact that "nobody discusses sexuality in India, not even strange sexuality". Michael finds that cultural values affect his being out, especially in terms of his interaction within the gay
community. He finds that even when he wants to be left alone, when someone begins to "approach you and they talk and for me it's hard not to talk back because of my background and everything I tend to talk to everyone who talks to me. Although I don't like them, I still have to".

Another cultural belief or value is that of gender roles within the youths' ethnic community. Samuel and George both discuss what they see to be socially constructed roles. George says:

Some Latin’s here that could be a masculine violent role. Kind of like swallowing your pain. It was kind of hard for me because I was more into feelings and I was more other people's feelings and healing people kind of including myself, and they seem to be more of, kind of, doing violent things or maybe they don't but they have that image and that mentality.

Samuel also notices gender roles but doesn't feel he fits into them:

I don't accept the roles put on by society. Because men claim to be macho and supposed to be doing what they're supposed to do, and they haven't done that.

Men are supposed to be powerful protectors of the feminine population.

Three of the youth were able to identify aspects of their particular culture they felt must be changed for their sexual identity to be accepted. John felt that the most pressing concern in his ethnic culture was homophobia. He feels that by discussing alternative sexual identities, the culture can begin to accept them. Samuel thinks back on his own experience of struggling with sexual identity issues and notes that "what was keeping me away was, at the time, I think education, or publicity, or whatever, is a big step. To show that being gay is
alright, in a positive light". Michael was able to identify some concrete examples of actions that could be taken:

I think they should be more open. There should be more things in the community talking about being gay and what they're like because a lot of families don't understand what it means to be gay. They should have something because kids learn all through school and everything would be there but then, for their own parents probably have some like, commercials or some pamphlets that are sent out to the family or something like that or something on T.V., something more through the media.

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Community

The final second order theme is that of the youths' experience in the gay, lesbian, bisexual community. It is here that the youth begin to understand what a gay identity means and how it comes to be. The youth discussed some of the positives and negatives of the GLB community. Stereotypes were a common experience for all the youth whether directed at them or their perceptions of the GLB community. The concept of exotification of visible-minorities was identified in the theme of racism. The GLB community is also identified as a source of support for the youth, aiding in their coming out process. The youth were all able to discuss what they thought were aspects of the GLB community that would make being a visible-minority in the GLB community a better experience.

Stereotypes

All four youth identify stereotypes as a common experience in the gay community. These stereotypes were either directed towards the youth, or were preconceived notions of what the
gay community would be like. Two youth discussed the stereotype of promiscuity in the gay community as being a concern for them. Three of the youth identified an image stereotype as a concern. Also, two youth were able to identify stereotypes directed towards visible-minority gays.

The stereotype of promiscuity was identified by two youth. Samuel made the assumptions that gay men are quite promiscuous or shallow based on what he had heard before coming out. John also discusses the stereotype of promiscuity as an observer and from his experience:

Gay men tend to be more promiscuous. That one of the thing I don't agree with it. Because at first I thought I was just experimenting and I thought it was just part of being gay, but it's not. From experiences I've gone through, I've realized more about myself, and realized I don't have to do this and if I don't want to and I can do other like, have some alternative options.

The stereotype of a perfect image in the gay community was identified as somewhat distressing for the youth, especially as this 'perfect' image was a white male figure. George and Samuel both make the point that the idea of a perfect image is far from their grasp and begin to question if they belong in the gay community. George says, "I may not fit a lot of people's thing in the gay community. So what is my future here?" Samuel agrees, "Sometimes I think that I'm not that glamorous myself and that makes me fear, that makes me assume that I'm not as attractive as these guys so I don't belong here".

Michael also discusses his views on the stereotype of image:

Everything is basically if you aren't a certain type or whatever and it's hard to
get into the sort of groups of people. I don't know because there is a lot of, because everything is like T.V. and everything and an idea that the media and stuff of what the perfect person looks like.

Michael and John also identify some stereotypes that relate specifically to being of a visible minority in the gay community. Michael discusses his perceptions of stereotypes:

There's a tendency for people to group certain people together with other people and assume everyone is like that. I feel it's wrong to categorize and to stereotype and to generalize about people which is wrong. There is certain, I mean ethnic group or race, certain type of good people or bad people that most of the bad things tend to stick out and you tend to group them and to generalize which is bad.

John gives a concrete example of a visible-minority gay stereotype, "because they think they are like, easy to pick up or something like that. It's just totally bullshit. It's kind of scary in another sense".

Racism

The theme of racism comes up in two interviews. In particular the concept of exotification, where a visible-minority is objectified as an 'exotic' potential sexual partner because of their visible minority status, comes up. George and John both have experience with this form of racism. John relates:

Maybe he think I'm Chinese I'm easy to pick up. I think it is. Like, I talk to some people too, they, like, Asian, gay Asians, and other ethnic groups, people who are gay. And have this concept that older people, like, older gay
men, like, so-called chicken hawks, like, will pick up usually they go out for
guys who are Chinese or something like that, like younger Chinese guys.

George had a similar personal experience:

Once I was standing right next to a gay man and he treated me like I was some
sort of exotic parrot or something like that. That has happened once or twice
or something. There's this perception of what I'm supposed to be. Like you
are a jungle creature or something. Or a really wild sexual animal or
something. Or you are supposed to be the perfect Latin lover.

Support

The GLBT community is also a source of support for all four youth. The community
allows interaction with other gays and gay youth who may or may not be of the same
minority background. These interactions often lead to supportive friendships within the gay
community. The GLB community can also offer support groups for those interested in
attending. Two of the youth specifically mention gay friends as a support. Michael notes
that gay friends often act as a sounding board when he needs to talk to someone about a
recent experience and finds his gay friends to be very welcoming to engage in social
activities. John also notes:

I've made a lot of friends. A lot of good friends too. And we, like, we have
something in common. And, we can relate to each other, like, what we're
talking about, and you don't have that so-called barrier.

Youth groups are also a source of support for all four youth. The youth groups are a
means of meeting new people and a social activity. Samuel relates that he has "come a long
way. I've been to support groups". John describes his experience in youth groups:

I guess I would be like meeting people, and youth groups and stuff like that, it's a really good way to know people, so like, they understand each other. It's a support thing going on. And being gay. The people there who are really gay positive. It was very interesting.

George notices that the majority of the youth groups he has attended are predominantly filled by white attendees. Samuel also notices that there are different youth groups based on ethnic differences and thinks it would be a good idea to get everyone together.

**Advice for the GLBT Community**

All of the youth were able to discuss what could be done to make the GLB community more welcoming to visible-minority gay youth. Michael thinks that more events in the community would help make people feel more comfortable in coming out and participating. Samuel thinks the services are great, but "if somebody had given me a good description of that before, if I had read some things about it somewhere, I might have come out before". George feels also that there should be more information on peer groups, just in general and marketed towards ethnic minority groups. John would like to see an attitude change around the notions of skin color and stereotypes. He thinks we need an understanding that culture and heritage are personal items; everyone has them and therefore we shouldn't categorize people according to their skin color.
Chapter Nine

Discussion – What was learned

This study brings to light the convergence of racism and heterosexism in the lives of these youth. The themes brought forward by these youth reflect the need to negotiate a dominant culture that devalues visible-minorities and gay youth; the need to integrate the cultural derivatives of one’s own ethnic group; the need to manage relationships with family, community, and friends; and the need to form a consolidated personal identity.

Understanding the experiences of visible-minority gay male youth requires an examination of ethnicity, racism, and homophobia and same-sex orientation at various levels. When working with these youth a number of factors need to be taken into consideration.

Coming Out

Realization and effects of same-sex orientation

Upon dealing with their realization of same sex orientation the youth in this study experienced issues of confusion, fears of abuse, depression, feelings of being different, and a need to know more about self and being gay. As social workers we can support this period of transition by providing supportive environments where these youth can access relief, debrief, and be provided with appropriate information that can help these youth come to a better self understanding.

Decision to disclose to family

All youth in this study were dealing with decisions of whether to disclose to family or not. As social workers it is imperative that when working through issues with these youth, we evaluate all the possible ramifications of disclosure to family.
Disclosure to friends, making new friends

For these youth it was common for their friends in their ethnic community not to know their same-sex orientation. Issues of violence and abandonment came up. In addition there was concern about possible ramifications on their family should someone find out about them being gay. All the youth in this study experienced a benefit to making friends with other gay individuals, however difficulty in meeting same others was expressed even at gay youth groups.

As service providers it is important that we make our services as inclusive as possible. We need to be aware if visible-minority gay are having trouble meeting others at our groups or are feeling alienated.

Disclosure to society

A common concern for these youth was the lack of information adults had about youth issues at various levels. There is a need for continued education or awareness campaigns in order to reduce the level of stress and isolation experienced by lesbian, gay and bisexual youth and to educate adults in the community about youth needs.

Family Dynamics

Family beliefs and values

Common to these youth were high levels of respect for their families, need for acceptance, fear of dishonoring family members and commitment to family no matter what. For each of these youth family’s beliefs and values in many ways restricted how they came out.

Family as support

In most peoples lives the family is usually the primary social unit and most prominent
source of emotional and material support. Heterosexual parents may not have the same insights about negotiating heterosexism that they possess about negotiating racism. For these youth coming-out to parents brought fears of their rejection and even violence.

Communication between members was essential in keeping the family structure together as a source of physical and emotional support.

All the youth in this study identified their family as a valuable source of support whether or not they had disclosed their sexual identity to them.

Social service providers should be aware of cultural expectations as it regards family structures and obligations. As well, groups such as PFLAG should try to extend services into the ethnic communities in hopes of exposing and creating greater understanding about GLBTTT identity for visible-minority parents.

**Ethnic Community**

**Coming out to the ethnic community**

In the face of racism, ethnic minority communities provide a safe haven. In a racist society in which visible-minority gay male youth are born, the ethnic community is often their main source of support and self-identification. However, often these communities are unwilling or unable to validate a same-sex identity. This can often have a great impact with regards to a successful identity assumption and integration.

Coming out to one’s ethnic community is a fearful experience for these visible-minority gay male youth. Isolation from one’s primary source of identification is often a reality when choosing to disclose a same-sex orientation. Issues of same-sex identity are often not discussed in many ethnic communities.
Language

Language is an important part of identity. Within language, a person can learn to describe identity to themselves and to others. Shared language is important in discussing feelings and experiences. (Ratti, 1993) suggests that not being able to converse in the language one was raised with intensifies the feeling of isolation especially within the GLBTT community. The language obstacle faced by visible-minority gay male youth is compounded by a lack of terminology in their first language to disclose a same-sex orientation to family, or ethnic community. Often, there is no word for being gay in their language, which limits the possibility of integrating same-sex attraction into a cultural identity.

A lamentation of many minority gays is the lack of information available to their community. Translation of publications and offering services in multiple languages may be a solution to this problem. Some specific measures need to address information awareness barriers. Translating information and intake/services into languages other than English. Advertising/promotion in both general and culturally sensitive print and electronic media. Making presentations on services to ethno-cultural groups/communities.

Cultural rules and changes for acceptance

The youth in this study indicated that talking openly about sexuality is difficult in their ethnic communities. Mainstream and ethno-specific organizations need to increase their collaboration and linkages, recognizing that both are needed to adequately serve the needs of diverse groups. The respective roles of organizations in the mainstream and ethno-specific sub-systems also need to be clarified and mutually accepted.
GLBTT Community

Stereotypes

Stereotypes affect the identification process of many minority gay people. Stereotypes place expectations on a minority population that often lead to discrimination, even within the GLBTT community (Morales & Eversley, 1980; Winnow, 1984).

All the youth in this study had experienced issues of ageism and been stereotyped. Awareness raising in the GLBTT community is needed to combat these issues.

Racism

The youth in this study identified a need for education around cultural differences and racism for service providers in the community. A beginning of dialogue about acknowledging the very real existence of racism in the GLBTT community is required.

Support

Youth need a safe space, support, people who are knowledgeable. There is an increased need for age-appropriate social/recreational/cultural opportunities.

Programs like Big Brothers or mentoring, ways for youth and adults to get together and learn from one another would be a benefit.

Culturally competent social work practice

In order to provide social services in a sensitive, non-oppressive and productive way, workers need to bring to the table a set of attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, and skills that are culturally appropriate.

The Empowerment and strengths perspectives

(Saleeby, 1997) views the emphasis on client strengths and resources as a significant
departure from past approaches, which were more focused on pathology.

Oppression is a structurally based phenomenon with far-reaching consequences for both individuals and communities. The effects of oppression point to the importance of such social factors as good support networks and other means of developing connections and relatedness. Most of the problems caused by oppression require a dual focus on changing the environment as well as strengthening the individual. The key assumption of this approach is that people are fully capable of solving their immediate problems. They can go beyond this level to analyze the institutional and structural sources that sustain their oppression. Basically people empower themselves, and it is they, not the professional helper, who is the key in the helping process.

Social work practitioners must shift from a pathology-focused practice to an empowerment-based practice when working with oppressed groups. Empowerment practice "seeks to create community with clients in order to challenge with them the contradictions faced as vulnerable, hurt, or oppressed persons in the midst of an affluent and powerful society" (Lee, 1994, p.13). Social workers must develop effective strategies and interventions to confront the client’s individual pain by taking social forces into account (Lee, 1994).

**Strengths and Limitations**

When ‘outing’ my biases or way of being, it is important for me to take into consideration that I am a ‘white gay male’ and therefore, I carry some of the power and privileges associated with being ‘white’ and ‘male’ in our society. In addition, I am a strong advocate and have internalized various aspects of feminist perspective in relation to structure, power,
and point of view in the world. This, no doubt, significantly impacts my approach to this research in both negative and positive ways. I approached this research and acknowledge that phenomenological bracketing of self has its benefits and limitations.

My not being of visible-minority status and being male may also have limited this study. It was therefore, essential that continual evaluation, of my self, my interpretations, and conclusions were vital:

As outsiders within, Black feminist scholars use the tension in their cultural identities to generate new ways of seeing and new sociological insights. Likewise, majority group scholars can develop and utilize tensions in their own cultural identities to enable them to see different aspects of minority group experiences and to examine critically majority experiences and beliefs (Anderson & Lee-Wilkerson, 1993, p.42).

It is impossible for any type of research to not be influenced by the researcher. As a means of recognizing and controlling the researcher’s biases, a phenomenological approach requires the realization of biases and preconceived ideas concerning the topic of study through a process of self-reflection called bracketing. As a result of this bracketing process, any reader of this research will be able to take the researcher’s perspective into consideration (Osborne, 1990). However, as an additional means of lowering the presence of bias, participants were asked to validate the data derived from their interviews.
Future Research

This study brought forward many experiences that still need to be addressed within the visible-minority gay male youth discourse. More research needs to be done to fill the void in information surrounding this issue. Some suggestions are as follows:

1. The experiences of gay male aboriginal youth.
2. The experiences of visible-minority transgendered youth.
3. The experiences of visible-minority parents with gay children.
4. The experiences of visible-minority gay male youth in regards to varied socio-economic status as well as rural-urban dichotomies.

Summary

To conclude, this exploratory study was designed to illuminate and understand the experiences of visible-minority gay male youth. Their lived experiences were examined in order that we might understand their issues, and way of being in the world.

The voices of these youth are seldom heard in their ethnic community, within the GLBTT community, and within society at large. This thesis gave the visible-minority gay male youth in this study an opportunity to discuss their oppression from society and to share their experiences.

The findings of this exploratory study contest the social work profession to confront its attitudes towards visible-minority gay male youth.

The findings of this study are a part of the beginning of understanding as regards to the world visible-minority gay male youth face. Although the specific needs of each individual will undoubtedly vary, the findings of this study have demonstrated some common elements
of the coming out, identity construction and way of being for these youth. These elements are contextualized as to the obstacles present within the homophobic and racist environment inside of which, these youth develop.

North American culture stigmatizes visible-minorities as well as same-sex orientation. As ethnic communities and the GLBTT community struggle to have their voices heard in a racist and homophobic culture, it is important to include and hear the voices of those members, which belong to both communities.

These youth continue to be marginalized in the communities within which they develop. Racism and homophobia are the agents of oppression for these minority-minority youth.

In creating greater tolerance and acceptance in society, we must challenge our views and biases as regards to race/ethnicity as well as sexuality. The experience of visible-minority gay youth is similar but distinct from both visible-minority youth, and 'white' mainstream youth. As such, the theories regarding identity development must be reworked to allow for difference in ethnicity and sexuality, as integrated parts of a whole.
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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Research Question

1. From the point of view of visible-minority gay male youth, what are your unique experiences and perceived needs?

• Is your family aware of your orientation?
• What does coming out/being out mean for you?
• How would you define or describe your family?
• Do your friends know about your orientation?
• What is it like being with friends who are from your “community” as well as those not from it?
• Was there a difference in how they respond to your orientation?
• Do you have a different relationship with friends who are lesbian or gay, who are from your culture/not from your culture?
• Are your experiences, both positive and negative, if in contact with a youth group/lesbian and gay community?
• If you could change anything, add something in the community at large, your cultural community, the lesbian and gay community what would your suggestions be?
• Any Concerns, questions, that we have not yet covered in relation to what it is like to be you?
INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

TITLE: Visible-minority gay and male bisexual youth: Experiences, perceptions of needs, and implications for social service development and social work practice.

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I, ___________________________________, hereby consent to participating in two in-person interviews, each taking about one hour each, done by Jason Watt. I understand that my participation will be completely voluntary and anonymous, and that I may withdraw from the study at any time, without jeopardizing any relationships with possible persons or agencies.

I understand that the interview will be audio-taped and that the audio-taped information will be destroyed or given to me upon completing of this project. All identifiable information will be held in confidence by researchers and all information that may identify me will not be present in any final research documents/publications. I will be paid $7.50 after completion of each interview, $15.00 in total. In addition, I understand that the resulting material of my interview will be used to construct a master’s thesis and may be used in any resulting journal articles or publications.

Should I have any questions regarding this study, I am aware that I can at any time contact either of the above named persons anytime.

My signature is an acknowledgment of my receiving a copy of this form and of my consent to participate in this study.

Participant’s Signature: ___________________________ Date: ________________

Researcher’s Signature: ___________________________ Date: ________________