

**THE MEANING OF INTIMACY
FOR MEN WHO ARE GAY**

by

David Loran

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Counseling Psychology)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

October 2007

© David Loran, 2007

Abstract

Intimacy has been cited as primary psychological need by many psychologists, including Rogers, Maslow, and Erikson. Others claim intimate relationships provide benefits for both the mind and body. Despite its importance, there continues to be disagreement as to how intimacy should be defined. Research suggests that the meaning of intimacy may vary according to the type of relationship involved or the gender, age, or cultural identity of the referent. Yet there exists almost no literature attempting to understand the meaning of intimacy for men who are gay. As gay relationships become more open and accepted, practitioners will find themselves dealing with questions of intimacy between men who are gay. In order to better serve the clients, it will be important to have a common reference point. This phenomenological study serves to advance the field by asking men who are gay to define intimacy using their own long-term relationship as a reference point. After interviewing men who are gay in Vancouver, Canada, the author conducted an analysis of the interviews and categories and themes were developed to help explain what intimacy means to men who are gay. These themes include the development of intimacy as a process, togetherness, openness, perceptions of commonalities between partners, the need for individuation and time spent apart, growth within oneself and growth within the relationship, effort required to develop and maintain intimacy, commitment, support, the role of emotions in intimacy, physical demonstrations of intimacy, sexuality, the varying levels and forms of intimacy, the influence of role models, and the need to overcome challenges in developing intimate relationships. Following a discussion of the themes, the essential structure of intimacy for men who are gay is presented. In addition, the relevance of these findings to previous research is discussed and recommendations to researchers and practitioners are offered.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
1 Introduction.....	1
2 Literature Review.....	6
2.1 General Studies of Intimacy.....	6
2.2 Intimacy and Romantic Relationships.....	12
2.3 Intimacy in Friendships.....	18
2.4 Sex Differences in Expressions of Intimacy, Friendship, and Closeness.....	25
2.5 Intimacy in Gay and Lesbian Relationships.....	37
2.6 Implications.....	42
3 Methodology.....	44
3.1 The Strategy of Inquiry.....	44
3.2 The Role of the Researcher.....	47
3.3 Data Collection.....	47
3.3.1 Recruitment of Participants.....	47
3.3.2 Participant Characteristics.....	48
3.3.3 The Interview Protocol.....	50
3.3.4 Data Collection Procedures.....	50
3.4 Data Analysis.....	51
3.4.1 Transcription of Materials.....	51
3.4.2 Analysis of Meaning Units.....	51

3.4.3	Coding of Responses.....	51
3.4.4	Generation of Categories and Themes.....	52
3.4.5	Broader Interpretations of Findings.....	52
3.5	Verification of the Findings.....	52
3.6	Presentation of the Findings.....	53
3.7	Ethical Concerns.....	53
3.7.1	Obtaining Approval From an Institutional Review Board (IRB).....	54
3.7.2	Obtaining Informed Consent.....	54
3.7.3	Maintaining Confidentiality.....	54
3.7.4	Risks and Benefits.....	55
4	Results.....	57
4.1	The Essential Structure of Intimacy For Men Who Are Gay.....	57
4.2	Common Themes.....	59
4.2.1	The Development of Intimacy as a Process.....	59
4.2.2	Togetherness.....	60
4.2.3	Openness, Honesty, and the Knowledge of One Another.....	61
4.2.4	The Perception of Commonalities Between Partners.....	62
4.2.5	Trust.....	64
4.2.6	The Need for Individuation and Time Spent Apart.....	66
4.2.7	Growth: Changes in Self and Changes Within the Relationship.....	68
4.2.8	Effort Required to Develop and Maintain Intimacy.....	70
4.2.9	Commitment to the Relationship.....	71

4.2.10	Support.....	73
4.2.11	Emotions Experienced in Relation to One's Partner.....	74
4.2.12	Physical Demonstrations of Intimacy.....	77
4.2.13	Sexuality.....	79
4.2.14	The Influence of Role Models.....	82
4.2.15	Overcoming Challenges in Developing Intimacy.....	83
4.2.16	The Different Levels and Forms of Intimacy.....	85
4.2.17	Realistic Appraisals of the Intimacy Between Partners.....	86
4.3	Participants' Definitions of Intimacy.....	86
5	Discussion.....	89
5.1	Summary of Findings.....	89
5.2	Relevance to Previous Research.....	91
5.2.1	Intimacy as a Multifaceted Phenomenon.....	91
5.2.2	Self-Disclosure/Openness and Intimacy.....	95
5.2.3	The Varying Levels of Intimacy.....	96
5.2.4	Love, Monogamy, and Intimacy.....	97
5.2.5	Men and Intimacy.....	99
5.3	Measuring Intimacy and Other Directions for Future Research.....	100
5.4	Challenges to Developing Intimacy Between Men Who Are Gay.....	101
	References.....	105
	Appendices.....	109
	Appendix A.....	109

Appendix B.....	110
Appendix C.....	112
Appendix D.....	113
Appendix E.....	114

The Meaning of Intimacy For Men Who Are Gay

Chapter 1: Introduction

The concept of intimacy is one which has garnered considerable attention from psychologists and counselors over the years. It has been suggested by some (Rogers, 1951; Maslow, 1968) that intimacy is primary psychological need, one that is closely linked to the development of an individual's identity (Erikson, 1963). Others suggest that involvement in intimate relationships may have benefits to both mind and body (Prager, 1995; Popovic, 2005). Yet, despite the importance of intimacy to the discipline of psychology, there remains a great deal of disagreement as to how intimacy should be defined (Floyd, 1998; Helgeson, Shaver, & Dyer, 1987; Monsour, 1992; Moss & Schwebel, 1993; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Prager, 1995; Register & Henley, 1992; Timmerman, 1991; Wong, 1981). This lack of agreement has resulted in intimacy being confounded with numerous other psychological concepts including closeness, self-disclosure, types of relationships, sexual activity and companionship (Berscheid & Reis, 1998; Lauer, Lauer & Kerr, 1990).

In addition to the lack of agreement as to what constitutes intimacy, the literature is replete with studies suggesting there may also be differences as to how individuals define intimacy within their own lives. For instance, studies suggest that men and women may experience intimacy differently (Duck & Wright, 1993; Helgeson, Shaver, & Dyer, 1987; Heller & Wood, 1998; Orosan & Schilling, 1992; Reis, Senchak, & Solomon, 1985; Williams, 1985). In addition, the concept of intimacy has been studied within the context of both friendships and romantic relationships, suggesting that its meaning may differ depending on the type of relationship one is

talking about (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco; 1998; Lippert & Prager, 2001; Mackey, Diemer, & O'Brien, 2000; Monsour, 1992; Moss & Schwebel, 1993; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Waring & Chelune; 1983). In the area of romantic relationships, research has indicated that the meaning of intimacy may also vary as a function of sexual orientation, that is, whether the relationship is a heterosexual one or a homosexual one (Deenen, Gijs, & van Naerssen, 1994; Kurdek, 1991; Kurdek, 1998; Worth, Reid, & McMillan, 2002).

Recently, psychologists have begun to address the issue of defining intimacy within romantic relationships. Articles by Register and Henley (1992), Moss and Schwebel (1993), Mackey et al (2000), and Lippert and Prager (2001) have all attempted to answer the question of what intimacy is. Unfortunately, Moss and Schwebel fail to mention potential differences with regards to sexual orientation and Lippert and Prager, although unclear, seem to have focused their research exclusively on heterosexual couples, as do Register and Henley. Mackey et al, on the other hand, assessed the meaning of psychological intimacy for both heterosexual and same-gender couples. As a result of their research, they came to define psychological intimacy as "the sense that one could be open and honest in talking with a partner about personal thoughts and feelings not usually expressed in other relationships" (p. 201). Interestingly, the authors noted that women in same-sex relationships considered psychologically intimate communication to be a fundamental part of their relationship, more so than partners involved in heterosexual or gay male relationships. It remains unclear whether this difference is a function of gender or sexual orientation, though. For instance, women may consider communication to be an integral part of intimacy while men are more concerned with physical proximity (Lippert & Prager, 2001). If this

is the case, a definition incorporating self-disclosure as a key element in intimacy may be biased towards relationships in which there are two women present (i.e. lesbian relationships), as opposed to relationships in which there is one (i.e. heterosexual relationships) or no women (i.e. gay male relationships) present.

In addition to the findings by Mackey et al (2000), Worth, Reid, and McMillan (2002) raised some interesting questions about the nature of gay male relationships. Their findings indicated that men who are gay, overall, had conventional notions of relationships and romantic love, notions which included monogamy as a central concept. Contrary to these notions, though, the men who are gay in this study also believed that monogamy was unsustainable in the long run. Similarly, LaSala (2004) has suggested that for some men who are gay, monogamy may not be an essential part of a satisfactory, committed relationship. Thus, traditional ideas of intimacy may not apply to men in these relationships.

To date, only the study by Mackey et al (2000) has addressed the meaning of intimacy for men who are gay. Although the sample used for this study was diverse in terms of ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic status, the research focused primarily on couples that had been together for an average of 30 years. As a result, all of the men in the sample of gay males were over the age of 40, with the majority of them being in their 50s at the time this research was conducted. While it has been suggested that the longevity of their relationships makes these men better candidates for understanding what intimacy is, it is likely that their experiences as men who are gay are profoundly different than more recent cohorts. With the advent of the internet, men who are gay today are finding it easier and easier to find others of the same sexual

orientation. Gay teens and young adults struggle less with the issue of isolation as a result of physical distance. As a result, it has become easier and easier for these teens and young adults to find social support and acceptance in the eyes of others. In addition, societal norms are changing and being gay is not nearly the stigmatizing condition it once was. Given these changes, younger men who are gay today may have experienced a radically different climate than their older counterparts and may find it easier to express themselves in ways that are true to their own identity, rather than societal expectations. It is possible that research with younger men who are gay may support the arguments by Worth et al (2002) and LaSala (2004) that monogamy is not a central tenet of gay relationships. As such, the meaning of intimacy for these younger men may be qualitatively different than the meaning derived by Mackey et al (2000).

In addition to the use of an older cohort in their research, Mackey et al (2000) attempted to provide a definition of intimacy that encompassed both hetero- and homosexual notions of this concept. In line with Worth et al (2002) and LaSala (2004), this may prove to be a shortcoming of the study. It is entirely possible that research focusing exclusively on a sample of gay males will find that the meaning of intimacy for this group is, in fact, different from the meaning of intimacy for heterosexual or lesbian couples. Thus, an all-encompassing definition of intimacy may be inappropriate.

The importance of intimacy within our lives has been stressed by numerous authors over the years (Erikson, 1963; Maslow, 1968; Popovic, 2005; Prager, 1995; Rogers, 1951) but few have sought to answer the question of what intimacy is exactly. As gay marriage becomes accepted and legalized throughout the world, more and more men who are gay could find themselves in

relationships that are not working. Practitioners may be confronted with clients who come to them for help in dealing with intimacy issues within the relationship. Without a clear definition of intimacy, it may be difficult for practitioners to understand the characteristics that contribute to developing and maintaining intimacy within gay relationships and, without this understanding, they may be ill-equipped to help these clients. For practitioners and scientists alike, it becomes difficult to locate and understand research findings when the concept of intimacy is confused with so many other concepts (e.g. self-disclosure, closeness, sexual activity, etc.). In order to ensure that counselors are able to access the materials they need and that researchers are talking about the same concept across studies, a clear understanding of the meaning of intimacy is needed. And, because the meaning of intimacy may vary as a result of gender and sexual orientation, it is necessary to examine this meaning from different perspectives.

Thus, the purpose of this phenomenological investigation was to explore the meaning of intimacy using a semi-structured protocol with a sample of men who are gay, aged 25-35, taken from a large Canadian city.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following will provide an in-depth analysis of the literature available on the topic of intimacy. Given that this body of literature is both diverse and extensive, this review will be broken into sections. The first section will focus on more general studies addressing the nature of intimacy. Following this, the literature dealing with intimacy in romantic relationships will be discussed followed by research dealing with intimacy in friendships and other relationships. Studies specifically addressing sex differences in intimacy, closeness, and self-disclosure will follow and the review will conclude with a discussion of the literature addressing intimacy in gay and lesbian relationships.

General Studies of Intimacy

Among the first to recognize the varied phenomena of intimacy that existed in research was a paper by Wong (1981). Because of the differing interpretations as to what intimacy was, Wong formulated several typologies of intimacy by treating the concept as a process that is defined by the situation in question. He recognized that self-disclosure was an essential part of the definition and that intimacy was generally seen as an emotional state in which two or more people experienced a sense of commonality and safety in the sharing of personal information. Differences in types of intimacy resulted from the combination of various factors including situational boundaries, the duration of the relationship, the emotional involvement of the actors in the relationship, the nature of communication within the relationship, and the intensity of the relationship. Although this paper intended to suggest several typologies of intimacy, the writing is often ambiguous and it remains unclear as to whether the author was addressing different types

of intimacy or simply noting some of the factors that influence the formation of intimate relationships.

Timmerman (1991) took Wong's approach one step farther and conducted a concept analysis to determine how the concept of intimacy had been defined in research literature up to that point. Her goal was to determine the characteristics or necessary conditions that would serve to differentiate the phenomenon of intimacy from other constructs. Following a brief review of the importance of intimacy in the field of nursing, Timmerman examined the scholarly definitions of intimacy and recognized that intimacy was a quality of a relationship and not a characteristic of an individual. In addition, she noted that intimacy is neither a dichotomous concept nor a static state as intimacy levels have been known to change over periods of time. In her review of previous studies on the topic, she mentioned that although some studies have included a physical component in their definition of intimacy, this was not a necessary condition for intimacy to exist. As a result of her analysis, Timmerman noted four necessary conditions that must be true in order for intimacy to be considered a quality of a relationship: 1) the partners must trust each other, 2) the partners must experience a sense of emotional closeness between them, 3) the partners must be able to openly communicate thoughts and feelings with each other (i.e. self-disclosure), and 4) there must be reciprocity within the relationship. Given these conditions, Timmerman proposed a theoretical definition for intimacy: "a quality of a relationship in which the individuals must have reciprocal feelings of trust and emotional closeness toward each other and are able to openly communicate thoughts and feelings to each other" (p. 23). Timmerman went on to examine these conditions in more depth and compared and contrasted her definition of

intimacy with those of attachment, love, the therapeutic relationship, and isolation in order to substantiate her case. Although this study did much to clarify the concept of intimacy as it is used in research, it failed to take into account any differences related to gender, sexual orientation, or type of relationship. As this review of literature will go on to show, the condition of self-disclosure may be less important for males than for females. Nonetheless, various studies will be cited that support many of Timmerman's arguments here.

Similar to Timmerman's approach, Floyd (1998) conducted a content analysis of intimacy as a research construct. In order to achieve this purpose, she collected a sample of reports based on the following criteria: 1) the word "intimacy" or a derivative of it had to appear in the title, 2) the report had to be issued within the last 20 years, and 3) reviews were excluded. A randomly chosen sample (N=100) was then selected for further analysis to determine the ways in which the construct of intimacy was operationalized. Two independent coders were used, one of whom was blind to the hypothesis. The first 50 reports were reviewed in order to generate a set of categories that represented the various operational definitions of intimacy. The ten categories that emerged (self-disclosure, undifferentiated closeness, emotional expression, liking/loving, commitment, trust and loyalty, interests and activities, physical interaction, comfort of interaction, and other) were then used to analyze all 100 reports, with each definition being placed into one or more of the categories, as required. The analysis showed that self-disclosure was, by far, the most common referent for intimacy, with a z-test indicating a significant difference between the use of this concept and the second most common one, emotional expressiveness. Although some variation was seen in the reliability of the ratings (Cohen's

Kappa = .79), Floyd's study provided an excellent quantitative analysis of how intimacy is used as a research construct.

In contrast to Floyd's and Timmerman's analyses of intimacy, Register and Henley (1992) took a different approach to understanding the meaning of intimacy for ordinary people. Their phenomenological study involved eleven male and nine female university and junior college students that volunteered their participation. The participants were given the following printed instructions:

"This study proposes to explore the experience of 'intimacy'. Please recall and describe a specific incident in which you experienced what you would call an 'intimate experience'. This can be as short or as long of an experience as you would care to write about. For our purposes, it is not as important what you say, as that you say it clearly in as much detail as possible. Please try to include as much of what you were aware of in the account as possible." (p. 469)

Written responses were then collected for analysis and an initial reduction was carried out in which the researchers prepared a narrative digest for each of the complete narratives. These digests, which were prepared independently, were then compared by the researchers. A thematic reduction followed, in which the researchers highlighted significant statements and determined which of the statements were illustrative of themes central to the structure of intimacy. As a result of this analysis, seven themes were uncovered: non-verbal communication, presence, time, boundary, body, destiny and surprise, and transformation. Contrary to previous findings, the researchers found that verbal self-disclosure was not an element featured systematically in the data. It is clear from the description of the method that this study was conducted with great rigor and certainly yielded findings of importance. Several methodological concerns may be mentioned, though. First, the study used a written account to gather the meanings of intimacy from the

participants. Although the researchers present an argument for this method of data collection in their introduction, it is worth mentioning that this type of data collection fails to allow the researcher to probe for more detailed responses from the participants, as would be possible in an interview. It is possible that this may be the reason for the participants' failure to mention self-disclosure in their ideas of intimacy. Another issue with the study is that participants were instructed to write about intimate experiences. These instructions led participants to consider intimacy in a variety of contexts, including their relationships with pets and with God. As a result, it is difficult to understand if the participants interpreted the instructions in the same way. Thus, while this study did much to advance our understanding of how ordinary people understand and experience intimacy, it is difficult to interpret these findings beyond the present study.

A different approach to understanding the meaning of intimacy was taken by Roscoe, Kennedy, and Pope in 1987. These authors used a paper-and-pencil questionnaire with 138 females and 137 males (mean age = 19.1 years) at a Midwestern university to gather responses to an open-ended question asking participants to indicate what they thought made a relationship an intimate one. The purpose of the study was to examine adolescents' definitions of intimacy by understanding what the participants believed the components of intimate relationship were. Chi-squared analyses indicated that the most frequently mentioned components of intimate relationships were sharing, physical and sexual interactions, trust/faith, openness, and love. Males were more likely to cite physical and sexual interaction as a component while females were more likely to mention openness and self-abandon in their responses. Neither age nor year in

school produced significant differences in the data but individuals dating various people concurrently were less likely to cite caring as a component of the relationship. A strong correlation of rank order was found between males and females ($r=.97$) but it is not mentioned if this correlation was significant or not. Nonetheless, the many characteristics cited by the respondents indicated that intimacy was a multidimensional construct, similar to many of the previous findings. In the discussion that follows, the authors refer to differences between Erikson's (1963) view of intimacy and their results, noting that Erikson's ideas of self-abandon and commitment were rarely endorsed by the participants while physical and sexual interaction was identified as a distinguishing component, contrary to Erikson's ideas. The authors suggested that these differences may be attributed to possible changes in social structure and the ages of the participants, indicating that these adolescents were just beginning to understand what intimacy was. The findings of this study largely parallel the others mentioned above but the inclusion of love in the responses is a new finding. Given that the instructions presented to the participants are not presented in detail in this paper, it is difficult to say whether this finding is a genuine result or an artifact of confusion generated by the instructions. Nonetheless, the other findings largely support the results of the other studies in intimacy mentioned here.

The results of the aforementioned studies suggest that intimacy is a multidimensional construct. As will be demonstrated, many studies either limit their definition of intimacy so as to include only a part of it in their research or define it so broadly that they are looking at constructs only minimally related to intimacy. The studies mentioned above should serve to provide guidance for researchers interested in addressing the meaning of intimacy.

Intimacy and Romantic Relationships

The meaning of intimacy in romantic relationships is also a topic that has received a great deal of attention from researchers over the years. In 1993, Moss and Schwebel recognized the importance of intimacy within our daily lives. In doing so, they noted an enormous variation in the way intimacy was defined within the research literature. Their review of this literature noted general definitions, often based on the authors' personal experiences with intimacy, multidimensional definitions derived from analyses of participants' statements of the meaning of intimacy, and operational definitions, often utilizing behavioral indices in order to facilitate research agendas. Based on this review, the authors found 61 unique definitions of intimacy, 31 of which were general, 10 multidimensional, and 21 operational in nature. All possible themes in these definitions were recorded and those themes that were found in at least 50% of the definitions were identified. As a result, seven different themes emerged as salient: mutuality of the interaction (suggesting that intimacy occurs between, not within, individuals), awareness and communication of affect between partners, awareness and communication of cognitive material between partners, awareness and expression of physical acts between partners (e.g. touching, kissing, sexual intercourse, etc.), a feeling of commitment and cohesion between partners, self-disclosure between partners, and a generalized sense of closeness within the relationship. As such, the authors proposed a formalized definition of intimacy: "Intimacy in enduring romantic relationships is determined by the level of commitment and positive affective, cognitive, and physical closeness one experiences with a partner in a reciprocal... relationship" (p. 33). Thus, the authors specify five components of intimacy: commitment, affective intimacy, cognitive

intimacy, physical intimacy, and mutuality. The authors then go on to evaluate the efficacy of their proposed definition by applying it to differences between romantic and nonromantic relationships, examining empirical findings for support for the definition, and differentiating the definition of romantic intimacy from that of romantic love. The authors make a firm case for their definition but fail to note any differences that may occur as a result of gender or sexual orientation. It is unclear whether the authors chose studies that addressed these issues or if their findings are based solely on discussion of intimacy between heterosexual couples.

While Moss and Schwebel's study looked at the broad picture of intimacy within romantic relationships, Waring and Chelune (1983) looked at the relationship between marital intimacy and self-disclosure from a multi-dimensional framework. In these authors' opinion, intimacy is highly related to marital adjustment and is a composite of expression of affection, commitment to the relationship, expressiveness (the sharing of private thoughts and beliefs), partner compatibility, the ability to resolve conflict without argument or criticism, a mutually satisfying sexual relationship, autonomy (the quality of relationships outside the marital bond), and identity (the couple's opinions about their marriage and marriage in general). Their study assessed the degree of the relationship between these aspects of intimacy and self-disclosure with 20 couples taken from a larger study. These couples included 10 clinical and 10 nonclinical couples with an approximate age of 38.5 years. The couples were married for about 17 years and had an average of 2.3 children. The Victoria Hospital Intimacy Interview (VHII) was used to assess marital intimacy on 10 operationally defined aspects of marital intimacy: the eight mentioned previously, intimate behaviors, and an overall rating of intimacy. In addition, a modified version of the Self-

Disclosure Coding System (SDCS) was used to code answers to questions about what intimacy is and what the couple's opinions of themselves as a couple were. Stepwise multiple regression procedures were used to determine the relationship between intimacy and self-disclosure. The authors found that compatibility, intimate behaviors, identity, and expressiveness were the aspects of intimacy most affected by self-disclosure and that the percentage of positive self-references, affective congruence, and the content of the disclosures were the top three predictors of intimacy ratings. Thus, the study suggests that "self-disclosure is a major determinant of the level of intimacy among married couples" (p. 188). As a result, the authors discussed various ways to increase marital intimacy by increasing self-disclosure. This study clearly identifies the strong role of self-disclosure in defining intimacy. Unfortunately, the study addresses only married heterosexual couples. As a result, it is difficult to generalize the findings to other contexts. In addition, the VHII used here, although demonstrated to be both reliable and valid in this study, is based on a rather broad definition of intimacy. Given the findings of the studies mentioned earlier, it seems questionable as to how appropriate this definition, and therefore this instrument, is for these purposes. Nonetheless, the findings do support many other studies suggesting the importance of self-disclosure in the concept of intimacy.

The only study located that addresses the meaning of psychological intimacy to partners in both heterosexual and same-gender relationships was conducted by Mackey, Diemer, and O'Brien (2000). Their extensive review of the literature revealed the difficulty in defining psychological intimacy as a result of differences that may occur due to gender and sexual orientation. As a result, their research, conducted with a sample of 216 participants from 108

relationships of diverse ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic status, utilized a qualitative analysis of data obtained from in-depth interviews as well as a qualitative and quantitative analysis of a recoding of the data in order to answer two questions: 1) what is the meaning of psychological intimacy to individual partners involved in long-term relationships, and 2) what factors are associated with the quality of this psychological intimacy during the relationship's recent years. Interviews looked at the participants' relationships, social influences, the relationship between the parents and the participants, and the experiences of the participants within the relationship from the beginning to recent years. A research team of two men and two women coded the first eight transcriptions blindly and individually. A list of categories was developed and as the interview process continued, previous interviews were recoded using the constant comparison method. It was found that positive communication was essential for psychological intimacy to exist. In addition, three themes were noted: 1) openness, in that partners were able to be themselves with one another, 2) interdependence (the maintaining of separateness and interpersonal boundaries within the attachment between partners), and 3) the sense that partners could confide in one another, if needed. While the authors failed to find a connection between personal or demographic factors and psychological intimacy, they did note relationships were more likely to be characterized as psychologically intimate when the participants experienced positive sexual relations and physical affect, minimal relational conflict, a confrontive conflict management style in at least one partner, mutual decision-making, a sense of equity within the relationship, and a continued importance of sexual reactions within the relationship. Themes of proximity and interdependence were more noticed in males while the responses of female

participants tended to reflect themes of openness, mutuality, and differentiation more. In addition, it was noted that lesbians were more likely to report that their relationships were psychologically intimate within recent years and it was suggested that this finding was a result of a mutually reinforcing process towards connectedness within exclusively female relationships. While this study represents a great contribution to the understanding of intimacy, two shortcomings may be noted. One is the recoding of multiple categories into dichotomous ones for the purpose of analysis. It is likely that many of the concepts associated with intimacy are not dichotomous in nature and the findings here may have been exaggerated by this recoding. The second is that the study focused primarily on older couples that had been together for many years. While age was not significantly related to the meaning of intimacy provided here, it remains to be seen if a sample of younger participants would yield the same results. Given the enormous changes to the ways in which men who are gay meet and become involved with each other as a result of the internet, an analysis of the meaning of intimacy for a younger group may result in different findings.

The last study to address the meaning of intimacy in couples to be mentioned here was conducted by Lippert and Prager (2001). This study sought to examine people's working definitions of intimacy that emerged through an analysis of the daily interactions of the participants that were perceived as intimate. The authors used a diary method in which participants, members of 113 cohabitating couples, were asked to complete interaction record forms immediately following any interaction that lasted more than five minutes during a one-week period. Participants were asked to rate their interactions, using a four-point scale to indicate

how true each statement was of each interaction, on the characteristics of intimacy, pleasantness, disclosure of personal/private information, listening, expression of a need or want, expression of positive feelings, criticalness, quarreling, perceived understanding, and disclosure of emotions. Participants also completed measures of relationship satisfaction, well-being, relational self-disclosure, relationship satisfactoriness, constructive and dysfunctional conflict, and sex frequency. The purposes of the study included the identification of a set of interaction characteristics that could constitute a working definition of intimacy and an examination of the effects of person and relationship characteristics on this definition of intimacy. In addition, the authors sought to understand the influence of gender on perceptions of intimacy and self-disclosure. Using hierarchical linear modeling, the authors tested their hypotheses and found a significant relationship between relationship satisfaction and sex frequency. Results also showed that intimacy ratings tended to vary more *within individuals* than *between couples*. Of the sixteen interaction characteristics measured, only 8 were found to be significant (interaction pleasantness, self-disclosure, partner-disclosure, self- and partner-expressed positive feelings, self- and partner-disclosed emotions, and partner understanding). Neither participant well-being, relationship satisfaction, nor gender were found to influence intimacy ratings although partners in more satisfying relationships tended to perceive higher levels of intimacy in their interactions. In the end, it was shown that working definitions of interaction intimacy reflected interaction pleasantness, disclosure of personal and private information, feeling understood, the disclosure of emotions, and the expression of positive feelings about the partner. The belief that disclosure is central to an individual's definition of intimacy was upheld. Although this study advances the

understanding of how intimacy should be operationally defined, the sample represented 113 Caucasian couples recruited from a psychology subject pool. It is assumed that the couples were all heterosexual, although this is not explicitly mentioned. As a result, the generalizability of these results may be severely limited.

Although the studies mentioned in this section serve to advance our understanding of how intimacy in romantic relationships is expressed, only the study by Mackey, Diemer, and O'Brien (2000) looked at the meanings of intimacy in gay and lesbian relationships. Unfortunately, for the reasons mentioned above, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to other age groups or relational types. Thus, it seems important to further investigate the meaning of intimacy for men who are gay.

Intimacy in Friendships

In addition to the research on intimacy in romantic relationships, the question of what intimacy means and how it is operationally defined in the context of more casual relationships (including friendships) has also been extensively studied. The first study to be addressed here was conducted by Monsour (1992). In his study, Monsour had 164 college students describe what they meant by the term intimacy in the context of cross-sex and same-sex friendships. This study took place within the context of a larger report. As such, data was collected through a five-page survey but only a portion of the data was used for this analysis. Respondents were asked what they meant by the term intimacy in reference to their friends of either the same or different gender. In addition, they were asked how they express intimacy in these relationships. A review of the first 50% of the surveys indicated a list of twenty-seven response categories. Coders then

placed all the responses within these categories and were asked to count the number of meanings used for the term intimacy. Following the coding, seven categories were found to be used by at least 10% of the participants and these seven were included in the final analysis. The seven categories that emerged were self-disclosure, emotional expressiveness, unconditional support, physical contact, trust, activities, and sexual contact. The results were then compared by means of a z-test to determine if there were proportional differences in the number of males and females in each category that specified the above meanings in their definition of intimacy. It was found that females in same-sex friendships specified self-disclosure as a meaning of intimacy significantly more often than females in cross-sex friendships or males in either category. In addition, a significantly higher percentage of males than females in cross-sex friendships considered emotional expressiveness to be a meaning of intimacy. Fewer males in same-sex friendships and more females in cross-sex friendships mentioned physical contact as a meaning of intimacy and more females than males considered physical contact a means of expressing intimacy in their cross-sex friendships. Sharing activities was mentioned only by females in cross-sex friendships as a meaning of intimacy. A marginally significant sex difference was found in the use of sexual contact as a means to express intimacy with slightly more males than females in cross-sex friendships reporting this. No other significant differences were found between categories. The average number of meanings assigned to the term intimacy varied from 1.9 to 2.3 and, although it was unspecified, it is assumed these differences were not statistically significant. This study used a mixed methods design in which a written qualitative interview was analyzed both for the themes present and for statistical differences in the frequency and proportion of

responses. The methods used for both parts are laid out quite well but it is unclear as to the approach taken for the initial coding of the responses. No mention is made as to the theoretical orientation of the qualitative portion of the study but it is presumed a phenomenological approach was taken to develop the themes used for the numerical analysis. Despite the fact that Monsour neglected to account for any differences that may have occurred as a result of sexual orientation, this study is considered to have been instrumental in advancing how we understand the meaning of intimacy in reference to friendships. The fact that the study has been referenced extensively in later papers addressing the topic of intimacy serves to demonstrate its importance.

Another study addressing the variety of meanings assigned to both closeness and intimacy in friendship was conducted by Park and Floyd (1996). Recognizing that closeness and intimacy are both “fundamental but poorly defined concepts in the study of personal relationships” (p. 85), the authors sought to clarify the understanding of these two concepts by examining and comparing the definitions for closeness and intimacy provided by participants. Seven different hypotheses were addressed in this research. The first was that women would be more likely than men to describe their close cross-sex and same-sex friendships as intimate. The second hypothesis was that men would be more likely to label close cross-sex friendships (as opposed to close same-sex friendships) as intimate. Hypotheses three and four stated that individuals who adopt a more masculine gender role would be *less likely* to label close friendships (both cross-sex and same-sex) as intimate while individuals who adopt a feminine gender role would be *more likely* to label these friendships as intimate. The fifth and sixth hypotheses assumed that closeness is a broader term than intimacy and, as a result, participants would generate fewer

categories in describing intimate relationships than close relationships. In addition, they were expected to assign fewer categories to the term intimacy than to the term closeness. Finally, it was hypothesized that there would be fewer sex differences in descriptions of closeness than in descriptions of intimacy. The sample involved 151 female and 119 male students at a west coast university in the United States, ranging in age from 17-55 (although over 80% were in the 18-21 age range). Participants were randomly assigned to report on either a same-sex or opposite-sex friendship. Two open-ended questions were asked: 1) "What does being 'close' in this friendship mean to you?" and 2) "In what ways, if any, does closeness differ in your same- and opposite-sex friendships" (p. 91). Participants were also asked if they would describe the target friendships as intimate or not and, if not, why they would not. Finally, participants completed the Bem Sex Role Inventory. In order to analyze the data, a grounded theory perspective was taken and a coding scheme was developed. Categories that were mentioned by at least 10% of the respondents were included in the final analysis. The most widely mentioned definition of closeness was self-disclosure, with provision of help and support, giving specific advice and perspectives on matters of interest, shared interests and activities, relational expression, global expressions of affect, comfort and ease of interaction, trust, acceptance, understanding, respect, frequency of interaction, and duration of the relationship also being mentioned. Women were significantly more likely than males to endorse self-disclosure, provision of help and support, giving advice and perspectives, and relational expression as meanings of intimacy. No other significant sex differences were noted. In addition to these differences, it was also noted that opposite-sex friends were more likely to include the provision of advice and perspective category

in their definition than same-sex friends but same-sex friends were more likely to include mutual respect in their definition. Respondents also indicated that it was easier to relate to same-sex friends than to opposite-sex friends and that they discussed different topics and participated in different activities with same-sex and opposite-sex friends. Participants that considered their relationships to be intimate tended to endorse the categories of relationship length, relational expression, mutual acceptance, and global expressions of affect more often than participants who simply considered their relationships to be close. The reasons given for a lack of intimacy included the lack of a sexual or romantic component, a lack of sufficiently deep, personal, and frequent self-disclosure, insufficient closeness, a failure to engage in non-sexual physical expressions of affection, an insufficient amount of interaction, and that intimacy needs were met by others in their lives. As a result of these findings, the first four hypotheses were rejected, in that no sex differences were noted in the tendency to define a friendship as intimate and gender-role orientation was not linked to a tendency to label friendships as intimate. Hypotheses five and six, on the other hand, were supported, in that nearly twice as many meanings for closeness were developed than for intimacy and that a greater number of categories were used in describing friendships that were close, as opposed to intimate. Hypothesis seven was also supported, with there being more significant sex differences in typologies of intimacy than in typologies of closeness. The results of this study demonstrate the need for researchers to differentiate between the use of the terms intimacy and closeness in their studies. Unfortunately, the authors did not choose to include sexual orientation in this study, as it would have been interesting to see if significant differences had emerged as a result of the inclusion of this variable.

A final study to be mentioned in this section involves an empirical analysis performed by Laurenceau, Feldman Barrett, and Pietromonaco (1998) designed to test a model of intimacy. This study provides the details of Reis and Shaver's (1988) interpersonal process model of intimacy, which "suggests that both self-disclosure and partner responsiveness contribute to the experience of intimacy in interactions" (Laurenceau et al, 1998; p. 1238). In Reis and Shaver's view, intimacy is a product of a transactional process wherein an individual discloses personal information, thoughts, and feelings to their partner and receives a response from the partner that is interpreted as understanding, validating, and caring. Disclosures involving emotions are generally thought to facilitate intimacy to a greater degree than those involving factual information and the listener's return communication is believed to be more important than the disclosure itself. In their paper, Laurenceau et al provide the details of two studies designed to test this model of intimacy in individual social interactions. The first study involved 42 women and 27 men recruited from an undergraduate participant pool at two different universities. It was designed to test the hypothesis that self-disclosure and partner disclosure would both predict feelings of intimacy and that intimacy will be experienced in interactions where disclosures are related to feelings of partner responsiveness. Using the Rochester Interaction Record, participants provided information on every interaction lasting 10 minutes or longer. Dyadic interactions were analyzed for the amount of self-disclosure, in general, the amount emotions were expressed, the amount of partner disclosure, the amount of positive and negative emotion expressed by the partner, the degree to which they felt accepted by their partner during the interaction, and the amount of intimacy experienced during the interaction. For the purposes of

this study, intimacy was defined as “the extent to which the participants felt interpersonally close to the interaction partner in a given interaction” (p. 1242). The second study was designed to replicate and extend the findings of study one by increasing the diary collection period from one week to two weeks, by measuring partner responsiveness in a broader manner, and by differentiating between disclosures of facts and those of emotion. Hierarchical linear modeling was used to test the hypotheses. The findings indicated that self-disclosure and partner disclosure were significantly correlated with each other ($r=.60, p<.001$) and were significantly correlated with intimacy ($r=.55$ and $.57, p<.001$). Intimacy was found to uniquely predict both self-disclosure and partner disclosure. All in all, the findings supported the basic tenets of Reis and Shaver’s (1988) model but the authors suggested some modifications. They suggest that partner responsiveness may be more important in closer relationships but self-disclosure is more important when first getting to know one another. They also note that their findings demonstrated a variation in the strength of the correlations between variables from person to person. Several shortcomings should be mentioned, though. Because the results were correlational in nature, a causal hypothesis was unable to be investigated. In addition, it was recognized that because the responses were obtained solely from U.S. college students, the generalizability of these findings was limited. Because the nature of the relationships between the participants was unclear, it is also difficult to determine whether participants were reporting on friendships or romantic relationships, a factor found to be significant in Parks and Floyd’s (1996) study. Also, the definition of intimacy used in this study may have been confounded with that of closeness, a concept shown to be quite distinct by Parks and Floyd (1996). Finally, the study fails to

recognize potential differences in interactions depending on the gender or sexual orientation of the partners involved, a factor that has also been shown to be significant in previous studies.

These studies represent a cross-section of the different approaches taken to address the meaning of intimacy within the context of more casual relationships (e.g. friendships). As the results of Parks and Floyd's (1996) study show, the concept of intimacy is quite different than that of closeness. It stands to reason, then, that intimacy in a romantic relationship would also differ from intimacy in a more casual friendship. Thus, while these studies serve to educate readers as to the potential meanings for intimacy in a variety of settings, they still do not provide an answer to the question of what intimacy means for men who are gay.

Sex Differences in Expressions of Intimacy, Friendship, and Closeness

Perhaps the most widely addressed topic in the study of intimacy has involved sex differences in the expression of intimacy between friends and romantic partners. In 1978, Lewis stated that although males were more likely to experience greater numbers of same-sex friends than women, most of these friendships were neither close nor intimate, given the lack of self-disclosure in the relationship. Lewis defined emotional intimacy as involving mutual self-disclosure, verbal sharing, and demonstrations of affection and suggested that cultural prohibitions made it difficult for men to demonstrate intimacy in public. Citing a plethora of studies, Lewis addressed some of the barriers to intimacy between men. One of the barriers suggested was competition, in that men are socialized to win by way of exploiting others' weaknesses. By closing themselves off from others, men may preserve an advantage in these situations. Another barrier to intimacy suggested was homophobia with the idea being that men

are afraid to be intimate with one another for fears of being labeled homosexual, in spite of a lack of empirical evidence suggesting this. Similar to the need to win, an aversion to vulnerability and openness was also cited as a barrier to intimacy between men as was the lack of available role models. While the first three barriers are assumed to be a result of male socialization, the lack of available role models is suggested to be an effect of the first three barriers. In this paper, Lewis suggests that men may experience increased intimacy with each other through workshops that foster self-disclosure and the extension of affection to each other. Although this paper is primarily a review of previous literature and a position piece, it does suggest that men are incapable of experiencing intimacy with each other. Unfortunately, Lewis' definition relies heavily on the self-disclosure component of intimacy which, as will be seen, is perhaps a female-biased definition.

Williams (1985) also addressed the question of gender, gender role orientation, and emotional intimacy in same-sex friendships. At the beginning of this paper, she suggests that men's friendships may be less intimate in their mode of interaction than women's. As a result, she set out to test three hypotheses: 1) males were expected to report less emotional intimacy in their same-sex friendships than women, 2) masculinity was expected to be negatively related and femininity positively related to emotional intimacy in same-sex friendships, and 3) sex-typed males and females were expected to exhibit responses that were more in line with stereotypical expectations while androgynous males and females were expected to be more flexible in their mode of interaction. In order to test her hypotheses, 205 males and 303 female undergraduate students from the University of Texas were asked to complete an instrument including a measure

of masculinity-femininity, a measure of emotional intimacy in same-sex friendship, and questions on sociodemographic data. A multiple regression analysis was performed and it was found that males were less likely than females to confide, openly express feelings, demonstrate affection, emphasize mutual understanding and responsibility, or to discuss personal issues in their conversations with same-sex friends. On the other hand, males were found to report spending more time than females pursuing activities rather than verbal communication in their same-sex friendships. Masculinity was shown to have no relationship to the degree of intimacy in same-sex friendship but femininity was strongly correlated with self-reported intimacy. Thus, hypothesis two was partially supported and hypothesis three was rejected. Although this study demonstrated some findings contrary to those of Parks and Floyd (1996), it is difficult to place much confidence in them. The definition of emotional intimacy used by the author was not explicitly stated but, from the introduction, it seems likely that she used a definition very similar to that of Lewis', in that self-disclosure was the primary referent. Given that this definition will be shown to be inherently biased, it is no wonder her findings were as they were. The results, nonetheless, do support the contention of sex differences in levels of self-disclosure, a concept shown to be highly related to intimacy.

Building upon the idea that males' same-sex interaction is less intimate than that of females', Reis, Senchak, and Solomon (1985) set out to provide empirical evidence for some of the underlying psychological processes. Although most explanations for the lack of intimacy in male same-sex interactions suggested that it was a result of socialization, the authors set out to test four alternative explanations: 1) that males have differing criteria for intimacy, 2) that males are

less likely to label same-sex interactions as intimate, 3) that males are more selective with whom they choose to engage in intimate relations, or 4) that males have a preference for avoiding intimacy, as opposed to an inability to engage in intimacy. Using 28 females and 25 males recruited from an introductory psychology class, the authors had participants complete an interaction record for every interaction lasting 10 minutes or longer. In addition, the participants viewed videotapes of 10 conversations and were asked to rate them for level of intimacy, among other things. Participants were also asked to bring their same-sex best friend to the lab in order to have an intimate conversation with each other and this conversation was videotaped so that it could be rated for intimacy by seven female graduate students. Finally, participants were asked to provide written narratives of the conversation they had with their best friend on the way to the lab and of the last meaningful conversation they had with each other. ANOVA tests revealed that male same-sex interactions tended to be less intimate than those of females but these tests failed to support any of the first three explanations for the differences. Males were not shown to be more selective than females with whom they choose to be intimate. Males and females did not differ in their tendency to rate videotaped conversations as intimate. Nor did males show a tendency to be more selective in engaging in intimacy with same-sex friends. On the other hand, the results showed that males were equally capable of engaging in same-sex intimacy as females but simply preferred not to interact intimately with each other. While this study did show a difference between males and females regarding the level of intimacy in same-sex friendships, the authors failed to provide a firm explanation for the process. In spite of their results discounting three of the four possible explanations and providing tentative support for one hypothesis, the

findings are in doubt. Because of the instructions given to participants, there is a possibility that the constructs of intimacy and closeness were confused. As a result, it is difficult to tell what the participants were reporting on in this study.

A similar problem occurred in the study by Helgeson, Shaver, and Dyer (1987). In this study, the authors set out to establish prototypes for intimacy and distance in both same- and opposite-sex relationships. Recognizing that the lack of consensus over the way intimacy is defined and operationalized in research, the authors make the case that it is difficult to compare sex differences across studies. Helgeson's review of the literature, though, showed three components of intimacy (self-disclosure, affection/sexuality, and expressiveness) but the degree to which each of these components were involved in intimacy seemed to be widely debated. Distance, on the other hand, was conceptualized as a lack of (or even the opposite of) intimacy. Thus, the researchers set out to answer five questions: 1) did men's and women's conceptualizations of intimacy differ (with women focusing on self-disclosure and men on proximity as the primary referent), 2) what was the role of self-disclosure in the prototypes of intimacy for both men and women, 3) were there differences in the prototypes of intimacy for same- and opposite-sex relationships, 4) was distance the opposite of intimacy, and 5) how did the meaning of distance vary due to differences in gender and relationship composition? To answer these questions, 39 male and 40 female undergraduates from a small western university were asked to describe both an intimate and a distant experience with a member of the same and opposite sex, preferably someone the participants were currently involved with in a relationship. Six probes were provided. Participants were asked to describe what things happened to cause them to feel this

way about the person in question, what their specific thoughts and feelings were, what they said or did at the time, what they thought their partner felt and thought at the moment, what the partner did or said, and anything else they wanted to include. In order to analyze the responses, every behavior, feeling, and thought expressed by the participants was coded as belonging to either the participant, the participant's partner, or both. These items were listed and separated by probe and condition. Similarly worded items were categorized together and any response given by at least three participants was included in the final analysis. ANOVAs, chi-square tests, and hierarchical cluster analysis were used to test the hypotheses. Three general themes resulted from the analysis of participants responses to the intimacy probes: sex/physical contact, appreciation/happiness, and talking versus sharing activities. In discussions of opposite-sex intimacy, the sex/physical contact theme formed a separate category for males only while females were found to express happiness more often. No other significant differences were found. With regards to same-sex intimacy, it was found that males were more likely to express appreciation while females were more likely to report feeling happy. In addition, females were more likely to talk while males were more likely to share activities. Comparing same- and opposite-sex intimacy, it was found that physical contact was mentioned as a theme more often in opposite-sex situations. Felt appreciation was mentioned more often in male same-sex experiences than any other situation. On the other hand, females were more likely to express appreciation and be happier with opposite-sex relationships while males did so more often in same-sex relationships. Both males and females were more likely to share activities with male partners but sharing of experiences, interests, and problems and listening and offering support to partners were more

common in references to same-sex, rather than opposite-sex, intimacy. Finally, participants describing same-sex situations were more likely to feel that their partner understood them while those describing opposite-sex situations were more likely to feel understood by their partner. Shifting attention to distance, the authors found that opposite-sex distance was primarily conceptualized as anger and sadness due to dissatisfaction with the partner's behavior. This often resulted from a lack of communication, uncertainty about the relationship, and physical separation. Females were more likely to feel hurt than males while males mentioned arguments and compliance with the partner more often than females did. Regarding sex differences in conceptions of same-sex distance, males were found to be more likely to have arguments and feel they were right than were females. Disapproval of the partner's behavior, lack of time spent together, and lack of partner awareness were the central features here while feelings of hurt, confusion, rejection, worry, and a lack of communication were more common in opposite-sex descriptions. Females were more likely than males to report feeling angry or sad and were also more likely to act cold or cruel towards their partner. On the other hand, males were more likely to engage in arguments and partner compliance. As a result of their findings, the authors suggest that intimacy may be more accurately characterized as appreciation, affection, or warmth, rather than self-disclosure. They believed self-disclosure to occur within the context of appreciation and affection. Indeed, an examination of the distance prototypes suggested that neither self-disclosure or sharing of activities were necessary for intimacy to exist. Unfortunately, it is difficult to place much confidence in these findings. It remains unclear as to how the authors conceptualized intimacy but the inclusion of distance as the "opposite" of intimacy suggests that some

confusion between intimacy and closeness may have existed. In addition, it is unclear as to whether participants were reporting on friendships or romantic relationships and sexual orientation was not included as a variable. Thus, it is impossible to know what kind of relationships participants were talking about in describing the meanings of intimacy and distance in this study. These confusions may have led to the contrary findings but it is impossible to be sure. As such, this research adds little to the study of intimacy.

Orosan and Schilling (1992), on the other hand, conducted a study of relationships with best friends in order to answer some questions regarding college students' definitions and perceptions of intimacy. Recognizing that definitions of intimacy may not be shared between sexes, the authors asked 15 female and 15 male Caucasian undergraduate students to participate in interviews lasting approximately 45 minutes. Participants were asked to describe both a recent interaction or experience and other interactions that were considered intimate and what led them to consider these interactions as intimate. They were also asked to describe the types of activities they were involved in as well as the degree of closeness and personal satisfaction they would experience in these interactions. In addition, participants were asked to describe their relationships and recent interactions with their most intimate male and female friend. They were asked to explain how they thought these relationships were similar and different and how easily they were able to achieve intimacy in these relationships. Finally, participants were asked what they thought the basic components of intimacy were. The personal definitions and basic conceptions were then used to determine whether the participants orientation towards intimacy was affective, instrumental, or dual T-tests showed that women had significantly higher affective

scores than men but no sex differences were noted in instrumental scores. When describing relationships with their most intimate male friend, though, men had significantly higher instrumental scores while no sex differences were noted on affective scores. No sex differences were noted in the similarities and differences between interactions with men and women and the conceptions of intimacy were similar across sexes. This study suggests that men and women have similar conceptions of intimacy but that they apply different templates in judging the intimacy of their own interactions. Unfortunately, this study is limited by the fact that sexual orientation was not included as a variable and that the sample was composed only of white, middle to upper-middle class college students. Nonetheless, the authors suggest that the study does lend credence to the idea that homophobia may limit how men express affection toward each other.

Continuing the discussion of sex differences in same-sex friendships, Duck and Wright (1993) challenged the claim that men's and women's friendships could be characterized as instrumental and agentic or expressive and communal, respectively. The authors argue that conceptions of these difference must be based on analyses that examine both similarities and differences as well as within- and between-gender tendencies. Using participants' responses to both an event-contingent report (ECR) and an instrument designed to measure the strength and quality of relationships in a number of areas, the authors attempted to discern if there was a truly dichotomous pattern to men's and women's same-gender friendships, as suggested above. Using data from a total of 907 females and 842 males gathered from other studies, the first study involved a reanalysis of data in order to answer the question at hand. ANOVA analyses showed that both men's and women's friendships were similar with respect to reasons for day-to-day

interactions. As a result, they refuted the claim that men's friendships tended to be more instrumental while women's friendships tended to be more expressive. Both sexes reported talking as the main reason for getting together with friends. The second study involved a reanalysis of data from 179 women and 171 men, ranging in age from 20-65, who were asked to describe their relationship with a spouse, fiancée, cohabiting partner, serious dating partner, same-sex friend, or opposite-sex friend. The MANOVA and MANCOVA analyses, in contrast to study one, *did* show an essentially expressive focus for women but *did not* show an instrumental focus for men. As a result of these two studies, the authors suggested that women have a tendency to respond more positively about their same-sex friendships than men and that their friendships tend to be more expressive than those of males. Yet, there was no indication that women's friendships were any less instrumental than men's, nor was there an indication that these were truly dichotomous categories. Thus, while this paper fails to provide conclusive evidence one way or another, it does suggest that there are differences between men's and women's same-sex friendships. Although not strictly related to intimacy, these findings also suggest a potential gender difference in how men and women experience intimacy.

Another study with a peripheral relationship to intimacy was conducted by Dindia and Allen (1992). While not dealing with intimacy directly, Dindia and Allen (1992) took a different approach to the analysis of sex differences in self-disclosure by conducting a meta-analysis of 205 studies of self-disclosure published between 1958 and 1989. The sample of studies was compiled through computer and hand searches of various databases and journals that dealt with North American Caucasian participants. The studies were coded for sex of target, relationship to

target, measure of self-disclosure, publication date, and publication status. Effect sizes were computed for each study and it was discovered that women were more likely to disclose than men and that these differences were greatest for female and same-sex targets, in the middle for opposite-sex targets, and least for male targets. Sex differences were also less significant when considering self-disclosure to strangers as opposed to friends or partners. In addition, studies using a measure of report from others were the only ones to demonstrate sex differences. Neither publication year nor publication status had an effect on sex differences. This study indicates that there are, indeed, sex differences in self-disclosure but that these differences are small. Nonetheless, these differences may account for some of the sex differences in meanings of intimacy assigned by men and women, given that most definitions of intimacy include self-disclosure as a referent.

The final study to address sex differences the relationships of friends and siblings to be mentioned here was conducted by Floyd (1995). Considering that friendships are voluntary, often transitory, and based on positive affect while siblinghood is imposed and irrevocable and involves a greater degree of shared experience than friendships, Floyd set out to test six hypotheses: 1) that men in all relationship types would report closeness being a result of shared interests (SI) and activities (SA) rather than verbal interaction (VI) or emotional expressiveness (EE), 2) that women in would relationship types will report closeness being based on VI and EE rather than SI or SA, 3) that there would be no significant gender differences in overall relational closeness, commitment, or satisfaction, 4) that cross-sex friends and siblings would describe closeness more in terms of VI and EE than same-sex friends and siblings, 5) that friends would

report manifesting intimacy in more ways than siblings would, and 6) that participants would find the friendships to be closer and more committed than their relationships with siblings. Using 72 male, and 96 female student volunteers between the ages of 18-39, the author collected data using an eight-page questionnaire. Participants were asked to report on either a same-sex or opposite-sex close friend or sibling as to how close they felt their relationship to be, how committed they thought it was, and how satisfied they were with it. In addition, a checklist of 42 items that indicated relational closeness was used to indicate how much the participants felt each item contributed to the closeness of the relationship. These items represented either activities or affective states. ANOVA testing indicated that women were more likely than to report closeness as being associated with verbal interaction, to see caring as an indicator of closeness, and to manifest their closeness through activities like hugging or shopping together. Men, on the other hand, were more likely to associate closeness with shaking hands, drinking together, and talking about sexual issues. No significant gender differences were noted in overall assessments of closeness, commitment, or satisfaction. Thus, the first three hypotheses were supported. Of the other three hypotheses, only the fifth was supported, with closeness being associated with a greater number of indicators in friendship than siblinghood. Given these findings, Floyd suggested that closeness could show a tendency to emerge differently for men and women and that this tendency could be affected by relational type, as well. Although these findings are limited to American college students and are based on ideas of closeness, rather than intimacy, they do have implications for the study of intimacy, as well. For instance, given the association noted previously between intimacy and closeness, it stands to reason that intimate relations may also

show sex differences. In addition, the type of relationship may also affect how individuals define intimacy within the relationship. Thus, this study lends important guidance to the current project.

The studies mentioned in this section suggest several implications for research into the meaning of intimacy. First, it has been long assumed that men and women manifest intimacy to different degrees. It remains unclear, though, whether these differences are a result of biological or sociological factors or whether the differences are an artifact of the way intimacy is defined. It is possible that men's and women's relationships are considered equally intimate but that the way in which intimacy is defined in these relationships is different. Secondly, it is clear that the type of relationship considered can affect the results uncovered. It seems likely that the meaning of intimacy will vary between siblings, friends, and romantic partners given the research considered here. And, as the following section will demonstrate, this meaning may also be shaped the sexual orientation of the participants.

Intimacy in Gay and Lesbian Relationships

Although unclear in some instances, the bulk of the preceding research is presumed to have examined differences in the meanings of intimacy in heterosexual relationships of different types. Some evidence suggests, though, that gay relationships may be different from heterosexual ones. This section will look at some of those differences.

One study to address the differences in gay relationships with regards to intimacy was conducted by Worth, Reid, and McMillan (2002). Considering that gay relationships may be characterized by a sense of democratization, as suggested by Giddens (1992), the authors

interviewed twenty New Zealand men in order to assess their notions of monogamy, trust, and sexual behavior within their relationships. These twenty men represented a homogeneous group whose average age was 36 years old and average duration of the relationship was 5 years. In-depth, unstructured interviews were used to allow the men to talk about love, trust, and intimacy within their relationship and to consider the factors involved in the negotiation of condom use within the relationship. Various themes resulted from an analysis of the data including a sense of fulfillment created by the relationship, a highly conceptualized notion of intimacy (which included classic ideas of romantic love), and a desire to remain monogamous. While this idea of monogamy was often laid down as a ground rule at the beginning of the relationship, it seemed clear that at least some of the partners either could not or would not respect the rule. While violations of the rule were often not openly discussed, it was suggested that many of the men did not trust their partners to remain monogamous. The resulting anxiety was often linked to an inability to discuss the possibility of sex outside the relationship for fear of conflict or other reasons. The results showed that, despite Giddens' (1992) belief that gay relationships should be more democratic than heterosexual ones, the relationships studied here were dominated by a strong belief in romance, love, and fulfillment through the presence of the partner. While it was believed that this bond could be secured through a condition of monogamy, most of the men here felt that monogamy was impossible to sustain. Despite some meaningful findings, this report seems limited in its usefulness. First, the methodology used for both the interview process and the subsequent analysis is unclear. It appears to be a phenomenological study but without further information, it is difficult to understand how the authors arrived at their conclusions. In addition,

the definition used for intimacy here was never stated. It is possible that the authors intended the term intimacy to be synonymous with sexual relations but this is also unclear. Thus, while the findings suggest both similarities and differences between gay and heterosexual relationships, it is difficult to assess how much confidence can be placed in these findings.

Another study comparing heterosexual married and gay and lesbian cohabiting couples was conducted by Kurdek (1998). Citing previous research, Kurdek suggested that five themes recur in regards to how close heterosexual relationships are maintained over time: 1) women tend define themselves in terms of their relationships, 2) men tend to prize autonomy, 3) men and women make unequal contributions towards maintaining their relationships, 4) men and women encounter difficulty in resolving conflict in a constructive manner, and 5) institutional barriers are necessary for marriage stability. These five themes provided the basis for a model which assumed that relationship quality could be understood both in terms of gender-related forces designed to promote the happiness of partners within the relationship (i.e. intimacy, autonomy, equality, and problem-solving style) and institutional forces that promote continuation of the relationship despite personal unhappiness (i.e. pressure to remain together). Kurdek's study, then, compared appraisals of these five dimensions across married heterosexual couples and gay and lesbian cohabiting couples with five hypotheses in mind: 1) lesbians should report greater intimacy because of the way women are socialized to define themselves in terms of their relationships, 2) gay couples should report greater autonomy due to presence of two men in the relationship, 3) gay and lesbian couples should report greater equality in the relationship because of an inability to assign work based on gender roles, 4) gay and lesbian couples should report higher levels of

constructive problem solving because, being of the same gender, they approach problems from similar perspectives, and 5) gay and lesbian couples should report fewer barriers to ending their relationships. Participants were drawn from two longitudinal studies in which annual assessments were conducted over a five-year period. The number of couples varied from 236 to 118 for married couples, from 51 to 36 for lesbian couples, and from 66 to 45 for gay couples over the five-year period. None of the samples, though, could be regarded as representative of the general population due to characteristics such as age, ethnicity, income, and education. At each annual assessment, both members of the couples were asked to complete a survey individually that assessed demographic variables, relationship quality (intimacy, autonomy, equality, constructive problem solving, and barriers), and relationship satisfaction. Using various analysis procedures, Kurdek found that gay partners were more likely than married partners to report higher levels of autonomy, fewer barriers to leaving the relationship, and more frequent dissolution of the relationship. In addition, lesbian partners reported higher levels of intimacy, higher equality, fewer barriers to leaving the relationship, and more frequent dissolution of the relationship than the married couples. Several limitations to the findings were mentioned, though. First, as mentioned, the couples could not be considered representative of the general population. Thus, the extent to which the findings were generalizable was questionable. Secondly, the results were all obtained from self-report measures. As a result, some bias may have occurred in the reporting process. Finally, the author chose not to examine intra-couple differences. Thus, the results reflect only differences between couples. In terms of the study's relation to the literature on intimacy, it suggests that there may be differences in the ways individuals experience

relationships depending on their sexuality and/or gender. One of these differences includes the degree of intimacy experienced within the relationship. While significant differences were noted between lesbian and heterosexual couples in levels of intimacy, no difference was found to exist between gay male and heterosexual couples. Unfortunately, the analysis here makes it difficult to understand whether this difference is a result of sexual orientation, gender, or both. Nonetheless, it suggests sexual orientation is an important factor to consider in the meaning of intimacy.

The final study to address intimacy in men who are gay considered here involves research conducted by Deenen, Gijs, and van Naerssen (1994). The authors examined 320 men, ranging in age from 20-77 years, who were involved in gay relationship in order to test three hypotheses: 1) that intimate and sexual experiences were negatively related, 2) that intimate and sexual experiences were related to relationship duration, and 3) that factors predicting relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, sexual frequency, and sexual encounters differed according to relationship duration and age. In order to test their hypotheses, questionnaires were sent to 229 gay couples in the winter of 1988-1989. The questionnaires included various intimacy scales and measures of shared activities, sexual experiences, relationship and sexual satisfaction, and sexual encounters outside the relationship. Correlational analyses showed that, contrary to the first hypothesis, relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, emotionally intimate experiences, and sexually intimate experiences were all positively related. Regarding hypothesis two, only sexual satisfaction was found to decline over time. Thus, the hypothesis was only marginally supported. Finally, regression analyses showed that emotional intimacy best predicted relationship satisfaction with sexual experiences having an added predictive value for older

partners and relationships of longer duration. Sexual satisfaction was predicted by sexual distance but nonsexual intimacy had a predictive value for relationships of shorter duration and younger couples. Sexual frequency was able to be predicted from sexual satisfaction, relationship duration, and age but the value of relationship duration as a predictor increased with younger participants and those in shorter relationships. As the duration of the relationships became longer, the predictive value of sexual satisfaction increased. The number of sexual partners for each member of the couple was able to be predicted by either member's belief that sexual encounters were positive for relationship functioning. Thus, the third hypothesis was supported. As a result of the findings, the authors suggested that some relational differences attributed to age may have resulted from the change in social climate during the individual's formative years. In addition, men raised in a post-HIV period and in a period where gay relationships are formally recognized may have different ways of dealing with intimate relationships. While the use of the term "intimacy" was not clearly defined throughout this study, the results do suggest both age and sexual orientation influence the role of intimacy within the lives of these men.

Implications

As the studies reviewed in this section show, there are many factors to consider in determining what intimacy means to men who are gay. Intimacy is, most likely, not a unitary construct but, rather, multi-dimensional in nature. In addition, the way intimacy is defined and the meaning it has in our lives may be affected by gender, type of relationship, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and age. While many studies have examined the role of intimacy in many different contexts, there has been only one study to investigate the meaning of intimacy within the lives of

men who are gay. Unfortunately, this study was restricted by both the age of the participants and the duration of the relationship. Thus, this paper will examine the meaning of intimacy for six Caucasian men, aged 25-35, who self-identified as gay in order to further understand the meaning of intimacy for men who are gay.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This section will discuss the various methods and procedures to be used in the investigation of the research question “what is the meaning of intimacy for men who are gay?”. The section will begin with a general discussion identifying the strategy of inquiry and providing some background information on the strategy as well as addressing why it was an appropriate means to answer the research question. Following this, the role of the researcher for the study in question will be addressed. The procedures used for data collection and analysis will be provided and the methods used to validate the findings will also be discussed. The expected outcome of the study will be presented and the section will end with a discussion of any ethical concerns that were expected to arise.

The Strategy of Inquiry

In order to address the research question in this study, the strategy of phenomenology was used. The phenomenological approach to qualitative research began with the work of Husserl as a means to reflect the distinctive characteristics of the human experience (Wertz, 2005). It is intended as a method by which researchers are able to suspend their beliefs and opinions in order to enter the lived world of others and grasp the meaning or essence of a phenomenon. Through the process of free imaginative variation, researchers are able to begin with a concrete example of a phenomenon and through a process of reduction, distinguish its essential features. The main purpose of phenomenology is to investigate, understand, and describe the meaning of the lived experience that an individual or group has had with the phenomenon in question (Creswell, 1998). It is designed to explore the various structures that exist in human consciousness and “to

give a systematic, descriptive account of the most fundamental aspects of an experience as reported by the subjects” (Register & Henley, 1992; p. 469). It is especially appropriate for studying phenomena that have not been well-described and for answering questions which are best answered from the perspective of the participants’ lived experience with the phenomenon in question. In this respect, phenomenology is unique as it encourages researchers to bracket, or put aside, their assumptions about a phenomenon in order to uncover the underlying themes or structures of a given experience.

The process of phenomenology begins by gaining access to the participants (Moustakas, 1994). The number of participants will vary from study to study but it is intended that the researcher will use as many participants as necessary to achieve saturation, that is, until no new themes present themselves in the narratives of the participants. Typically, data is collected through a number of relatively unstructured interviews with the participants. These interviews often begin with a statement of the research question and then continue with the participants’ answer to the question. Probing questions may be used by the researcher to extend or clarify a participant’s statement but the idea is to allow the participants the opportunity to describe the phenomenon in their own words as fully as possible. Once the participant feels they have exhausted their account of the phenomenon in question, the interview comes to an end and the analysis portion begins.

Data analysis will typically begin with a transcription of the interview. Once the interviews have been transcribed, the researcher approaches the data with an open mind in order to understand the participants’ lived experience with the phenomenon. Entire descriptions are read

to gain a sense of the whole and then each description is reread in order to find meaning units, or shifts in meaning, within the description. These meaning units are then reflected upon in order to discern what they reveal about the phenomenon in question. Redundancies are then eliminated and themes or categories are developed. Once the themes and categories have been uncovered, the researcher begins to look at the relationship between the parts and the whole in order to identify the general structure of the experience. Commonalities between accounts are noted and eventually the researcher outlines the essence or meaning of the experience for the participants as a whole. Following a process of verification, the results are presented as a rich, thick narrative that serves to identify the essential structure of the phenomenon in question.

This approach to research, although valuable, rests on a number of assumptions (Creswell, 1998). First, it is assumed that it is possible to capture and understand the meaning of the lived experience of a phenomenon for an individual or group. Secondly, it assumes that experiences make sense within the lives of individuals in question. As such, science and philosophy are not necessary in order for the individual to make sense of the experience. Third, people exist within their own context and the reality of a phenomenon lies within the participants' perception of and reaction to the phenomenon. Finally, phenomenologists assume that participants are able to articulate the meaning of lived experiences and that the researcher can locate, understand, and describe the essential structure of the phenomenon.

While this method is not meant to test hypotheses or provide meanings that are valid and generalizable to all individuals, it is an excellent means to uncover the essence of a phenomenon for a group of individuals and to shed light on an issue that is unclear. With this in mind, it seems

ideal for understanding the essence of intimacy within the lived experiences of men who are gay.

The Role of the Researcher

Before moving into specific procedures for this study, it seems important to understand the primary researcher's place within the study. As a gay man, himself, the primary researcher has had the opportunity to experience intimacy with another man. His understanding of intimacy was quite similar to the process model described by Reis and Shaver (1988). He believed intimacy to be a process by which two or more individuals come to know each other and feel comfortable enough with each other that they are able to disclose personal information and feelings without fear of endangering the relationship in question. While this understanding of intimacy has been partially supported by the literature reviewed previously, it is clear that there are a number of unanswered questions as to what the experience of intimacy is for other men, especially those who are gay. Thus, he was encouraged to set aside his assumptions in this matter and to enter the world of the participants in order to gain a fuller understanding of what the experience of intimacy meant to men who are gay. Given that he is a gay man, it seemed reasonable to assume that the participants would be willing to discuss their understanding of intimacy with me and that he would be able to recruit participants through various means to be discussed later. In fact, this process was found to be decidedly more difficult than anticipated and only six participants were able to be recruited.

Data Collection

Recruitment of Participants

Participants were recruited by two means. The first involved a recruitment poster (see

Appendix A) describing the nature of the study, the requirements of the participants, the means to contact the researcher, and ways in which questions about the study can be answered. This poster was placed in various areas including The Centre: A Community Centre Serving and Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Transgendered, Bisexual People and Their Allies, an area of downtown Vancouver known to be populated by men who are gay, and at the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University. In addition, participants were also recruited through list-serves servicing gay organizations at the two universities. Due to a difficulty in recruiting enough participants to achieve saturation, recruitment continued with similar advertisements placed on various websites known to be frequented by men who are gay in Vancouver. In the end, participants responded only to the advertisement sent to the university list-serves and to personal requests made by the primary researcher.

Participant Characteristics

For the purposes of this study, and for reasons discussed earlier, participants were required to be between the ages of 25 and 35. In addition, the participants were expected to be, at the time of the interview, in a committed relationship that they consider to be intimate for at least two years prior to the interview. The reason for this was that it was believed that individuals in a relationship would be better able to understand the meaning of intimacy within their lives, given that they were currently in an intimate relationship. While participants who had previously experienced an intimate relationship might have been able to shed light on the experience of intimacy, a concern was raised that their understanding of intimacy could be confused with grief over the lost relationship. As such, the sample here was restricted to individuals who were

currently in a long-term intimate relationship. For the initial study, we decided to restrict our sample to Caucasian individuals raised within Canada or the United States, as previous research has suggested there could be cultural differences in the way intimacy is experienced and expressed. Finally, as there are numerous subcultures within the gay community, the research focused on men who self-identified as part of the mainstream gay culture. The main focus was to understand the meaning of intimacy for Caucasian males, aged 25-35, raised in Canada and the United States, and who were presently in relationships they considered to be intimate for at least two years prior to the interview.

Following an initial response to advertisements by the participants, a telephone interview was used to confirm that the participants met the preceding criteria and an appointment for the research interview was established. In the end, eight participants made appointments for interviews. Of these eight, one participant failed to keep his appointment and one other participant declined to participate after being made aware of the requirements of the study. In the end, six participants provided data for this study. These participants ranged in age from 25 to 33 years old (mean age = 27.2 years) and were all Caucasian men raised in Canada. The length of their relationships varied from as little as three years to as many as twelve years. With exception of one participant, all participants were university educated, having completed at least a Bachelor's degree. At the time of the interviews, one of the participants was pursuing a Master's degree in counseling psychology and a second was in the process of applying for a similar degree.

Although it was intended that interviews would proceed until saturation was achieved, the problems associated with recruiting participants prevented this from happening and data was

reported for only these six participants.

The Interview Protocol

Data was collected through a semi-structured interview in which participants were asked to describe the meaning of intimacy within their own lives. Interviews ranged in length from approximately fifty-five to ninety-five minutes. Following a description of the limits of confidentiality and attainment of participant consent (see Appendix B), the participants were presented with a sheet of paper containing the orienting question (see Appendix C). In short, participants were asked to describe their understanding of what intimacy meant to them within their lives. They were asked to focus on their current relationship, to describe what makes that relationship an intimate one, and to indicate what differentiates that relationship from others that are not intimate. Probing questions were employed, as needed, to clarify or extend the participants' responses. As the interviews neared completion, more specific questions were asked (see Appendix D) if it was believed that the participants had not fully described the phenomenon in question.

Data Collection Procedures

Interviews took place at The Centre: A Community Centre Serving and Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Transgendered, Bisexual People and Their Allies in an interview room made available for this purpose and permission was obtained from the director of the organization. The interviews were recorded by means of a digital audio recorder in order to accurately capture and convey the information presented in the interview. These recordings were used to prepare written transcriptions of the interviews used for the subsequent analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded through several steps: transcription and organization of material, reading the narratives to gain a sense of the whole, analysis of meaning units, coding of responses, generation of categories or themes, and broader interpretations of the findings.

Transcription of Materials

Following the interviews, digital recordings were used to transcribe verbatim both the participants' responses to the interview questions and the researcher's probes and comments throughout.

Reading the Narratives to Gain a Sense of the Whole

Each interview was read both individually and as a group in order to gain a sense of the full experience for both each individual participant and the group as a whole. By reading and rereading the interviews, it was expected that various themes would begin to emerge. Structures designed to elucidate the meaning of intimacy for each individual participant were then constructed.

Analysis of Meaning Units

Once a sense of the whole had emerged, each individual interview was broken into meaning units. These meaning units were signaled by a shift in direction of the conversation and were used to develop coding strategies.

Coding of Responses

Once the various meaning units had been identified, redundancies were eliminated and the statements were grouped into categories designed to facilitate the analysis.

Generation of Categories and Themes

As meaning units were seen to recur, categories and themes developed which allowed the primary researcher to classify statements in order to provide a textural description of how the concept of intimacy was experienced by the participants, both individually and as a group. By comparing these categories across the group, it is expected that a general structure of what intimacy means to men who are gay was found to emerge.

Broader Interpretations of the Findings

Following the generation of categories and themes, a general idea of the essence of the phenomenon was developed by comparing the findings across the group as whole. Themes which were seen to be central to the concept of intimacy were reported as describing the essential structure of the meaning of intimacy for the men in this study.

Verification of the Findings

Following the data analysis stage, and once the essential structure of intimacy for men who are gay had emerged, the findings were returned to the participants for verification. It was expected that, by taking the data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants, they would be able to correct any errors or misconceptions in order to increase the accuracy and credibility of the account. Thus, each participant had the opportunity to read the results section and address any concerns they had. In addition, it was believed that the prolonged period of engagement with each participant allowed the researcher to build trust and ensure that the findings were both accurate and credible. As a further step, the findings were presented in a rich, thick format which describes in detail both the participants' individual experiences of

intimacy and the themes generated by the group as a whole. Finally, it was expected that supervision would increase the quality of the findings. As such, the primary researcher met with his supervisor on a regular basis to review his progress, thereby providing further opportunities for other interpretations of the results to emerge.

Presentation of the Findings

Once the data analysis was completed and the findings were verified, a general structure of the meaning of intimacy for men who are gay emerged. This structure took the form of a narrative designed to present and elaborate on the various themes that emerged in the course of the research. An overall structure was presented and supported by various quotations from the participant interviews. Exceptions to this structure were also noted, as necessary. The resulting body of research forms the basis for this report and is intended to be published both as a thesis and in a condensed form, as a journal article so that the findings can be reviewed by others. By doing so, it seems likely that further research will go on to elaborate on the findings of this study and that both researchers and practitioners will be better able to understand what intimacy means to men who are gay.

Ethical Concerns

Various issues existed with regard to the ethics of conducting this study. These issues included obtaining approval from the university's institutional review board, obtaining informed consent from the participants, maintaining confidentiality throughout the study and anticipating the risks and benefits involved both with the research and the reporting of findings.

Obtaining Approval From an Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Before beginning the study, the research proposal was reviewed by both faculty members and the university's IRB. Based on the information provided in the proposal and the application to the IRB, clearance was granted to conduct the study. This clearance depended on the anticipation of any ethical concerns that might have arisen in the course of the study and ways in which these concerns would be dealt with, should they have arisen. Thus, the remainder of this section will deal with some of these issues.

Obtaining Informed Consent

Obtaining informed consent from the participants was of primary importance during the data collection phase of this study. As a result, participants were presented with a consent form (see Appendix B) which detailed the purpose of the study, the procedures used to record information disclosed by the participants, any risks that might have been present in the process, and the benefits expected to be gained by the participants for their participation in the study.

Participants were also informed as to the steps used to maintain confidentiality and any exceptions that could occur. Finally, participants were informed that their participation was strictly voluntary and that they may withdraw their data from the study at any time. As participants agreed to these conditions, their signature on the consent form indicated that they both understood the risks and benefits and agreed to take part in the research.

Maintaining Confidentiality

Various steps were taken to maintain the confidentiality of the data provided by the participants. Prior to their participation in the study, participants were informed of these

procedures and were also informed of any exceptions that might have come up (i.e. should information arise that made it clear that the participant poses a risk of harm to oneself or others, that the welfare of any children was in question, or that the records may be subpoenaed in extreme circumstances). These procedures included the following. First, only the researcher had access to the recordings of the participant interviews. Secondly, transcripts were coded so as to preserve the anonymity of the participants. This was maintained by referring to the participants by initials only. Transcripts were stored in a locked filing cabinet and were viewed only by the primary researcher. Third, in reporting the findings of the study, steps were taken to disguise the identities of the participants so they would not be recognizable by anyone who decided to read the study. Five of the six participants consented to the use of their initials in the reporting of the results. The sixth requested that his initials be changed so as to further preserve his anonymity. This request was accommodated.

Risks and Benefits

The participants were also made aware of any risks and benefits that may accrue as a result of their participation in the study. Few risks were anticipated. Steps were taken to preserve the confidentiality of information revealed by the participants and the study did not reveal information that constituted an exception to the rules discussed above. It was possible, however, that, in discussing the topic of intimacy, the participants might have experienced some discomfort or distress resulting from their recounting of memories. This did not occur but participants were provided with appropriate referrals, nonetheless, at the conclusion of each interview. By doing so, potential dual relationships will be avoided. In addition, it was believed

the competence of the primary researcher in conducting the interviews and analysis might have posed a problem for the study. As a result, the researcher engaged in extensive supervision throughout the process in order to minimize any risk resulting from a lack of competence in the research methods. Finally, it was considered important for the researcher to present the findings from the study in a style that will not result in any misinterpretation of the findings. Providing a clear, accurate account of the findings in a non-biased manner was intended to help ensure this happened. Thus, potential harm to the gay community, in general, was believed to be avoided.

As for benefits accrued in the study, participants reported finding themselves to be more “in touch” with the feelings of intimacy in their relationship and felt they had a greater understanding of how they experience intimacy. In addition, the publication of the results will allow for others to understand what the experience of intimacy is like for men who are gay. As such, it is expected that these results will spawn further investigations into the area which may allow for more effective treatment for men who come to counseling with intimacy issues in their lives. Finally, the results should allow others from outside the gay community to better understand how men who are gay conceptualize and experience intimacy within their lives. Thus, it seems clear that the for these participants, the benefits of their participation far outweighed the risks encountered.

Chapter 4: Results

Following the transcription of the participant interviews, an analysis of the data began to reveal themes inherent in each participant's statement. As analysis continued, it became apparent that many of the same themes were present in most, if not all, of the statements. This section will begin by presenting the essential structure of intimacy for men who are gay and will go on to discuss in-depth each of the common themes revealed by the participants during the course of their interviews. Finally, the participants' individual definitions of intimacy will be reported.

The Essential Structure of Intimacy For Men Who Are Gay

After an exhaustive analysis of the data presented by the participants in this study, an essential or invariant structure of intimacy for men who are gay began to emerge. One of the key elements of intimacy is that it is a phenomenon that evolves over time. The development of intimacy follows no pre-set plan and can occur over weeks, months, or even years. It requires effort on the part of those involved to not only develop intimacy but to maintain it once it has been established. Spending extensive time with one's partner is strongly connected to intimacy and this invariably leads to a sense of closeness between the partners. As the partners spend time together, elements of trust develop. This trust may take the form of trust in the relationship itself or simply trust placed in each other. As a result of the high levels of trust between partners, openness and honesty are able to be present to such a degree that partners tend to know more about one another than anyone else in their life. Such knowledge not only allows for similarities to emerge between partners but differences between one another begin to be noted as well, prompting the need for individuality as well as togetherness. For many, these differences serve as

vehicles for growth, both as individuals and within the relationship itself. As intimacy grows, so does the commitment to one another. Partners experiencing high levels of intimacy will often be committed to working through whatever problems or conflicts are presented to them. This sense of commitment in an intimate relationship allows for each partner to draw support from the other. For some, this support may be in terms of emotional needs while for others, the support may be financially based. Intimacy is connected with various emotions but none so strongly as love. Partners in intimate relationships will also find themselves feeling both comfortable and secure to such a degree that they are able to let their guard down with one another and experience complete and unconditional acceptance. Attraction is another hallmark in intimacy as partners are invariably drawn to one another either physically, emotionally, or sexually. Most often this attraction will involve a combination of the three. Physical demonstrations of the intimacy experienced between partners will occur either through displays of affection or through sacrifices made by one partner in order to increase the happiness of the other. Sexuality, too, is an essential component of intimacy and while the act of sex itself is not necessarily intimate, sex is definitely a part of intimacy as it is considered to be better when connected with the intimate relationship. For men who are gay, developing intimacy is a challenge. Sources for this challenge include a lack of available role models for gay relationships, lack of support and acceptance by the heterosexual community of gay relationships, and challenges experienced from within the gay community itself. Intimacy is clearly a complex phenomenon and this complexity is enhanced when experienced by men who are gay. This chapter will now continue with an in-depth discussion of each of the themes uncovered in this study.

Common Themes

The Development of Intimacy As A Process

According to all participants, intimate relationships develop over time. The amount of time required to develop an intimate relationship varies, though. While one participant reported feeling intimate with their partner in terms of the emotional bond present within the first week, others felt as if it took years to develop the intimacy in their relationship. There seems to be no specific point in time where participants suddenly are able to declare their relationship to be intimate. According to BN, "I don't think there's a point where you just... you know, you're intimate and suddenly, bam! You become intimate. Like there's just a sharp black and white thing". Rather, in the eyes of these men who are gay, intimacy is an entity that builds in the relationship over time. This passage of time seems to allow the partners to learn more about one another and as they do, their sense of commitment to each other increases. In turn, this allows for enhanced intimacy within the relationship. Thus the development of intimacy is thought to occur in stages within the relationship:

TS: ...the first year or so, (there was) definitely blind love and acceptance where it didn't matter what (my partner) did. He was amazing. It was such a high. Then around the two-year mark, there was more history together compared to the first year mark. (We started) realizing who they are and how they're different. So those little things start bugging you. I'm guessing the third year mark is then are you willing to work on this and accept them for who they are or are you gonna jump ship and find another honeymoon love?

For some of the participants, there were markers along the way that helped them to realize the growing intimacy within their relationship. For instance, JM remarked that the decision to remain living with his partner, in spite of having moved in on a temporary basis, signified a turning point for him in terms of the development of intimacy. Likewise, KG considers the point

at which he learned his partner was HIV+ to be a turning point as well. Although unaware of it at the time, he looks back at his decision to remain in the relationship to be indicative of the intimacy that developed up to that point. Nonetheless, while there seem to have been indications of growing intimacy in their relationships, none of the participants were able to pinpoint a moment when intimacy suddenly appeared. Rather, all participants indicated that the development of intimacy was a process that occurred over time and that the amount of time required for its development depended on the relationship in question.

Togetherness

In discussing intimacy, the concept of togetherness emerged as a central theme in the meaning of intimacy. In addition to living together, all six participants indicated they spend substantial amounts of time with their partners. For TS and his partner, it is not so much the amount of time they spend together that is intimate but rather the experience of being together in both good and bad moments. Similarly, CS indicated that struggling through difficult times with his partner has allowed him to develop a sense of faith in the relationship and that, in turn, allows him to feel more intimate with his partner. KG considers his partner to be part of his life in a very direct way and on a daily basis. Even during a brief period where he and his partner decided to end the relationship, the two of them spent little time apart from each other and KG believes that is part of the reason why they were able to reconcile their differences. As BN indicates, sharing his life with his partner is highly intimate:

That's really quite an intimate thing when you think of yourself as two circles, right? And you don't wanna just have one circle go over the other completely. But I think our circles have gone halfway into each other so we still have our personal lives but there's a big part in there that's an intimate life with each other

Thus, it is clear that for each of the participants, spending time with their partner not only allows for intimacy to emerge but sharing both good and bad moments together is, in itself, intimate.

Openness, Honesty, and the Knowledge of One Another

Doubtlessly related to the amount of time spent together with their partners, the concept of openness was another theme to emerge as central to the meaning of intimacy for these men who are gay. For five of the six of the participants, this sense of openness allowed them to learn more about their partners than almost anyone else in their life. While BN considers it exciting to be learning new things about his partner, TS believes that the level of intimacy he shares with his partner allows them to experience total honesty with one another. He indicates that the emotional transparency within his relationship is so high that he and his partner know 99.9% of everything that's going on in each other's lives. For JM, intimacy emerges directly as a result of the openness and honesty shared by himself and his partner:

...the more we live together, the intimacy comes from... all the faults come out and all the idiosyncrasies and all the nasty things that you never saw in the person that they were able to hide when you weren't living together and I think, um... it's kind of realizing that you love the person enough that you're willing to live with those things for the rest of your life.

Similarly, SL indicates that the level of intimacy within his relationship is so high that he and his partner know more about each other than even their best friends.

...being intimate is a trust thing and you get to know that person enough. You start sharing things with them that you normally wouldn't share with just friends or the people you know or even close friends. I mean, over four years, you get to know him more and more and more and you are still opening up and sharing things... he knows way more than my best friend. We just have that relationship. That level of intimacy.

Likewise, KG believes that intimacy is not just about having sex with one another but that it is about being open. He feels his partner is the one person he can tell everything to and goes as far

to say that without that kind of intimacy, it would be impossible to have a long-term relationship.

In contrast to the others, the concepts of openness and honesty emerge for CS in a discussion of he and his partner's sexual relationships with others:

...I don't know what the numbers are and how many people cheat on their spouses but, I mean, it, it's a fairly common (thing) and I... that shouldn't break up your relationship. Why can't you just be open about it? (It's) not the physical act, it's the deceiving and lying. So we just avoid that problem. We take away the need to cheat by being open about it.

Unlike the other participants, CS did not discuss openness and honesty in terms of the depth of knowledge he and his partner share with one another but it is clear that they are still important aspects of the relationship for him and, as a result, are connected to the intimacy he experiences with his partner.

The Perception of Commonalities Between Partners

As the participants discussed their experience of intimacy, it became clear that both the amount of time spent together and the in-depth knowledge of each other shared by the partners allowed for the perception of commonalities to emerge on various dimensions. Surprisingly, though, none of the participants discussed commonalities in interests as having a contribution to intimacy. Instead, some of the participants commented on similarities in terms of situation while others discussed the values they share with their partner. For instance, CS talked about how he and his partner grew up in a small town together and are roughly the same age. This commonality may have contributed to the start of their relationship but he indicated that he and his partner are together for reasons beyond that, otherwise their relationship would not have lasted. While BN and his partner attended the same university, BN indicated that sharing the coming out process

with his partner helped to strengthen the intimacy within their relationship. Likewise, SL and his partner went to the same university and were involved in residence life together. They shared similar experiences in terms of growing up as men who are gay but it was their discovery that both of them valued and desired an intimate relationship that allowed their relationship to develop.

I would have liked to settle down with somebody and wanted that partnership and intimate relationship. I wanted that and I knew that's what I wanted and... fortunately enough met (my partner) and... that's what he wanted as well. We were able to nurture that and get to know and grow and here we are 4 years later. Whereas, in the past, you kinda get to know them and "So what are you into? What are you after? What do you want out of this relationship?" and, you know, they may take it a little bit more light-hearted than I. I dated people with drug problems and things like that and, you know, no thanks. Don't want to really be involved with that...

TS and his partner also mentioned their shared values as being a major contributor to the intimacy in their relationship but for KG, it was the discovery that he and his partner shared a life-threatening illness that helped to enhance the intimacy they experience together.

There is no barrier between (my partner) and I and, actually, for a significant portion of our relationship, while he was positive and I wasn't, that was something we really had to think about at the time. We had to have these barriers between us. There isn't a way that we couldn't. And I always thought of it as kind of a problem. It wasn't a big problem cause it really didn't negatively impact our relationship in any way but it was something I didn't particularly like. I would have preferred that by the time I'm six years in a relationship with somebody that I wouldn't have to worry about whether we've got this condom and is it a good one and all the rest of that stuff.

In discovering he was HIV+, KG and his partner found themselves able to drop the barrier between them and, as a result, discovered a newly enhanced sense of intimacy. Thus, as demonstrated here, similarities in personality types are less important to the development of intimacy within this sample than commonalities in values and experiences.

Trust

In their discussion of intimacy, trust is mentioned by all the participants as either contributing to the intimacy in their relationships or as being part of the intimacy itself. Indeed, according to SL, “being intimate is a trust thing” as a relationship without trust wouldn’t last long. The concept of trust, though, can be further divided into two sub-concepts: trusting in the relationship and trusting in one’s partner.

Trusting in the relationship. Five of the six participants indicated throughout the course of their interviews that intimacy involved a sense of trust or faith in the relationship. For instance, TS stated that both he and his partner share the need for trust and security in their relationship and that this trust and security has allowed them to be intimate with one another. Similarly, CS indicated how an action as simple as paying rent was a sign of intimacy for him in that he trusted his contributions to the relationship would not be in vain. CS also mentioned that intimacy involves his trust in the couple’s abilities to overcome issues they may fight about from time to time, a sentiment echoed by JM:

...there’s something very intimate about having a major fight and both of you going into separate rooms and just stewing in that room and being furious but with the security that you know that he’s only going to be as far as that room and he’s not going anywhere. You know that your love is stronger than the fight and whatever the stupid thing is that you’re... that you need to give it time and you know he’ll be willing to talk about it and work it out. Um, there’s something very intimate about that for me.

On the other hand, BN notes that he put a great deal of trust in the fact that his relationship would grow and bloom from the initial seed of intimacy they started with. Thus, it is clear that for these five participants, trust in the success of the relationship is a major component of the intimacy within their relationships.

Trusting in one's partner. Once again, trusting their partner was a sub-concept mentioned by five of the six participants as being relevant to their experience of intimacy. According to JM, intimacy comes with trust and he and his partner trust each other to the extent that they can be vulnerable with one another. Not only does JM trust in his partner's commitment to working through arguments but he feels that his partner is the only one he's ever been able to fully let his guard down with, all of which he feels is a result of the intimacy shared in their relationship. BN also indicated a sense of trust in his partner as contributing to the intimacy in their relationship:

Trusting to be faithful. Trusting with financial decisions. Trusting they're gonna do some things that are good for the relationship, you know. I would trust (my partner) that he's not gonna... just quit his job, if he gets a job, and then leave us not being able to pay rent or something like that. Or I trust him to just think about us and not about himself...

Although several of the participants mentioned that they trust their partner to be honest with them, trust in one's partner seemed to center more strongly around the sexual side of the relationship. Both BN and JM are in monogamous relationships with their partners. As a result, it is important for them to know that they can trust their partners to be faithful.

JM: I think the intimacy comes with the trust, and it's knowing that (my partner) is saving himself for me and is not with anyone else and would not be with anybody else and we can... cum together and not have that be an issue...

As implied by the above statement, JM not only trusts his partner to be faithful but also trusts that his partner will not risk his physical health by having sex with someone else and then bringing home a disease like HIV. Similarly, CS and his partner recognize their open relationship could have health consequences for both of them. As a result, he trusts his partner to be open about his sexual experiences so the two of them can take precautions when necessary. Although both KG and his partner are already HIV+, they also recognize the need for trust in this arena:

...you may be in an open relationship like (my partner) and I were, so I knew he was having sex with other people but I also knew that he was having protected sex with other people because I trusted absolutely that he would never engage in some kind of risky sex act with someone else he didn't know and bring home some increased risk to me.

Thus, while trusting their partners to be honest is important for these participants, it is clear that intimacy goes far beyond that. These participants trust their partners with their lives and that trust is an indication of the just how intimate their relationships are.

The Need for Individuation and Time Spent Apart

Despite spending large amounts of time together and finding similarities with one another, each of the participants commented on individual differences and the need for time apart in their discussion of intimacy. For SL, it's as simple as recognizing that he and his partner have different interests and responsibilities. As such, they spend time apart and recognize this time spent apart prevents them from driving each other crazy.

In spite of the compatibility, KG also considers himself to be quite different from his partner and, as a result, has an individual life as well as the life they have together.

We're two different people but our relationship is rather like a third person. We tend to think of it sometimes like it is. The best way I can think of it is, we have a pet name which is _____. It was given to us by a friend and we've had it ever since we've been together. And sometimes that's what I think, I'm KG and he's (my partner) but together we're _____.

Similarly, TS recognizes that he and his partner have different interests but fulfill different roles within the relationships. For instance, while TS is more relaxed and easy-going and likes to entertain, his partner has the ability to take charge of situations and accomplish what needs to be done. Nonetheless, he recognizes that the two of them also have different needs and that these needs can be nurtured by spending time apart. In fact, TS often finds that he is more likely to notice the closeness between his partner and himself more after spending time apart.

For BN, the need for individuality is a prerequisite for intimacy to work. He recognizes that he and his partner both have individual lives but it is that individuality that allows the relationship to function. In order to be able to contribute to the relationship, it is important to have an understanding of yourself and this self-understanding is fostered through time spent apart. BN believes that without that individuation, a relationship cannot progress beyond infatuation, a state in which two people are committed to being like one another instead of with one another. Therefore, for him, it is important to have a balance between individuality and togetherness.

JM also believes that accepting the differences between partners is one of the hallmarks of intimacy.

I think me allowing him to be who he is and him allowing me to be me speaks a lot towards intimacy. We're very different people. He's very introverted. I exaggerate. He speaks exactly to the point, doesn't go off on tangents. Something like exaggerating when I'm telling a story will drive him crazy. And him not elaborating on something, I'm just "Meh, kinda boring". And I think it's just appreciating the other person and still loving the person...

Similar to TS, he finds that by spending time apart, he and his partner are able to develop a greater appreciation for one another. Because he and his partner are able to attain affirmation from other sources in addition to one another, he finds they are more able to enjoy the time spent together and, as a result, the intimacy between them grows.

CS and his partner often find their differences create conflicts within the relationship but these differences also have the benefit of stimulating growth in one another. The conflicts they experience together stimulate thought and compromise and as a result, CS and his partner find they learn from each other. This, in turn, serves to enhance the intimacy within the relationship. In addition to the differences between one another, CS has discovered that time spent apart from

his partner helps him to realize just how much his partner means to him. He finds that the only time he can truly comprehend how much his partner means to him is when they're separated. These examples demonstrate the importance of individuality for developing and maintaining an intimate relationship.

Growth: Changes in Self and Changes Within the Relationship

The concepts of growth and change figured prominently in the discussions of five of the six participants. As hinted at in the previous section, CS believes the individual differences between himself and his partner have served to stimulate individual growth within one another. For instance, CS considers himself to be lackadaisical in terms of appearance while his partner will spend hours debating what to wear. Because of the intimacy within their relationship, though, CS now finds himself taking better care of himself while his partner has relaxed somewhat. For him, part of being in an intimate relationship is learning from one another and growing together. This growth is also apparent in the development of their relationship as the two of them have learned to get through arguments spawned by their differences and this has served to strengthen the intimacy between them. In addition, when they began their relationship, both he and his partner were sexually naïve in that they had little previous experience. Yet, as their relationship developed, the two of them learned from each other and developed sexually.

Similarly, BN believes that growth is important for an intimate relationship. In comparing his current relationship to one in which he did not experience intimacy, he cites the lack of willingness to make the relationship grow as a major difference. For BN, physical and emotional attraction to a partner is what he considers the seed of intimacy but you have to work to help

that seed bloom and grow into a full fledged intimate relationship.

Like CS and BN, SL and his partner came out at roughly the same time together. As a result, the two of them were able to start their relationship at similar points and experience that coming out process together. SL believes this helped to strengthen the intimacy in their relationship and that continues to this day:

...the commitment and all that just grows and deepens the longer we're together and the more time we invest in each other. I mean, if there was a problem in our relationship now, I'd be more apt to work at it harder to get through it.

As the two experience growth both individually and together, the intimacy between them grows as well.

For TS, growth is essential for the survival of his intimate relationship. As differences emerged between he and his partner, the two found themselves at a rocky patch in their relationship. As a result, they sought counseling to help with the differences, the purpose of which was to allow the partners to continue their growth together while developing a greater appreciation and understanding of one another. Thus, as he and his partner become better at recognizing each other's needs, they find the intimacy within their relationship increases.

The link between growth and intimacy is perhaps even more apparent in the case of JM. By helping one another grow while, at the same time, maintaining the acceptance of each other, intimacy develops:

...it's like you wanna help the person become a better person and love the person at the same time. It's like you're trying to better yourself and I think that is very intimate for me that I can give that to him. And I feel the intimacy when he gives that to me and he doesn't judge me...

Thus, for these five participants, it becomes apparent that growth is an essential component of

the intimacy within their relationships.

Effort Required to Develop and Maintain Intimacy

All six participants recognize that in order to develop and maintain intimacy, effort is required. Despite feeling as if his relationship has done fairly well in spite of the lack of effort he and his partner have put into it, KG recounted several episodes in which he and his partner had to work through problems in order to continue their life together including a discovery that his partner was HIV+ and his partner's addiction to crystal methamphetamine.

TS, on the other hand, feels as if he has put a lot of effort into making the relationship work right from the start. Nonetheless, he feels as if his partner puts more into the relationship than he does and would like to be able to give more.

For CS, maintaining an intimate relationship involves working through problems and it takes effort for him to keep reminding himself that people fight and a single fight does not mean the end of the relationship.

Similar to TS, BN has also put in effort to make the relationship with his partner work right from the start and he believes that learning to work through arguments with one another strengthens the intimacy in his relationship. For him, intimacy involves maintaining a balance between the partners so that one person isn't left shouldering all the responsibility for the relationship. This helps to prevent burnout, as well. He feels that it is "inevitable your relationship can get stagnant so it's just rebuilding things and always trying things new".

Like the other participants, SL recognizes that you have to work at a relationship to keep it alive.

...things can get routine or consistent and you just kinda get into your groove and do your thing and may neglect the relationship a little bit for a while... And we live together so we see each other every day but just might get really busy with work... so realizing that "Hey, wait a second. It's been a few days since we've had time together" and either going for a movie or going for dinner or making dinner and realizing that "Hey, you know, you have to make that a priority"... If I feel like work's getting really busy for him and he hasn't been giving me much time or commitment, I'll mention something and say "Hey, you know, what's going on?" and let him know that I'm missing him...

Thus, for SL, reminding his partner how much he means to him helps to keep the intimacy in his relationship from declining.

Similar to SL, JM also works to maintain the intimacy in his relationship by reminding his partner why they're together. These reminders may take the form of spontaneous presents or simply saying "I love you" but for JM, it's important to keep each other at ease in times of stress, as well. The open communication he has with his partner allows him to know that his relationship is secure even during periods where he or his partner might be experiencing difficulties outside the relationship.

For each of these participants, it is clear that intimacy doesn't just spontaneously occur but rather it requires effort to both develop and maintain it.

Commitment to the Relationship

As hinted at in the previous section, all six participants indicated a commitment to work through differences and difficulties in their relationships. But the commitment in their relationships can be seen in other ways, as well. For instance, BN, SL, and KG all think of their relationships as being a partnership. In fact, thinking of themselves as partners itself is considered to be intimate for BN as he experiences more commitment in this relationship than he has in others. According to SL, "he's my partner and I care about him differently than I care

about anybody else in my life". Likewise, KG thinks of himself and his partner as a team, largely due to the intimacy he experiences in his relationship.

Commitment for CS also involves a degree of financial support for his partner. For him, it is intimate that he is willing to pay the rent for his partner as this implies a sense of commitment. But the commitment goes beyond the financial contributions, as indicated by CS's confidence that he and his would remain together even if the money were to run out.

Commitment in terms of monogamous relationships were also mentioned in the discussion of intimacy by JM and TS. According to JM, you can't "be truly intimate with someone unless you're committed solely to each other". Therefore, his partner is the only one for him and even in the early stages of the relationship, there was a commitment to stay together rather than to go shopping around for something better.

One aspect of commitment shared by all the participants was the belief in a future together. Despite never intending to be in a relationship for the rest of his life, BN now finds that he daydreams about a future together with his partner. Likewise, KG never thought this would be the only relationship he'd ever have but he now hopes it will last forever and he strongly associates that desire with intimacy. CS also wants to be in a relationship for the rest of his life, not just seven years or fourteen years and believes that is connected to the intimacy within his relationship. TS considers intimacy to involve planning for the future, as well.

I would judge intimacy too, running along the lines of how you see the future of the relationship. And I'm not 100% sure that (my partner's) the one until I die, that I wanna spend my life with. But we do talk about having kids and where we'll be, where we'll be in five (or) ten years in our relationship.

Similarly, JM and his partner are focused on creating a life together and see children in their

future as do SL and his partner, who see their relationship potentially lasting forever. Thus, for each of these participants, the commitment extends beyond the here and now to a distant point in the future and that belief in the future is strongly connected to their experience of intimacy.

Support

As trust developed in the relationships of the participants, they began to realize they could depend upon each other for support and this sense of support was also connected to their experience of intimacy. According to TS, his partner is his most important supporter and he recognizes that his partner depends on him as a primary source of support, as well. Likewise, KG indicated a belief that life is easier in pairs and that he knows he can depend on his partner to look out for him.

Most of the participants derive support from their partners in emotional terms and for SL, the strength of his relationship hinges on that support. "If he stopped supporting that means he stopped caring. And if he stopped caring, he stopped loving and if he stopped loving, you go your own ways, I guess". While SL depends upon that support for maintaining the intimacy within his relationship, BN feels that the support he provided his partner during the coming out process was largely responsible for bringing them closer together. CS also connected intimacy with emotional support in that he is willing to provide it for his partner whenever needed. Similarly, he knows his partner will respond in kind and he feels this strengthens the intimacy in their relationship. In addition to the emotional support, though, CS provides financial support for his partner.

...part of the intimacy in my relationship is my financial contributions. I'm not a cheap person... but I've carried a lot of the financial load over the last two years also. And I've been

a student so I can't really afford it. So I just borrow quite heavily. But for me, that's really a sign of commitment. There's not many people, maybe just some family members and (my partner) that I would do that for. So paying his rent, to me, is a sign of intimacy.

JM expressed a similar statement in that he feels the financial support provided by his partner as he finishes school is a sign of the love and intimacy within their relationship. Therefore, just as trust is important for intimacy to exist, it seems support can help that intimacy to grow and flourish.

Emotions Experienced in Relation to One's Partner

Emotions were perhaps the most commonly experienced aspect of intimacy mentioned by the participants. While TS indicated that he felt his relationship was quickly intimate in terms of the emotional bond shared with his partner, KG went even farther to say that he believes intimacy itself is "an emotional thing". Although numerous emotions were mentioned by the participants, this section will focus on five widely-shared sub-categories: love, acceptance-comfort-security, closeness, attraction, and happiness-contentedness.

Love. Love was strongly connected to intimacy for each of the six participants in this study. For instance, CS believes it is impossible to "have an intimate relationship with someone they don't feel any love for". And, for him, it goes beyond just thinking you love someone.

I try to love everyone but if I feel a sort of intimate connection to someone, my partner, friend, or sometimes it's even with people you've just met but you feel something... you actually feel it as opposed to think(ing) it.

Likewise, TS and his partner not only love each other but they feel that love constantly. BN also believes that love is a part of intimacy as does KG. KG admits that the love he feels for his partner now is deeper than anything he feels for his friends and that helps to differentiate his relationship from less intimate ones. He also claims that the love he feels for his partner today is

much greater than what he felt during the break in their relationship. Besides just feeling the love, SL claims that “it’s important to remind the person and to let them know that and to make them feel loved and secure and happy” in order to keep the intimacy going. And while JM loves his partner and knows his partner loves him every bit as much, he finds that love can be enhanced by spending time apart from one another.

Acceptance, comfort, and security. Closely connected to one another, the concepts of acceptance, comfort, and security were mentioned by all six participants in one form or another. These concepts were linked to intimacy most strongly by JM who claimed that intimacy was an unconditional love and complete acceptance of one another that allowed him to feel comfortable in the relationship. Similarly, BN indicated that “once you fully accept someone, I guess that’s when you’re at your most intimate point”. For TS, it is knowing that his partner cares and does not judge him that allows him to feel comfortable in his relationship and that sense of comfort was also a major indicator of the intimacy in the relationship between KG and his partner after the first year together. Knowing that his partner has no negative opinions of him not only allows KG to be naked in front of his partner, but it allows them to experience intimacy together. Likewise, CS draws comfort from his intimate relationship and SL believes it is important to make your partner feel secure for intimacy to exist.

Closeness. Although closeness was not mentioned by JM in his discussion of intimacy, KG believes that “if you’re intimate then, yeah, you’re close. As close as it gets”. CS expressed a similar viewpoint in that he believes “intimacy is a close emotional connection with another person”. Likewise, sharing experiences with his partner has brought SL and his partner closer

together and this has helped to enhance the intimacy in their relationship. BN noted that he and his partner developed a sense of closeness early on in their relationship, most likely as a result of the stigmatization he partner experienced at home while coming out. And TS feels he and his partner are extremely close, sometimes to the detriment of their relationship. He feels that spending time apart from one another could serve to make the moments they share more meaningful. Thus, despite not being mentioned by JM in his description, closeness figures prominently in the other participants' descriptions of intimacy.

Attraction. Once again mentioned by only five of the six participants, attraction seems to play a role in the experience of intimacy for these five participants. For instance, SL admitted to being attracted to his partner as he discussed what intimacy means to him. Likewise, KG claims to be drawn to his partner both physically and personally while CS finds himself drawn to his partner's physical appearance as well as his artistic nature. Although TS finds himself attracted to his partner for various reasons, he claims that chemistry was there right from the start and continues to this day. Finally, BN used the attraction he feels for his partner on both a physical and emotional basis to differentiate his current relationship from others in which he failed to achieve intimacy.

Happiness/contentedness. Although this category was generated from the interviews of only four of the six participants, it seems worthy of mention here as it was expressly linked to intimacy by these four participants. For instance, realizing that he and his partner had been together for over a year and were still a happy couple was considered to be an indicator of the intimacy in their relationship for KG. Likewise, his ability to experience happiness even while

being bored with his partner was used to demonstrate the difference between BN's current intimate relationship and others that were less intimate. SL notes that he and his partner make each other happy and that this happiness is part of the intimacy they share. Finally, CS claims to feel completely content when he's with his partner and this contentedness is demonstrated by the fact that they have not had sex with others outside their relationship, despite having an open relationship.

While other emotions (i.e. excitement, lack of frustration, and caring) were discussed by participants in reference to intimacy, the lack of commonality prohibits their elaboration here. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that there may be many other emotions connected to intimacy and this list is by no means exhaustive.

Physical Demonstrations of Intimacy

Physical demonstrations were connected to intimacy by all six of the participants in their interviews. These demonstrations can be separated into two sub-categories: displays of affection, included by all six participants in their description of intimacy and sacrifices made, noted by only three of the participants.

Displays of affection. Intimacy within the relationships of the participants was often demonstrated through various displays of affection. For instance, simple gestures like wishing his partner a happy day and calling during the day to check in were considered to be demonstrations of intimacy for TS. Likewise, a kiss on the cheek signified intimacy for KG, not just because of the gesture but because of the meaning behind it, which was different with his partner than with others he might kiss similarly. In BN's case, bestowing pet names on one another was a sign of

the developing intimacy in his relationship and actions such as cuddling, kissing, and hugging help to show the continued intimacy. Furthermore, being able to hug and kiss his partner in public was considered intimate for BN, perhaps as a result of the affirmation attained by doing it in front of others. BN also believes that these displays of affection serve to keep the relationship from becoming stagnant. In CS's case, physical displays of affection are even more strongly connected to intimacy as they serve to differentiate his intimate relationship from other, less intimate relationships.

...when I think about the difference between my relationship with my partner and say with a close friend, the physical aspect is often one of the major differences. I mean, I love some of my friends dearly, almost the same as I love my partner but he and I touch each other... (in a sexual aspect but also just non-sexual touching that I don't engage in with other people. For me, I think that's a big part of it. I'm not afraid or uncomfortable with being touched but unless I'm very close with a person, I generally don't touch them at all. And it's only with a very select few people, probably maybe four, that I will allow them to touch me.

Likewise, SL considers actions such as holding hands, snuggling, and kissing to be intimate not only because of who he engages in them with but also as a result of the meaning behind them.

...I kiss my mother and my sister and things like that but it's not (the same)... it's the mentality behind it I guess. It's just what you do as family members. But when it's with (my partner), there's more passion and there's all of the history behind it and our relationship and who we are together which makes that intimate...

In a similar vein, JM considers cuddling, spooning, and the eye contact that lasts just a little longer than it should to be intimate but touch itself can also be intimate. He believes it is not just the touch that is intimate but rather what is communicated by the touch. As a result, we see that these physical displays of affection are connected to intimacy for each of the participants.

Sacrifices Made. While explicitly referred to by only three participants in their discussion of intimacy, the relevance of this sub-category to intimacy makes its mention here necessary. For

CS, sacrificing himself is a sign of intimacy in that he is willing to do things for his partner that he neither enjoys nor would be willing to do for anyone else, just because he knows it will make his partner happy.

...maybe that's intimacy, that you're willing to suffer for them... I wouldn't say you do it gladly but you just really understand and accept that that's part of your connection. It's that you're willing to suffer in many ways for that person just to make them a little happier.

Both SL and JM recognize their willingness to make sacrifices for the happiness of their partner, as well. For SL, the decision to give up his job in Ontario and move to Vancouver so that his partner could take a job there was considered to be an intimate sacrifice. In JM's case, the decision to take time out of his busy schedule to wash his partner's car or do something similar was also considered to be intimate in that he sacrificed of himself to make his partner happy. Thus, while not mentioned by the other participants, it seems clear that making sacrifices for the happiness of one's partner is connected with the concept of intimacy for these three participants.

Sexuality

During their discussions of what intimacy means to them, the concept of sexuality came up in some form or another for each of the six participants. While most admitted that the popular conception of intimacy has been skewed toward the sexual side of it, all of them believed intimacy was more than just sex. According to JM:

I know for a lot of people their mind automatically races towards sex. And there is definitely the intimacy part about sex. But for me, it's not so much the sex itself and the being together but it's like the eye contact that lasts longer than it should or the... or even not in sex, like in the morning when you wake up and you both have the day off and it's like, you're cuddling and even after three years and it's like "God, I love this man so much".

BN expressed much the same sentiment in his description of the sexual component of intimacy:

...the sexual component is definitely a part (of intimacy). Being able to click with someone in that way. It's even a bit more than sex. Just lovemaking, the whole foreplay and cuddling and things afterwards. It's very bare and raw but it's not like whenever you're just having sex. It's good and hot and nice but when you have a partner, it's someone you love, I guess. It's more intimate. It's more special You know things about each other. You know what each other likes and that sort of thing...

Yet, despite agreeing in their beliefs that intimacy involves more than just the act of sex, participants were found to differ in their beliefs as to just how intimate the act of sex is itself.

Analyses of the interviews with each of the three participants involved in monogamous relationships showed that, for them, sex itself is highly intimate. When SL thinks about intimacy, right away he "think(s) of the more physical aspect, the sexual part. I mean, just being together, the two of us and having sex". Similarly, JM believes that sex is an expression of love, one which he shares only with his partner. He and his partner find themselves on the same page regarding monogamy and he detests open relationships, perhaps because of his belief that they do not work or as a result of his strict moral upbringing. BN, too, finds that sex with someone he loves is much more intimate and special, largely due to the familiarity and connection with one another. For these three participants, sex is something that is closely linked to the intimacy in their relationships.

Despite being in non-monogamous relationships, the sentiment expressed by BN finds its way into the description of intimacy for each of the other three participants, as well. For instance, TS and his partner will invite others into the bedroom in order to play together but will not have anal sex with any of these others. TS finds the sex with these other men, though, to be superficial and meaningless. Yet, it is precisely those characteristics that make TS grateful for what he has with his partner.

...because the sex seems so superficial with just somebody else. It's almost like this fear and yucky feeling afterwards, after an encounter with someone else. And then I feel closer to (my partner) emotionally after. Like I'm so grateful and I want to do more with (him). It's sort of like it's been a devastating experience, being with this other person. Meaningless too.

It may also be these characteristics that lead TS to disagree with fully open relationships, as he feels they are too destructive and non-committed for him to participate in.

Both KG and CS have open relationships with their partners, though. Expressing a sentiment similar to that espoused by TS, while KG believes having sex with other people is simply like having fun with someone else in the room, he finds the emotional content of sex is different with his partner.

...with me, it is different. He loves me and it's a more intimate, it's a more passionate thing. It's more specific to me whereas that act of having sex or whatever can be something not at all intimate... you can share it with people whose names you don't even know and never will know again, if you ever see them again. So it's not the same thing.

For CS, though, sex is just a physical relationship and after having sex hundreds of times with his partner over the years, he finds that it no longer inspires any passion or emotional connection.

The exception to this is when they have sex after being apart from one another.

...sex is more of a physical thing that's almost separate. I mean sometimes they come together, the sexual and the incredibly emotional side of it but that was probably a lot earlier. Like after seven years and having sex with someone hundreds of times and most of the time it's the same, I mean, it doesn't really inspire any passion or real emotional connection. It's just physical gratification. But every now and then, you do feel it. Usually it's when you're apart for a while, too, and you come back together and you realize how much you miss them and you're not just enjoying the sex, you're enjoying the person.

Given the differences between sex with their partners and sex with others, one might wonder why these three men choose to have non-monogamous relationships. According to TS:

...men are such sexual beings that you crave something new, fresh meat. But after a sexual encounter with another person... ironically, I find it strengthens intimacy, how I feel. I don't know how to describe it. The sex was so crazy and frightening and fun but all so instantly

gratifying and unmeaningful that I feel more drawn to the relationship and being with (my partner).

Likewise, CS recognizes that he values the emotional connection he has with his partner and does not want anything like that with other men. On the other hand, he desires new sexual experiences and physical gratification from time to time. Recognizing this need, he and his partner allow each other the freedom to satisfy these desires and, as such, find that an open relationship works better for them.

So it is apparent that while there are differences in participants' views about how intimate sex itself is, each of the participants recognizes that sex is only a part of intimacy. Nonetheless, it is an important part.

The Influence of Role Models

Whether participants have monogamous relationships or non-monogamous ones, it seems that many recognize the influence of role models in how they have shaped their intimate relationships. For instance, SL has always compared his relationship to those of heterosexual couples. He believes that it is important to stick with one person and as a result, he does not endorse cheating and would be hurt if his partner went home with someone else.

...I've always compared myself to heterosexual relationships and the norm growing up. I mean, you stick with one person and I definitely don't believe in cheating. And if that happened, that wouldn't be good. And he feels the same way. We've both had that discussion from very early on...

Similarly, JM was raised with a strongly religious upbringing and, as such, was indoctrinated with the belief that sex should be reserved for marriage. This belief remains with him today and even though he and his partner are not married yet, he does compare their relationship to that of a typical married couple. BN, too, believes it is normal to be in a monogamous relationship in spite

of failing to cite any specific role models for this belief.

On the other hand, KG has an open relationship with his partner but still admits the influence of his parents and grandparents in shaping the way he thinks about relationships.

...my grandparents have been together for a long time. My parents, even though they were nobody that I would hope to model much of myself off of cause they're alcoholics and my mother was not a mother... she left us many times... so I don't model myself much after them but I've often thought as much as they shouldn't have been parents maybe, they were a good couple. Like they seemed happy in their marriage despite the problems that were going (on) and they were together a very long time.

Thus, even though monogamy is not a priority in his relationship, KG does derive the concept of longevity from these models and has incorporated it into his experience of intimacy.

TS, while being in a non-monogamous relationship, still idealizes straight couples and gay couples that are monogamous. Despite his need for "fresh meat" from time to time, he feels that straight couples are more committed and wishes he and his partner could satisfy each other's needs without having to resort to playing with others. Even here, one can see how the influence of role models has served to shaped TS's and the other participants' idea of intimacy.

Overcoming Challenges in Developing Intimacy

Despite their success in developing long-term intimate relationships with their partners, each participant recognized that developing an intimate relationship presents certain unique challenges for men who are gay. Contrary to the implications of the previous section, a challenge mentioned by several of the participants relates to the lack of available role models for gay relationships.

According to JM:

...it's not having the role models to look up to and it's almost a very new thing where (my partner) and I can be committed and be out and be a loving monogamous couple. But it's like you're creating your own path and you're not really sure where to go...

Similarly, TS recognizes that a gay relationship is something you have to define on your own.

...we're so prepared to see how a straight relationship works but the gay thing is such a free for all. Gay relationships you have to define by yourself. And experiment with, trial by fire. Two men, it's a funny role. I mean, who's doing what? With a woman and a man, roles are sorta predetermined in a lot of ways but two men... oh yeah, it's trial by fire.

Another challenge faced by men who are gay in their quest for intimacy is the lack of support or acceptance from either family or society itself. In TS's case, many of his extended family do not know he is married to a man because he fears their disapproval. Similarly, KG not only feels unaccepted by his partner's family but was highly offended when his partner's cousin tried to set his partner up with someone else at the beginning of their relationship. JM also recognizes that the lack of support and recognition for his relationship is a tremendous challenge for developing intimacy.

...the way I was raised, that "It's wrong, it's wrong, it's wrong, it's wrong", and not getting support from family and not being recognized as me choosing to love this person and me being in an intimate relationship. I mean, as far as my entire nuclear and extended family (is concerned), it's a phase and they're gonna pray it away. And not getting support that way is a huge challenge.

In BN's case, though, the lack of acceptance by his partner's family presented both advantages and disadvantages for the development of his relationship.

...when I first met his parents, they thought automatically he had AIDS. You know, all those social stigmas right? They wouldn't allow him to share their drinks with his brothers and sisters. So that probably made him feel a bit closer to me as well.

In addition to resistance from outside of the gay community in recognizing the validity of their relationships, challenges are also faced from within the community itself. In JM's words:

...we're home owners and we're both focused on our career and we're thinking about having children. I mean, to a lot of the community, they're just like "Ugh, you want kids? Ugh! You wanna get married?". It's almost like a resistance, like we're viewed as if we're adopting a straight agenda. So you fight that all the time and we fight our familiars... it's very much

focusing on each other. So that part's difficult.

SL also found it difficult to develop intimacy but for other reasons. He found that many men who are gay were just after sex and believes that the word relationship is a scary one within the gay community. Likewise, KG admits to having found the concept of a long-term relationship to be frightening at first. TS, on the other hand, believes that men who are gay simply don't have as many "tools in their tool boxes" for developing intimate relationships. In CS's case, though, the challenge was even simpler: growing up in a small town limited his options for finding another gay man. Unfortunately, these examples demonstrate but a few of the challenges associated with developing intimacy for men who are gay.

The Different Levels and Forms of Intimacy

The idea that intimacy can exist in different forms and on different levels was mentioned by four of the six participants in this study. For instance, both JM and KG believe they have intimate relationships with select friends but, at the same time, do not feel that these relationships have the same depth of intimacy as the relationships they have with their partners. According to KG, the love he feels towards his friends is not as deep as the love he feels for his partner. Similarly, CS recognizes the possibility that close friendships could be intimate but he feels the physicality inherent in the relationship with his partner makes that relationship more intimate.

I guess a close friendship, you might say is more intimate than just a casual friendship because there's a certain level of compromise that you will make for them. Whereas just with acquaintances, you won't really budge much on issues. So in a way, close friendships are similar in many ways to my relationship. But probably the major way they differ is the physical touch aspect. That's one of the key differences between intimacy within a relationship and intimacy that you experience with other people.

SL also contrasts the intimacy some experience between siblings with the intimacy he feels with his partner.

...generally speaking, people who are monogamous, usually the relationship that they have with their partner or whatever is intimate, you know? They may define others as intimate but not as intimate. They may consider relationships with their siblings intimate. I choose not to define it as that but then they would say with their partner it's a deeper intimacy. It's a different level. It's a more physical...

Thus, it seems clear that in the eyes of these participants, intimacy is not an all or nothing concept. Rather, it can exist on various levels and in different forms.

Realistic Appraisals of the Intimacy Between Partners

Although the concept of realism was only mentioned by one of the six participants, it seemed so central to his experience of intimacy that it deserves mention here. For CS, part of intimacy is using your head and not just your heart and this may mean disputing the idea of love that many people have, that a relationship with someone you love should be good all the time. CS realizes that all relationships have their downturns and bad moments but he believes you have to have faith and believe that you will get through those problems. He indicated that most of the problems faced in his relationship come from outside the relationship itself and that even if he was single, he'd still be dealing with them. Having a partner, though, means that you don't have to deal with those problems by yourself. In addition, CS believes that his odds of meeting someone as physically attractive as his partner and finding them mutually compatible are slim. As such, he realizes that this relationship may be as good as it gets for him. Thus, for him, intimacy means using your head to keep matters in perspective.

Participants' Definitions of Intimacy

As part of this investigation into the meaning of intimacy, participants were asked to define

intimacy in their own words. Because of the lack of consensus in these definitions, this section has been included outside of the common themes mentioned by participants. Many of the participants considered intimacy to be a complex phenomenon. For instance, JM believes there are “a million different definitions” for intimacy. But for him, intimacy can be defined as a non-judgmental, unconditional love experienced in a committed relationship where there is complete acceptance of one another. TS’s definition differed somewhat in that he believes intimacy to be a sense of physical and emotional closeness characterizing relationships where there is high transparency between partners, trust and commitment. BN’s definition of intimacy highlights the holistic nature of it in that he believes intimacy to be a combination of physical, mental, and emotional attraction shared between partners that trust and communicate with one another. CS also indicated that intimacy involves a combination of elements including physicality, sexuality, and a close emotional connection to one’s partner. This close connection was also picked up upon by SL, who believes intimacy to be a close bond between partners who share sexuality with one another. For him, the intimacy he experiences in his relationship with his partner is unlike any other in his life. Finally, KG found it difficult to define intimacy but believes that it is “an emotional thing” that is not only significant but necessary for a long-term relationship to be successful.

As can be seen, each of these definitions highlight different aspects of intimacy. The variation in these definitions not only reflects the difficulties in defining intimacy but serves to reinforce the findings of this chapter. Thus, it should be clear to the reader that intimacy is truly a complex phenomenon which possesses many facets and components. The implications of the multi-

faceted nature of intimacy will now be considered.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Summary of Findings

As indicated in the previous chapter, the participants in this study clearly indicate that intimacy is a multi-faceted phenomenon. Among the facets mentioned is the idea that intimacy develops as a process. This process occurs over time and neither follows a set schedule nor exists as an all-or-nothing concept. Rather, as experienced by many of these participants, intimacy can manifest itself at different levels depending on the type of relationship and the experiences of those involved in the intimate relationship.

In addition to the idea of intimacy developing over time, participants indicated various components to their intimate relationships. Not only does the amount and quality of time spent together as partners enhance the intimacy in the eyes of these participants but it also allows for a high degree of openness, honesty, and trust to develop. The participants in this study clearly indicated that they know their partner better than most other people in their lives and this has allowed them develop a sense of commonality between themselves and their partners. Surprisingly, though, these participants indicated the similarities discovered between them manifested themselves more in terms of values and experiences rather than interests and activities enjoyed.

Despite the extensive time spent together with their partners, the men in this study also recognized the need for individuation in their relationship in order for intimacy to thrive. By pursuing individual interests outside of the relationship, these participants found they were less dependent on their partner to meet their needs and more able to contribute to the relationship

itself.

Another concept noted by the participants here included the idea of growth as being a part of intimacy, either within oneself or within the relationship. For some, the intimacy they share with their partners has allowed them to grow as individuals and to develop new insights and appreciations. For others, growth within the relationship is a necessary component for intimacy to exist. Without this growth, many of these participants would not have made it past the “honeymoon stage” of their relationship and may not have developed truly intimate relationships. It is clear, though, that this growth requires effort on the part of the participants in order to develop and maintain the intimacy in their relationships.

Inherent in the intimacy of the participants here is a sense of commitment to one another and to the relationship. The commitment in these relationships is not only manifested by the devotion to work through problems as they occur but by the belief in a future together of potentially infinite length. As such, the participants find that they are able to depend on one another for support and this support can be manifested in various ways including emotionally and financially.

According to these participants, intimacy is clearly an emotional phenomenon that includes the element of love. In addition to this sense of love, the partners experience acceptance, comfort, and security in one another as well as a feeling of intense closeness. Both physical and emotional attraction are a part of the intimacy shared between these participants as is a feeling of happiness or contentedness. These emotional components are often demonstrated through physical demonstrations of intimacy such as displays of affection and sacrifices made for the happiness of

one's partner.

For the men in this study, sexuality is certainly an important part of the intimacy they share with their partners but this does not always translate into a monogamous relationship. While some of the participants connected the act of sex directly to feelings of intimacy, others found sexual activity itself to be less important to their idea of intimacy than the deeper experience shared while making love. As such, the latter participants tend to have more open relationships while the former have strictly monogamous partnerships.

Despite the variation between couples in terms of monogamy, most of these men considered role models to be instrumental in the development of their idea of intimacy. Those who referred to modeling their relationship after others in their lives most often cited parental or family influences as central to their idea of intimacy but some mentioned friends or community members as being influential as well. Surprisingly though, the majority of influences discussed were heterosexual and the absence of homosexual models for intimate relationships was mentioned as a challenge to developing intimacy. Participants also mentioned a lack of family and community support as a barrier to developing an intimate relationship.

Relevance to Previous Research

Intimacy as a Multifaceted Phenomenon

As indicated by the participants in this study, intimacy is clearly a multifaceted phenomenon. While researchers in the 1980s and 1990s often linked intimacy to a single concept such as self-disclosure (Waring & Chelune, 1983; Wong, 1981) or closeness (Helgeson et al, 1987; Laurenceau et al, 1998; Reis et al, 1985), scientists today recognize that intimacy extends across

multiple domains. Given the plethora of research suggesting this, one wonders why Laurenceau et al (1998) would choose to define intimacy as “the extent to which the participants felt interpersonally close” (p. 1242) in their study of the effects of self-disclosure on feelings of intimacy. Despite the move towards recognizing intimacy as a complex phenomenon, it is evident that some researchers still equate intimacy with unitary constructs. This study continues to demonstrate the differences between intimacy and self-disclosure and closeness in that both concepts are shown to be a part of intimacy but recognizes that intimacy itself is a much larger concept.

It is interesting to note that virtually all of the themes uncovered in this study have also been mentioned in previous studies. As indicated, the link between self-disclosure or openness and intimacy has been demonstrated in countless studies and continues to be upheld. In addition, the connection between closeness or togetherness and the meaning of intimacy has been mentioned by Floyd (1998), Moss and Schewbel (1993), and Mackey and colleagues (2000), among others.

Monsour (1992) found trust to be an essential component of intimacy between friends and Floyd (1998) also included it as a category in her content analysis of intimacy as a research construct. Similarly, the men in this study consider trust to be an important element of the intimacy in their relationships.

The theme of independence was noted by Mackey et al (2000) as connected to intimacy and that theme continues to emerge as important in the present study. For these men, it is almost impossible to have an intimate relationship without a sense of self and maintaining intimacy in their relationship means maintaining that sense of self as well.

Commitment is another theme that has emerged in previous research on intimacy as well as in the study here. Moss and Schwebel (1993) found commitment to be yet another necessary component of intimacy while Floyd (1998) included it as a widely mentioned referent in her review of intimacy literature.

Emotions have long been connected with intimacy as numerous studies have included the concepts of liking or loving in their definitions for intimacy (i.e. Floyd, 1998; Lewis, 1978; Roscoe et al, 1987; Worth et al, 2002). Similarly, Moss and Schwebel (1993) referred to the awareness and communication of affect as one of their five components of intimacy while Monsour (1992) considered emotional expressiveness to be an ingredient of intimacy between friends. Yet the men in this study mentioned other emotions in connection with the meaning of intimacy. For them, feeling comfortable, secure, happy, contented, attracted, and close to one another also emerged as being relevant to their experience of intimacy. While closeness has already been mentioned in other contexts and comfort and security could be connected to commitment, the concept of physical and emotional attraction in relation to intimacy is somewhat new. Despite being linked to sexuality and romance itself, attraction can exist independent of these two concepts and it may be that an attraction to one another is sufficient for an intimate relationship to develop.

Demonstrations of affection have also been linked to intimacy in previous studies. As early as 1978, Lewis began relating emotional intimacy to physical indications of affection between individuals. Similarly, Moss and Schwebel (1993) included the awareness and communication of physical acts as one of their components of affection while Monsour (1992) connected physical

contact to intimacy between friends. On the other hand, Parks and Floyd (1996) found that a lack of physical expression of affection was one of the factors responsible for a lack of intimacy between the participants they studied. It seems that simply feeling affectionate toward one's partner is not enough for intimacy to be sustained. As indicated by the participants in this study, it is necessary to go beyond that and demonstrate that affection through physical acts or sacrificing oneself in order to keep the intimacy alive.

Finally, sexuality emerged as being an important part of intimacy both to men in this study as well as participants in previous research. For instance, Roscoe and colleagues (1987) found sexual interaction emerged as a theme in their research on intimacy as did Monsour (1992), despite looking at intimacy between friends. Similarly, Helgeson and colleagues (1987) found that sexuality was an important part of intimacy for the men in their research. On the other hand, Parks and Floyd (1996) cited the absence of sexuality or romance as a reason for the lack of intimacy between participants they studied. Thus, the finding that the men in this investigation consider sexuality to be important to their experience of intimacy can hardly be considered surprising. The connection between intimacy and monogamous sexual relations is somewhat more tenuous, though, and merits further discussion later in this paper.

In contrast to previous research, two themes emerged in the present study as new findings. The first to be discussed is similarities in values. Although previous research has indicated shared interests and activities to be important aspects of intimacy (Floyd, 1998; Helgeson et al, 1987; Monsour, 1992), the results of this study suggest that sharing interests and activities is less important to the development of intimacy than sharing values. In fact, many of the participants

reported finding their partner quite dissimilar in terms of interests and activities enjoyed but because of the similarity in core values, intimacy was able to develop and thrive. To the author's knowledge, no previous study has commented on this aspect of intimacy and it will be interesting to see if future research replicates this finding.

The second theme to emerge as novel in this study is that of growth. Once again, the author was unable to find any prior research indicating growth as an element of intimacy but it is clear that the participants here considered growth in themselves and growth in the relationship itself to be essential to their experience of intimacy.

Self-Disclosure/Openness and Intimacy

Consistent with a large body of previous research, self-disclosure has been upheld by this study as a necessary component for intimacy to occur. Although not labeled as such, the idea of self-disclosure is recognized in the theme of "openness, honesty, and the knowledge of one another". The participants in this study clearly recognize that it is important to know one's partner extensively for intimacy to develop and this occurs primarily through self-disclosure of both factual and affective information.

The link between self-disclosure or openness and intimacy has been supported by numerous other studies, as well. Timmerman (1991) considered it a necessary condition for an intimate relationship to occur. Floyd (1998) noted that it was, by far, the most common term used by researchers while referring to intimacy. Moss and Schwebel (1993) also considered the awareness and communication of both affect and cognitive material to be integral components of intimacy. On the other hand, Register and Henley found that only non-verbal communication emerged as a

theme in their phenomenological study on the meaning of intimacy. In contrast to this investigation, their study indicated that verbal self-disclosure did not emerge as a consistent theme. As noted in the literature review, though, participants were asked to discuss an intimate experience as part of the instructions. As a result of the vague instructions, some participants reported on experiences with both pets and God, neither of whom could be expected to respond verbally. It seems likely that the failure to mention verbal self-disclosure as a theme here is largely due to these instructions and, as a result, the finding cannot be considered reliable. Thus, the findings of the current study are upheld by previous literature in that self-disclosure or openness are clearly essential components of intimacy.

The Varying Levels of Intimacy

As mentioned by the participants in this study, the amount of intimacy experienced in a relationship seems to be influenced by the type of relationship and the experiences shared by the participants. Thus, the men in this study considered their relationship with their partners to be extremely intimate while relationships with siblings and friends were considered less intimate. Reasons cited for the difference include a lack of sexuality, a lack of physical contact, and lower levels of commitment and openness in less intimate relationships. These findings are consistent with Timmerman's (1991) claim that intimacy exists at different levels and is a quality of the relationship, not the individual

In a similar vein, Parks and Floyd (1996) attempted to differentiate closeness and intimacy and found that closeness was a broader concept than intimacy. Among the reasons cited for a lack of intimacy in their friendships, participants reported the absence of sex and romance as a prime

reason as well as insufficient self-disclosure, insufficient closeness, failure to express affection physically, and insufficient time spent together. In support of this argument, it is interesting to note that the participants in the present study included each of these concepts as part of their meaning of intimacy. Rather than considering friendships to be non-intimate, though, it may be more apt to consider them as less intimate than romantic relationships in that the necessary components for intimacy exist at different levels in friendships than in romantic relationships.

As the literature review indicates, previous research has focused on investigations of intimacy in romantic relationships, friendships, and sibling relationships, often suggesting differences in the type of intimacy depending on the type of relationship. Timmerman's finding, the research by Parks and Floyd, and the findings of the current study suggest, though, that intimacy is a continuous construct, one that exists at different levels rather than in different forms. Thus, rather than constructing typologies of intimacy as Wong (1981) attempted to do, it may be more prudent to examine the aspects of intimacy that occur at different levels depending on the type of relationship in question. As such, friendships, sibling relationships, and romantic relationships could be considered to exist at different points along the intimacy continuum rather than being distinct entities.

Love, Monogamy, and Intimacy

In 2002, Worth, Reid, and McMillan interviewed twenty men in New Zealand to assess their notions of monogamy, trust, and sexual behavior in their intimate relationships. As a result of their analysis, it was concluded that these men had a highly conceptualized notion of intimacy, strongly connected to the idea of romantic love. It was also concluded that the majority of men

in their study preferred monogamous relationships but doubted their ability to sustain a monogamous gay relationship. The results of the current study both support and refute the arguments made by Worth and colleagues. For instance, the concept of love emerged as a vital aspect of intimacy for the men in both studies but the connection between monogamy and intimacy was less clearly defined. While three of the six participants here strongly emphasized monogamy and trusting one's partner to be faithful in their experience of intimacy, the other three participants had open relationships in which partners were allowed to experience sexuality with men outside the relationship. For these participants, monogamy was evidently not a necessary component for intimacy to occur, despite TS's belief that monogamous relationships are more intimate than non-monogamous ones. Each of these three participants managed to sustain long-term intimate relationships without the condition of monogamy. Although Worth and colleagues do not state that monogamy is necessary for intimacy to occur between men who are gay, they do assert that it is strongly desired. It would seem the results of this study contradict this finding to some degree in that at least two of the participants are quite satisfied in having a non-monogamous relationship. Indeed, having an open relationship without having acted upon the desire for extra-relational sex has shown CS just how contented he is with his current relationship. This, in turn, has served to strengthen the intimacy in his relationship. Thus, it appears that monogamy is not a pre-requisite for intimacy. Although the reason for this remains uncertain, it is possible that men who are gay already find themselves outside societal norms. As such, they feel less constrained by traditional models of marriage and monogamy and, therefore, are more willing to experiment with other relationship types. For them, the leap to extra-

relational sex may be less shocking than it would be in the confines of a traditional relationship. This concept fits with the primary author's experience, as well. Despite TS's assertion that men have higher sex drives and less of a draw towards commitment, many lesbian couples known by the primary author also show a tendency towards open relationships. Because of this, it is my assertion that gender may have less influence on monogamy than sexual orientation. It is more likely that because societal norms are less relevant to men and women who are gay that this population finds themselves more receptive to the possibility of maintaining an intimate relationship that is not monogamous.

Men and Intimacy

Connected to the previous section, and in particular to the argument made by TS, this section looks at the claim that men are less able or less inclined to be intimate. It has long been asserted that men and women either experience intimacy differently or have different abilities to be intimate. For instance, Williams (1985) found that men were less likely to confide in one another, to openly express feelings, to demonstrate affection, to emphasize mutual understanding and responsibility, or to discuss personal issues with same-sex friends. Similarly, Reis et al (1985) found that males tended to be less intimate in same-sex interactions and suggested that males are less inclined to be intimate with one another. While the present study does not purport to examine sex differences in intimacy, it visibly shows that men who are gay are extremely capable of being open, trusting one another, and demonstrating affection. In addition, intimacy is shown to be an important part of the lives of these men. Perhaps these findings failed to emerge in the two prior studies because of the focus on intimacy in friendships or because the definition of

intimacy was confused with either self-disclosure or closeness. In any event, this study suggests that men who are gay are not only capable of experiencing intimacy but experience it in many of the same ways women do. In addition, while I recognize that the sample in this study is made up of men who are gay, I believe the findings can be extended to men, in general. It is my belief that men, whether gay or straight, value many of the same aspects of intimacy and this paper not only speaks to intimacy between men who are gay but to intimacy as experienced by men, in general.

Measuring Intimacy and Other Directions for Future Research

As this and other research suggests, intimacy is a complex phenomenon. It stands to reason then that measuring intimacy in relationships would also be a complex task. Although several instruments have been developed to assess levels of intimacy, some question remains as to how effective each individual instrument is. A study by Hook, Gerstein, Detterich, and Gridley (2003) began to address this problem by administering three popular measures of intimacy to undergraduate students in an attempt to determine if the measures assessed four commonly associated components of intimacy: love/affection, trust, self-disclosure, and personal validation. Their results showed that neither the Miller Social Intimacy Scale (Miller & Lefcourt, 1982), the Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships Scale (Schaefer & Olson, 1981), nor the Fear of Intimacy Scale (Descutner & Thelen, 1991) managed to capture all four elements individually, although some success was shown when used as a battery. The results of the present research show that intimacy involves numerous factors, even beyond the four assessed by Hook et al (2003). Therefore, it may be that no single instrument existing today effectively measures all the

essential parts of intimacy effectively. As a result, it is important that researchers and practitioners interested in measuring intimacy for whatever reason recognize that various scales and measures may assess some aspects of intimacy more accurately than others while some components might fail to be assessed altogether. Thus, it seems incumbent upon the research community to develop newer, more accurate measures of intimacy that reflect its multidimensional nature.

This qualitative analysis of intimacy between men who are gay is intended as a launching point for further research in the area. For instance, it would be interesting to see how widely each of the themes mentioned here are endorsed by a larger population and to what degree they contribute to intimacy as a whole. Once a more solid and complete understanding of all the components of intimacy has been established, accurate measures of intimacy can be developed and differences in expressions of intimacy as a result of demographic variables can begin to be assessed and understood. In order to do so, though, researchers need to establish a common reference point for what intimacy is. It is hoped that the research covered here will provide a basis for that reference point.

Challenges to Developing Intimacy Between Men Who Are Gay

Despite demonstrating that men who are gay are indeed capable of developing and maintaining intimate relationships, the participants in this study assert that establishing intimacy between men who are gay can present challenges beyond those experienced by the heterosexual community. Two of the primary challenges involve a lack of available role models and a lack of support for gay relationships by family and community members. In the author's opinion, these

challenges are highly interrelated.

Because of continuing homophobia in various communities around the world, men who are gay often find themselves stigmatized by family, friends, and colleagues upon revealing their sexual orientation. As a result, many men refrain from disclosing their sexual orientation to others. Those who remain "in the closet" may find it next to impossible to meet other men with whom they can develop relationships, particularly during adolescence, a period in which Erikson (1963) considers intimacy a crucial need. Without these formative experiences, some men may continue onto adulthood without the necessary skills for being intimate with one another, thus perpetuating the problem. This could be one reason why the author continues to witness men in their thirties, forties, and beyond still attempting to overcome this developmental task by dating men many years their junior. It is the author's belief that these men are fixated on capturing something they never had themselves at that age and, as a result, have never been able to accomplish this defining developmental task. Without the necessary skills for developing intimate relationships, these men are forever stuck and, as a result, prone to loneliness, depression, and self-destructive behaviors.

In addition, because of homophobic attitudes, many men that are able to establish relationships with one another are often reluctant to divulge the nature of their relationships, sometimes referring to their partners as roommates or friends in front of others. Men who are gay that manage to be intimate together but keep their relationships out of the realm of public knowledge rob others of the affirmation that can be attained by witnessing successful relationships. Although their behavior is understandable in a sense, given the difficulties they

potentially face, the secrecy has the effect of maintaining this unfavorable climate. As the public begins to view men who are gay as being more than just sexual beings, though, understanding and tolerance can be increased. In addition, younger men who are gay can find hope in seeing others who have found happiness in the arms of one another. For some, this may have the effect of making it easier to come out of the closet and to experience other men as loving, caring beings with whom they can find the affirmation needed to develop their personal identity to the next level.

Practitioners working with men who are gay that struggle with intimacy needs may find it helpful to have role models at their disposal. Not only will these men begin to see intimacy as a real possibility but they may also benefit from the knowledge shared by the role models. This idea has been put into place in at least one location known by the authors. In Vancouver, Canada, the Generations Project aims to connect younger men and women who are gay with older counterparts in an attempt to share knowledge and understanding. It is hoped that these connections will allow for greater support and understanding across generations and the development of healthy interpersonal relationships within the gay and lesbian community. Initiatives such as these may be of use to practitioners in other cities, as well.

As gay and lesbian youth begin to see relationships with one another affirmed and recognized as valid, they may find it easier to develop similar relationships, thus overcoming one of the major developmental tasks of their lives. In addition, as these relationships become more and more common, the climate towards men and women who are gay should begin to change. This is happening already as countries across the world begin to recognize gay and lesbian partnerships

as not only legally binding but as morally valid, as well. It is important, though, that this momentum continue. It is hoped that the findings discussed here will allow practitioners to explore issues of intimacy in a more respectful and effective manner than previously possible, not only with men who are gay but with men in general. In addition, by building upon the research here, it is expected that men and women who are gay will find it possible to understand and develop intimacy to a degree never before seen and, as a result, a substantial segment of the population may find happiness where previously they found only despair.

References

- Berscheid, E., & Reis, H.T. (1998). Attraction and close relationships. In D.T. Gilbert, S.T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (4th ed., Vol. 1, p. 391-445). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Creswell, J.W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design. Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Deenen, A.A., Gijs, L., & van Naerssen, A.X. (1994). Intimacy and sexuality in gay male couples. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 23, 421-431.
- Descutner, C.J., & Thelen, M.H. (1991). Development and validation of a fear-of-intimacy scale. *Psychological Assessment*, 3, 218-225.
- Dindia, K. & Allen, M. (1992). Sex differences in self-disclosure: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 112, 106-124.
- Duck, S.W. & Wright, P.H. (1993). Re-examining gender differences in same-gender friendships. A close look at two kinds of data. *Sex Roles*, 28, 1-19.
- Erikson, E. (1963). *Childhood and Society* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: W.W. Norton.
- Floyd, K. (1995). Gender and closeness among friends and siblings. *Journal of Psychology*, 129, 193-202.
- Floyd, K. (1998). Intimacy as a research construct. A content analytic review. *Representative Research in Social Psychology*, 22, 28-32.
- Giddens, A. (1992). *The transformation of intimacy: Sexuality, love, and eroticism in modern societies*. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press.
- Helgeson, V.S., Shaver, P., & Dyer, M. (1987). Prototypes of intimacy and distance in same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 4, 195-233.
- Heller, P.E. & Wood, B. (1998). The process of intimacy. Similarity, understanding, and gender. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 24, 273-288.
- Hook, M.K., Gerstein, L.H., Detterich, L., & Gridley, B. (2003). How close are we? Measuring intimacy and examining gender differences. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 81, 462-472.

- Kurdek, L.A. (1991). Correlates of relationship satisfaction in cohabitating gay male and lesbian couples. Integration of contextual, investment, and problem-solving models. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61, 910-922.
- Kurdek, L.A. (1998). Relationship outcomes and their predictors. Longitudinal evidence from heterosexual married, gay male cohabitating, and lesbian cohabitating couples. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, 553-568.
- LaSala, M.C. (2004). Extradyadic sex and gay male couples. Comparing monogamous and nonmonogamous relationships. *Families in Society*, 85, 405-412.
- Lauer, R.H., Lauer, J.C., & Kerr, S.T. (1990). The long-term marriage. Perceptions of stability and satisfaction. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 31, 189-195.
- Laurenceau, J-P., Feldman Barrett, L., & Pietromonaco, P.R. (1998). Intimacy as an interpersonal process. The importance of self-disclosure, partner disclosure, and perceived partner responsiveness in interpersonal exchanges. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74, 1238-1251.
- Lewis, R.A. (1978). Emotional intimacy among men. *Journal of Social Issues*, 34, 108-121.
- Lippert, T. & Prager, K. (2001). Daily experiences of intimacy. A study of couples. *Personal Relationships*, 8, 283-298.
- Mackey, R.A., Diemer, M.A., & O'Brien, B.A. (2000). Psychological intimacy in the lasting relationships of heterosexual and same-gender couples. *Sex Roles*, 43, 201-227.
- Maslow, A. (1968). *Toward a psychology of being* (2nd ed.). New York, NY. Van Nostrand.
- Miller, R.S., & Lefcourt, H.M. (1982). The assessment of intimacy. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 46, 514-518.
- Monsour, M. (1992). Meanings of intimacy in cross- and same-sex friendships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 9, 277-295.
- Moss, B.F. & Schwebel, A.I. (1993). Defining intimacy in romantic relationships. *Family Relations*, 42, 31-37.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage.
- Orosan, P.G. & Schilling, K.M. (1992). Gender differences in college students' definitions and perceptions of intimacy. *Women & Therapy*, 12, 201-212.

- Parks, M.R. & Floyd, K. (1996). Meanings for closeness and intimacy in friendship. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 13, 85-107.
- Popovic, M. (2005). Intimacy and its relevance in human functioning. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 20, 31-49.
- Prager, K.J. (1995). *The psychology of intimacy*. New York, NY. Guildford Press.
- Register, L.M. & Henley, T.B. (1992). The phenomenology of intimacy. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 9, 467-481.
- Reis, H.T., Senchak, M., & Solomon, B. (1985). Sex differences in the intimacy of social interaction. Further examination of potential explanations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 48, 1204-1217.
- Reis, H.T. & Shaver, P. (1988). Intimacy as an interpersonal process. In S.W. Duck et al (eds), *Handbook of personal relationships*, Chichester. Wiley.
- Rogers, C.R. (1951). *Client-centered therapy. Its current practice, implications, and theory*. Boston, MA. Houghton Mifflin.
- Roscoe, B., Kennedy, D., & Pope, T. (1987). Adolescents' view of intimacy. Distinguishing intimate from nonintimate relationships. *Adolescence*, 22, 511-516.
- Schaefer, M.T., & Olson, D.H. (1981). PAIR: Personal assessment of intimacy in relationships. Procedure manual and item booklet.
- Timmerman, G.M. (1991). A concept analysis of intimacy. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 12, 19-30.
- Waring, E.M. & Chelune, G.J. (1983). Marital intimacy and self-disclosure. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 39, 183-190.
- Wertz, F.J. (2005). Phenomenological research methods for counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52, 167-177.
- Williams, D.G. (1985). Gender, masculinity-femininity, and emotional intimacy in same-sex friendship. *Sex Roles*, 12, 587-600.
- Wong, H. (1981). Typologies of intimacy. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 5, 435-443.

Worth, H., Reid, A., & McMillan, K. (2002). Somewhere over the rainbow. Love, trust and monogamy in gay relationships. *Journal of Sociology*, 38, 237-253.

Appendix B: Consent Form



Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology
and Special Education
Faculty of Education
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4

Main Office
Tel: (604) 822-8229
Fax: (604) 822-3302

Program Areas

Special Education

School Psychology

Measurement, Evaluation
& Research Methodology

Human Learning,
Development,
& Instruction

Counselling Psychology
Tel: (604) 822-5259
Fax: (604) 822-2328

The Meaning of Intimacy For Men Who Are Gay

The purpose of this study is to explore the meaning of intimacy for men who are gay. In order to answer this question, we are interviewing men who identify themselves as being part of the mainstream gay culture and are:

- between the ages of 25 and 35
- Caucasian
- raised within Canada or the United States
- currently in a relationship that has lasted at least 2 years.

If any of these qualifications do not apply to you, please let us know immediately so we may excuse you from the study.

In this study, you will be asked to reveal what intimacy means to you and how your current relationship differs from other non-intimate relationships. You have been asked to participate in this study because we feel your participation will help us to answer the question of what intimacy means for gay men. Your participation in this study will involve two interviews. The first interview will take approximately 90 minutes and during this interview you will be asked to discuss your views on the meaning of intimacy. The second interview will take place approximately 3-4 months later and will require approximately 30 minutes. In this interview, you will be presented with our analysis of the data provided by participants so that you have the opportunity to correct any errors we may have made.

By participating in this study, it is expected that you will gain a clearer understanding of what intimacy means in your current relationship. In addition, you will be given the opportunity to read the results of this study, thereby gaining insight into the ways other gay men think about intimacy. Although we believe participation in this study presents little risk to you, it is important to understand that you will be asked to discuss a topic that is personal and perhaps sensitive. As a result, you will be presented with a list of affordable and available counseling resources prior to beginning the study. These will be available for you to consult in the event that you encounter any emotional distress as a result of your participation in this study.

Any information you provide to us regarding your identity will be kept strictly confidential. Recordings and transcripts of the interview will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and will be accessible only by the interviewer and the principal investigator. In reporting the results of this study, pseudonyms will be used so as to preserve the identity of all participants. Finally, you will be given an opportunity to read the results of this study. At this time, you will have the opportunity to modify or remove any information that you believe could lead to your identification.

You may decline to participate in this study, stop the interview, or withdraw your data from this study at any time without penalty.

This study is being conducted by David Loran (co-investigator) as part of a Masters Thesis in the Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology at the University of British Columbia

Appendix C: Orienting Question

In this study, we are interested in what intimacy means to you. Using your current relationship as a reference point, we'd like you to tell us, in your own words:

- How you think intimacy is defined.
- What thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are involved in your perception of intimacy.
- What makes your relationship an intimate one.
- What is it about the other relationships in your life that makes them non-intimate ones.

For the purposes of this investigation, it is important that you describe your answers to these questions as completely as possible, including as much detail as you can. Thank you.

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

- What does intimacy mean to you?
- What makes your current relationship an intimate one?
- Are there specific *thoughts or feelings* that you associate with intimacy?
- Are there specific *behaviors* that you consider intimate?
- Are there other intimate relationships in your life?
 - How are they *similar to* your current relationship?
 - How are they *different from* your current relationship?
- Do you have relationships in your life that you *would not* consider intimate?
 - What makes your current relationship *different from* these non-intimate relationships?

Appendix E: Situated Structures of Intimacy

BN

According to BN, intimacy is a relational quality that begins with an initial spark of excitement and grows into a full fledged healthy relationship. When referring to his current relationship, he notes that he knew early on that his partner was everything he was looking for in a relationship as he had learned from previous attempts at intimacy what was important and necessary for him to be able to develop a truly intimate relationship.

One of the components BN cites as being important for intimacy is similarity between partners. As he and his partner spent time together, they quickly learned that they shared many goals in common, including those related to education, career, and relationship. In addition, he and his partner were able to share their experiences of coming out which helped to enhance the intimacy in the relationship. As time passed, the two of them found themselves spending more and more time together to the extent that he began to think of themselves as two overlapping circles, where the overlap represented their lives together and the area outside this overlap signified the individuality they maintain.

For BN, it is essential to have a sense of self in order to participate in an intimate relationship. This sense of self is necessary for stability in the relationship and for each partner to be able to contribute to the relationship. While both he and his partner have tailored their behaviors to be more in line with one another, BN recognizes that their fundamental individual nature has not changed. In fact, he cites the loss of self as the core aspect of infatuation while intimacy requires a maintaining of the self while being committed to the relationship. This

commitment is signified by their thinking of themselves as partners invested in a relationship which allows them to daydream of a future together, and while BN never intended to be with one person for the rest of his life, it is clear that he believes this relationship could last forever.

In order to achieve this goal and to maintain and enhance intimacy within their relationship, communication is necessary for the partners to overcome differences and arguments between them. This communication allows the partners to create equality within the relationship and to maintain this balance over time, which is thought to contribute to the intimacy of the relationship. Part of the balance includes providing support for one another, either through financial contributions or contributions to maintaining the household, such as cleaning, cooking, and other chores.

As time progresses, BN finds himself trusting in his partner to do what's best for the relationship and not just himself and this has helped to create a sense of faith that the relationship will continue to grow and that the two of them will be able to overcome any difficulties they face. Maintaining an intimate relationship requires effort, though, and simple displays of affection like kissing, hugging, and bringing home surprises for one another help to keep the intimacy going.

When considering some of the emotions connected with intimacy, BN indicates that physical and emotional attraction and love are strongly associated. Others include contentedness, closeness, enjoyment of togetherness, a sense of connection, caring, respect, and continued excitement within the relationship. For BN, it is important to be able to display these emotions at home as well as in public. Being affectionate with his partner in public is a very intimate

feeling for BN as it both affirms the relationship and creates a sense of security, knowing that he will not be rebuked if he attempts to show affection towards his partner in a public setting.

While BN acknowledges that intimacy comprises more than just sex, he notes that the sex with his partner is definitely a part of intimacy. Yet, it involves more than just the act of sex; it includes the foreplay, cuddling, and feelings of love all connected with the act. In addition, the knowledge of each others likes and dislikes in the sexual arena is considered by BN to be intimate. Both BN and his partner believe in monogamy and BN has always thought it normal to be in a monogamous relationship. Although the two haven't formalized the agreement, an unwritten contract exists in which the two of them agree to be monogamous with each other.

Developing an intimate relationship with his partner has not always been an easy task for BN, though. Following an introduction to his partner's family, BN found himself faced with a partner who was stigmatized by his family. The partner's family automatically assumed BN and his partner must have AIDS as they were involved in a gay relationship but ironically, this stigmatization pushed BN's partner closer to him as he provided a refuge from the family environment. This is one reason why BN believes it is important to publicly affirm the intimacy within their relationship.

Although BN believes this to be his first truly intimate relationship, he mentioned previous experiences with both a girlfriend and other men he dated. Despite being involved in the relationship with his girlfriend for over six years, he never felt intimate with her. Reasons for this included the fact that he was pushed into the relationship by his friends, the lack of effort put into making the relationship work and grow, and the lack of physical attraction to her. When

comparing his other relationships with men who are gay, he noted a lack of intimacy there, as well, perhaps due to the lack of attraction on his part in some instances and feelings of frustration and doubt in others where he mistook simple attraction for genuine intimacy.

When asked to define intimacy, BN indicates that it is a holistic quality of a relationship that involves a physical, mental, and emotional attraction to his partner. He believes this quality has to be shared but concedes it may be possible to feel intimate towards someone without that feeling be returned. Genuine intimacy for BN, though, involves a mutual connection between partners that involves both trust and communication.

CS

For CS and his partner, as for other participants, developing intimacy was a process that occurred over time. Although CS and his partner consider their relationship to have started the first time they kissed, it took weeks before they said they loved each other. For CS, this was a turning point which signified the increasing intimacy in his relationship. Following this emotional recognition, their relationship became increasingly sexual which led, in turn, to increased intimacy. It was this intimacy that allowed them to take on experiences and struggles together such as moving in with one another and moving to different cities.

Although CS and his partner are similar in that they both grew up in a small town and are the same age, the two are very different people. Their oppositeness often leads to conflict within the relationship but managing these conflicts and recognizing that most of them are based outside the relationship itself has helped CS to feel more intimate with his partner. In fact, their relationship has allowed CS to experience growth without feeling as if his fundamental nature has changed. In

fact, he recognizes that there is a need to maintain your identity within an intimate relationship and claims to dislike individuals who enter relationships and become different people.

CS considers his intimate relationship to be a lifetime commitment and remarked several times throughout the interview that he does not want to be in a relationship for the short term but rather forever. He claims to have faith in the relationship's ability to survive outside influences such as extra-relational sex and conflicts brought on pressures beyond the relationship itself. His commitment extends to support his partner both emotionally and financially, as needed, and recognizes that his partner would be willing to do the same should their situations be reversed. Yet, for CS, this support involves a sense of risk in that he has had to borrow heavily in order to be able to support his partner financially. He feels his monetary contributions are a direct indication of the intimacy in the relationship as it ups the level of commitment to his partner and he realizes that the relationship could fail, especially given the statistics concerning relational success. Nonetheless, he trusts in their ability to maintain the relationship.

For CS, maintaining intimacy is a balancing act between emotional involvement and rational thought. He believes many people have a romantic notion of love that includes the belief that a relationship should be good and enjoyable all the time. In reality, though, intimacy requires working with what's presented and recognizing that every relationship will have its bad moments. By using his head and reminding himself that people do fight, CS finds himself willing to work through problems between himself and his partner and this has given him faith in their ability to weather stormy periods. In fact, he finds that his relationship is often helpful in dealing with the problems presented to him as he has additional support from his partner. In reality, it is easier

for him to cope knowing that he is not alone. CS also claims to doubt his ability to find someone better than his current partner and this seems to maintain his commitment to the relationship.

Part of the intimacy within CS's relationship is the growth both he and his partner have shared. As the two of them were somewhat naive sexually when they first met, the relationship allowed them to learn together about sexuality. In addition, the personality differences between himself and his partner have allowed CS to begin to appreciate different points of view, to take more concern in his appearance, and to pay more attention to detail. He also notices complementary changes in his partner, such as a more relaxed demeanor. The two of them seem to enhance each other and this seems to be an ingredient of intimacy for CS.

As with all other participants, CS remarked on the emotions connected with intimacy. Love is an essential ingredient for intimacy in CS's opinion as he believes it is impossible to have an intimate relationship with someone you don't love. This extends beyond simply thinking you love someone but rather feeling that love within you. CS also pointed out the happiness and comfort he feels with his partner and finds himself attracted and drawn to both the physical and personal attributes of his partner (i.e. his partner's artistic, creative, and emotional sides). There is a connection and emotional attachment between the two that allows them to feel closeness that is especially apparent when they are separated. CS finds it difficult to sleep when his partner is gone and misses his partner intensely when they are separated. The two find themselves content with each other and this is reflected in the fact that they have not had sex outside the relationship despite considering themselves to be in a sexually open status.

Certain behaviors were also considered indicative of the intimacy between CS and his partner.

Both sexual and non-sexual touching were at the top of the list as CS only feels comfortable engaging in touch with people he feels a certain degree of closeness with. To hug or kiss someone he does not feel this closeness with would demean what he has with more intimate relationships, in his opinion. Therefore snuggling and hugging are considered very intimate behaviors for CS. CS also finds that he is more likely to do things for his partner that he does not enjoy (i.e. cooking cleaning, and giving massages), simply because he knows these activities will bring his partner happiness or make his partner's life easier. CS believes it is intimate to sacrifice or suffer for someone you love.

In terms of sexuality, CS notes that the popular definition of intimacy has been linked to sex but he finds that sex is one of the weakest sides of his relationship. Despite the initial exploration of sexuality together, the amount of sex the two have has declined over the years. Yet, CS still considers his relationship to be intimate as it is not the sex, per se, that is intimate but rather the emotional and physical connection involved in the act. As mentioned previously, CS and his partner provide each other with the permission to have sex outside the relationship but neither has taken advantage of it, a fact that shows CS how content the two are with each other. He believes this open status has allowed the two of them to be more honest and open with each other and has taken away the need to lie or cheat on one another. Because CS and his partner do not use condoms, he trusts that his partner will be honest with him about sexual activities with others, particularly as his physical health could be put at risk.

CS also noted several challenges associated with developing an intimate relationship including a lack of opportunity to meet other men who are gay in his hometown. He also cited a lack of

family support for his relationship by both sets of parents. Neither CS nor his partner found themselves particularly welcome in each other's homes which made it difficult for them to be sexually active. This presented a particular challenge as they were forced to find other places to be with each other.

In defining intimacy, CS remarked that intimacy was a conflagration of all the physical, emotional, and sexual aspects of a relationship which allow for a close emotional connection. He notes that there may be levels of intimacy which are affected by the physical nature of the relationship and that the level of compromise and sacrifice are higher in relationships that are more intimate.

JM

Similar to other participants' reports, JM notes that the intimacy in his relationship developed over time beginning with a single date and progressing to the point where he and his partner live together and share a life together. Although JM and his partner knew early on that they wanted the same thing in terms of a monogamous intimate relationship, there were two turning points that allowed JM to recognize the growing intimacy within the relationship. The first of these turning points was the decision to move in with his partner and to stay there, even though the move had been considered temporary at first. The second was an introduction to his partner's family. In introducing JM to his family, the partner demonstrated a willingness to be vulnerable on JM's behalf and it was at this point that JM knew he could also let his guard down and enjoy the intimacy that had developed between the two of them.

As indicated, JM and his partner spend extensive time with each other. While JM might

separate himself from his friends at some point, he and his partner live together and their lives are intertwined to the degree that the two are intimately aware of each other's faults. Nonetheless, the two of them are committed to understanding each other and are forthcoming about their relationship as JM believes communication is essential for intimacy.

Although JM believes he and his partner are different people, he also believes that intimacy comes from appreciating those differences and accepting the other for who they are. As such, they allow each other a degree of privacy and trust each other with that privacy. JM finds that the time they spend apart from one another allows for other perspectives to emerge and an increased appreciation for his partner to develop. In addition, JM is able to obtain other sources of input and affirmation which makes him less dependent on his partner and more able to enjoy the intimacy in the relationship.

Both JM and his partner are focused on each other and have experience a degree of commitment from the very beginning of the relationship. Both knew that they wanted a monogamous intimate relationship and rather than trying to find something better, they worked on creating a life together. This life together involves planning for the future both in terms of career and having children. JM believes that he and his partner will be together forever and that his partner is the only one for him. In fact, JM believes that in order for true intimacy to emerge, there must be a sole commitment to one another involving an acceptance of each other to the point where they know they can live with each others faults. This commitment is made clear through their desire to work through differences and knowledge that even intense arguments will not mean the end of the relationship.

The commitment to each other has allowed JM and his partner to develop a degree of trust in one another that is indicative of the intimacy in their relationship. JM feels that his partner is the only one he's ever been able to fully let his guard down with. He trusts that his partner will be willing to work through differences in the relationship and that their love is stronger than any fight that might occur. JM also trusts that his partner is saving himself for JM and that he will be monogamous.

Despite the trust in the relationship, JM realizes that effort is required to keep the intimacy alive. As such, the two strive to remind each other how much they mean to one another by doing things for each other like bringing home presents and providing support for another in times of need. By keeping each other at peace in terms of the relationship, the two are able to weather stressful periods and know that their relationship is secure.

While both JM and his partner demonstrate an unconditional acceptance of one another, there is a tendency to try and encourage growth in one another. Each strives to help the other become a better person while still loving each other as they are. For JM, trying to encourage growth is a risky proposition but it is important as they work to build a future together.

As with all other participants, intimacy involves emotional involvement for JM and his partner. The unconditional love demonstrated by both JM and his partner is the most important part of their intimate relationship and while JM is more comfortable verbally expressing this love for his partner, he is content knowing that his partner does things to demonstrate it. The complete acceptance of each other's faults and appreciation for the other as they are has allowed JM and his partner to feel a degree of comfort and lack of embarrassment that might otherwise be

present in a less intimate relationship. As mentioned by other participants, these feelings are often intensified after spending time apart from one another.

In terms of behaviors considered intimate by JM, cuddling, spooning, and making eye contact with one another are both meaningful and important in the relationship. Touch is also an intimate behavior in JM's eyes but it is more the meaning conveyed by the touch than the touch itself that is intimate. By doing things for each other that will be appreciated and enjoyed (i.e. washing the car, bringing home a gift, etc.) and sacrificing to make the other happy, intimacy is encouraged and allowed to thrive.

A monogamous sexual relationship is also something JM associates with intimacy as he was raised in a strongly religious environment to believe that sexuality is a behavior that should only occur in a committed relationship. As such, JM detests open relationships and believes that they not only fail to work but that they lead to a disintegration of the relationship. Although the popular definition of intimacy has been linked to sex, JM believes it's more than the act of sex that is intimate. For him, sex is only 10% of what intimacy is. Rather, it is the connection established and the expression of love involved with the act of sex that is intimate for him. As such, JM and his partner have surrounded themselves with a community of people that share their beliefs.

Similar to other participants, JM notes that there are many challenges to establishing an intimate relationship with another gay man. One of the first to present itself was the belief that if he had sex with another man, he was likely to become infected with HIV and develop related illnesses. This belief was strongly ingrained as a result of his upbringing but in spite of this, JM

has managed to develop a healthy intimate relationship with his partner. Other challenges include resistance from the gay community itself. JM believes many people in the gay community are only interested in casual sex and as such, there are a few role models for developing intimate relationships. Thus, he and his partner have shared the experience of trying to create their own path in a world that often fails to support and recognize their relationship as valid. Indeed, marriage and children are even viewed by some in the gay community as a cop out in which men who are gay try to adopt a heterosexual agenda in order to be more accepted. Thus challenges are presented not only from outside the gay community but from within the community itself, making the road to developing intimacy even more difficult.

In defining intimacy, JM highlighted the aspects of unconditional love, complete acceptance, and lack of judgment for one another in a committed relationship as being the essential components of intimacy.

KG

Despite being something KG has not thought much about, intimacy is a very important part of his life and his relationship with his partner. Beginning with a brief meeting at a local gay bar, KG's relationship progressed quickly in that he and his partner spent every night together for the next two weeks. Although the two didn't have sex during that period, they quickly discovered their compatibility and as time progressed, KG realized he was not looking for an exit. After a year together, he remembers looking back and realizing that they were still happy. For KG, this signified the intimacy of their relationship. The defining moment, however, came when KG learned his partner was HIV+. Despite his fear of contracting the disease and the admonition

from his partner to leave, KG decided to remain and the two managed to deal with the problem, a decision he feels was clearly indicative of the commitment to his partner.

KG and his partner now spend extensive time together as they live together and interact with each other on a daily basis. KG feels this indicates the significance of their relationship and the two of them integrate their lives so completely that they think of their relationship as being a third person in their lives. This interconnection helps the partners to maintain the level of intimacy in their relationship, even during a brief period in which the two broke up.

The time spent together has allowed KG and his partner to learn more about each other than anyone else in their lives. For KG, communication is an essential part of intimacy and the two experience a degree of openness that the two are able to share and be honest about everything in their lives. This knowledge is important for the intimacy to continue in KG's eyes.

Although KG had never intended to be in a relationship for the rest of his life, he now sees his relationship as being forever. He considers his partner to be his best friend and together they form a team. This commitment to each other was especially apparent when KG discovered his partner was addicted to crystal methamphetamine. Although this occurred during their break up period, the two had not separated themselves from each other and KG issued an ultimatum to either stop using the drug or lose him forever. Faced with this choice, his partner stopped using the drug and when KG discovered he was HIV+ himself, the relationship was rekindled. When asked about it, KG admits that he had faith in their getting back together, no matter what but knowing that they could dispense with condom use helped KG to feel more intimate with his partner. Until that point, the fear of contracting HIV was a barrier that KG began to grow tired of

and this barrier affected the love he felt for his partner.

The support provided by each other is an essential part of intimacy for KG and his partner. KG feels that life is easier in pairs and while that should not be the reason you stick together, his life has significantly improved since meeting his partner. Now he finds that relies on his partner in a direct and significant way everyday. He knows that his partner is looking out for him and this dependability is a direct result of the intimacy within their relationship. There is a trust inherent in the relationship that allows the two face adversity as it comes.

KG admits the two of them have never put any real effort into maintaining or developing their relationship. Despite it working well so far, though, he wishes they would put more effort into it and think that doing so might make the relationship even better.

In reference to emotions, KG expresses a belief that intimacy is truly "an emotional thing". It is a connection to one another in which feelings are the most important part. He cites a closeness that comes from the intimacy and a love that is deeper than any love he feels for friends or family. During their break up period, KG admits this feeling of love had diminished and was not as strong as it was either before or after their break up. KG also indicates that comfort and security are important parts of an intimate relationship and finds himself happy to this day. He also notes an attraction to his partner, both on a physical level and a personal level that helps to enhance the intimacy in their relationship.

In contrast to the other participants, KG failed to mention any behaviors he connected with intimacy other than kissing. Although KG would kiss friends, the meaning behind a kiss on the cheek to his partner was considered to be different and indicative of the intimacy within the

relationship.

One behavior that KG did use to differentiate intimate and non-intimate relationships was sex. Although he and his partner have an open relationship, KG claims that sex is different with his partner than with others. He feels the sex is more intimate with his partner and this is primarily due to the motional content of it and the knowledge of what each other likes and dislikes. KG admits sex does not have to be intimate but it is with his partner, perhaps because they have unprotected sex, a behavior he does not engage in with anyone else.

Previous to this relationship, KG had had little experience in dating as none of his other relationships had lasted longer than a month. He feels this relationship is different, though, because of its depth. In comparing this relationship to others in his life, KG feels it is more intimate, primarily because of the depth of love and friendship between the partners, the degree of openness shared, and the reliance on each other. The two look out or each other more actively than anyone else in their lives and this indicates a deeper level of intimacy for KG.

Defining intimacy was a difficult task for KG as he feels it is a complex phenomenon and it is something that he never really thought about before. Nonetheless he feels it is an emotional thing that is significant and important for the success of a long-term relationship.

TS

TS was introduced to his partner by a mutual friend. After noticing an instant interest and attraction this partners sweet, polite, and caring demeanor, the two went on several dates and things became serious quickly. TS felt he and he partner-to-be were a good match for each other and an emotional bond developed in the first few weeks. Despite this bond, TS felt it took years

to develop the true intimacy the two now share as the first year of their relationship was filled with blind love and acceptance for one another. During the second and third years, though, the two came to learn more about each other and to accept each other for the person's they truly were, rather than what they believed each other to be. For TS, it was this knowledge that led to the development of a truly intimate relationship.

TS and his partner have spent extensive time together, especially since marrying. He finds he is able to spend this time with his partner without needing a break from one another, even in moments that are less enjoyable. He feels this is the closest relationship he's had with another man and that their lives are enmeshed to such a degree that they are able to spend both good and bad moments without the need for separation.

The time spent together has allowed TS and his partner to learn everything they can about one another. TS feels as if his partner knows 99.9% of what's going on in his life and when his partner does not know something, he feels left out. The total honesty between partners has allowed the two to develop a sense of comfort in which they feel safe sharing whatever comes to mind. This safety and honesty is considered to be essential for the intimacy in their relationship.

Although TS and his partner share similar values, including the desire for closeness and connection to family, the two have different interests, needs, and roles within the relationship. While these differences are often complementary, TS recognizes that some of his needs could be nurtured by greater independence within the relationship. He feels time spent apart from one another may have the benefit of making the time they spend together more meaningful and there would be less resentment on his part at having to give up activities and interests for the sake of

his partner. Nonetheless, the two value the commitment they have and this commitment has allowed them the ability to work through difficult times, include a point where they broke up for a brief period of time.

Despite the fact that TS believes his partner should be his first priority, he finds family commitments can often result in his partner feeling as if he is second place. TS recognizes that intimacy requires a commitment to put his partner ahead of all others, though, and struggles to make this a reality. He feels as if the relationship requires constant effort to keep things on track and the two have participated in counseling in order to improve the relationship. The focus of counseling has been to allow the partners to accept each other as they are and to recognize the effort each puts into the relationship. TS realizes his partner puts more effort into making the relationship, though, and is working to try and match that commitment. At the same time, he finds himself willing to let go of some of the control for the sake of maintaining the intimate bond between them.

Growth is an important part of intimacy for TS, as he feels the relationship would be doomed without it. As a result, the two are trying to modify their behaviors so as to appease one another and prevent problems within the relationship. They find they are getting better at recognizing each other's needs as the relationship progresses, though, and this has helped to increase the sense of intimacy between them. As the two grow together, they find the trust and security between them increases and this allows the two to develop a sense of safety in sharing emotions with one another. It has also allowed them to begin planning a future together including thoughts of having children and thinking of where they'll be in the time to come.

Emotions are an important component of intimacy for TS as he finds it difficult to meet others that he can share the emotional connection that he has with his partner. He admits to noticing the chemistry between them from the start and that he was both attracted and drawn to his partners physical and emotional qualities, many of which he wished he possessed himself. The two felt comfortable talking to each other very quickly and this allowed them to develop the closeness they now share. Each is intimately aware how much the other cares and are especially aware of the closeness between them when spending time apart. The love they share allows them to accept each other and experience one another without judgment.

Although behaviors were not emphasized by TS in his discussion of intimacy, he did note that two have a traditional view of what marriage should be in that they wake up together, wish each other a good day, and nearly always sit down to dinner together. In addition, they'll often touch in with one another throughout the day.

Like other participants, TS recognizes that the popular definition of intimacy has been skewed towards the act of sex but TS feels that intimacy goes far beyond the act itself. Although TS and his partner may invite others to join them in sexual activities together, he finds that sex with his partner is much more intimate. He and his partner refuse to engage in anal sex with others and TS often finds that after a sexual encounter with someone else, he is reminded of how grateful he is to have his partner in his life. This may be due to the superficiality and meaningless nature of the sex with others. In reference to these extra-marital relations, TS wishes he and his partner were enough to satisfy each other but recognizes the need for new experiences from time to time and feels that these experience help to strengthen the intimacy within the relationship.

Despite this, he does not want to have an open relationship as he feels they are less committed and often destructive.

TS has never had a long-term relationship with another man before, perhaps because he finds it so difficult to find another man who desires the closeness that he and his partner share. He also finds the lack of role models has been a factor in creating difficulties for him in developing intimate relationships with other men. As a result, he and his partner are trying to copy a heterosexual model, which he views as more committed because of a lesser need for sex outside the relationship. TS believes men have bigger sexual appetites and are less committed and loyal than women. As a result, they may have fewer tools for making relationships work than heterosexual couples do. In addition, the discrimination experienced as men who are gay can cause stress within the relationship, especially as extended family may not approve were they to learn TS was in a gay marriage.

When asked to define intimacy, TS indicated that it was a physical and emotional sense of closeness provided by a high level of transparency, trust, and communication between partners.

SL

According to SL, an intimate relationship is one that develops over time to move past the initial stage of infatuation into a deeper, more committed relationship. The development of this type of relationship involves a continuous process of learning about one another in order to discover similar attitudes, experiences, and values through extensive time either spent together or spent in contact with one another. As time passes, the degree of openness between partners increases and trust and commitment develop to the extent that plans for the future begin to be co-

constructed, including decisions regarding career advancement and starting a family at some point. For SL, this trust is an essential ingredient for an intimate relationship to continue, as is the commitment to work through problems as they develop. This is often accomplished by open communication and sacrificing individual autonomy for the betterment of the relationship. As future plans become reality, the partners experience shared growth, which SL believes enhances the intimacy in their relationship. This growth includes both development as an individual and as a couple. For instance, both SL and his partner have learned to appreciate ideas and sentiments not previously enjoyed because of the influence of their partner. In addition, the two have learned to deal with conflict and their relationship has grown stronger as a result. The intimacy shared between the partners is further enhanced by individual pursuits which allow the partners the freedom to explore their individual interests without being dependent on one another to meet all their needs. Sustaining this level of intimacy requires constant effort by the partners, though, in order to avoid monotony in the relationship and to keep the emotional attachment alive. For SL, this effort involves maintaining the open lines of communication with his partner and reminding one another that they need to make their relationship a priority in their lives. In terms of the emotional attachment, SL indicates that love, affection, caring, and respect for one another are all important elements of an intimate relationship as are happiness and a sense of security. These emotions are often demonstrated through various displays of affection such as holding hands, kissing, and snuggling. While SL may engage in some of these behaviors with others (i.e. family members), the meaning of them is different with his partner, as they denote more passion and intimacy for him. One behavior strongly indicative of intimacy for SL is sexuality, a behavior he

does not share with anyone else but his partner. Both partners indicated early on in the relationship that monogamy was important and have maintained this stance throughout their relationship. Although SL concedes it may be possible to have an intimate relationship that is not monogamous, he and his partner have developed their relationship after the model demonstrated by both their parents, one he considers to be the norm in the heterosexual community. Sexuality is so strongly associated with intimacy for SL that it is the one aspect that differentiates his relationship from all others in his life. SL indicates that intimacy can exist on different levels, though. These levels can be differentiated by the degree of physical contact shared, the commitment to one another, and the degree of sacrifice recognized within the relationship. Although family relationships or non-monogamous relationships may be considered by some to be intimate, SL does not personally subscribe to this belief. According to SL, it can be difficult to develop intimate relationships within the gay community, as he believes many men who are gay find relationships to be a frightening concept and are often only interested in casual sex. When asked to define intimacy, SL suggested that intimacy was a relationship like no other in his life, involving a close bond with his partner and degree of sexuality not present in other relationships.