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STRUGGLING AGAINST OPPRESSION IN THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHURCH BY LESBIAN, GAY, BI-SEXUAL, TRANSGENDERED AND QUESTIONING PEOPLE SEEKING JUSTICE

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ABSTRACT

STRUGGLING AGAINST OPPRESSION IN THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHURCH BY LESBIAN, GAY, BI-SEXUAL, TRANSGENDERED AND QUESTIONING PEOPLE SEEKING JUSTICE

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The purpose of this project was to discover how lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning persons struggled against oppression in the African-American church. They experienced oppression in the African-American church and wanted justice. The project included 6 members, friends, or persons who frequently attended Truth Center Metropolitan Community Church (Truth Center MCC), for a consciousness-raising group. Members of the group were selected from a questionnaire. The effectiveness of the group was monitored through the use of a before and after survey.

Group sessions were held over a four-week period. The topic of the first session was patriarchy and its effects on parenting styles and gender socialization. The second session addressed racism, sexism and classism. The third session surrounded biblical interpretations of Genesis 19 and reading strategies used by Bible scholars to interpret scripture. The last session sought answers to questions such as, ‘what was the worst sermon that you heard about homosexuality?’ ‘how did it make you feel?’ and ‘what did you do about it?’
The issue of the project was ‘how do lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning persons struggled against oppression from the African-American church.’ The literature review revealed that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning persons struggled against oppression by forming small consciousness groups that supported and helped each other. The literature review also revealed that our differences should be embraced.

The project revealed that the group had a difficult time accepting new information that would help them as they sought justice. The African-American church has had a strong influence on its people and it appeared to be very difficult for members to transcend the teachings even if they were detrimental to one’s personhood. New information presented to the group did not appear to be effective.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this doctoral dissertation to my church family, Truth Center Metropolitan Community Church, Lamont Alford and Michael Ross for their unquestionable support and inspiration throughout the process of completing this project. I also dedicate this work to all whose paths I have crossed, good and bad, for I learned a valuable lesson that helped me on my incredible journey of life. Lastly, I dedicate this work to all those who have been oppressed simply because of who they were. I experienced my share of oppression and I know that there was an illuminating light at the end of the tunnel.

L. S.
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I am especially grateful to my advisory committee: Dr. Randall Bailey, Dr. Maisha Handy and Dr. Willie Goodman. They stretched, pulled and expanded my consciousness. They talked, I listened; they gave of themselves; I received the offering; they inspired, I invented, they prayed, I cried. Because of them, I tore down walls that had been built in my mind for a long time. Now, the bricks are being used to build a new trail so that others may follow. Thanks for the gift.
Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my Truth Center MCC Church family for being willing to participate in this project. Thank you for your participation, dedication and support; you gave so much of yourselves. They tolerated me, stood up for me and stood in for me during the tumultuous process. What a family. Blessings!
GLOSSARY

androgy nous persons. An androgy nous person may identify and appear as neither clearly male nor female or as between male and female.*

binary thinking. A system of thought that divides concepts into two oppositional categories, for example, white/black, man/woman, heterosexual/homosexual, saint/sinner, reason/emotion, and normal/deviant.+

black community. A set of institutions, communication networks, and practices that help African Americans respond to social, economic, and political challenges confronting them. Also known as Black civil society.+

black sexuality. A set of ideas invented about the sexual practices of people of African descent that have been used to justify Black subordination. Ideas about Black sexuality underlie dominant societal beliefs about Black masculinity and Black femininity.+

black sexual politics. A set of ideas invented about the sexual practices shaped by gender, race, and sexuality that frame Black men and women’s treatment of one another as well as how African Americans are perceived and treated by others.+

capitalism. An economic system based on the private ownership of the means of production. Capitalism is typically characterized by extreme distributions of wealth and large differences between the rich and the poor.+

cross dresser. Formally known as transvestites, cross dressers identify and are completely comfortable with their assigned birth gender. To varying degrees, they take on the clothing and mannerisms of the opposite gender for emotional fulfillment. They may do this either publicly or privately.*

gender expression. Refers to the ways in which people externally communicate their gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice, and emphasizing, de-emphasizing, or changing their body’s characteristics. Gender expression is not necessarily and indication of sexual orientation.*

gender identity. One’s internal sense of being male or female. One’s gender identity can also innately reside somewhere in between or outside the boundaries of the binary expression of male or female.
heterosexism. The belief that everyone is or should be heterosexual.

heterosexual. A person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to members of the opposite gender.

heterosexual privilege/heteronormativeness. Cultural, societal, and religious/theological systems that support the rights and privileges that heterosexuals enjoy and same gender loving persons often do not. *

homophobia. The irrational fear and hatred of same gender loving persons and same sex love that often includes a systematic oppression of same gender loving individuals and their culture.

hyper-heterosexuality. A thesis developed within Western societies that views people of African descent as being sexually promiscuous and engaging in sexual practices that resemble those of animals. +

identity politics. A way of knowing that sees lived experiences as important to creating knowledge and crafting group-based political strategies. +

internalized homophobia. When a same gender loving person believes and accepts cultural, societal, and religious/theological prejudices about same gender loving people and same sex love. *

intersexed. Formally known as hermaphrodites, intersexed persons are born with some degree of physical ambiguity regarding their genders. *

oppression. An unjust situation in which, systematically and over a long period of time, one group denies another group access to resources of society. Race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, age, and ethnicity constitute major forms of oppression. +

racism. A system of unequal power and privilege in which humans are divided into groups or “races” with social rewards unevenly distributed to groups based on their racial classification. In the United States, racial segregation constitutes a fundamental principle of how racism is organized. +

same gender loving (homosexual). A person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to members of the same gender. *

sexual orientation. One’s affectional, emotional, psychological, and sexual attraction. *
groups or gatherings. In American society, LGBTQ persons experienced oppression as part of their everyday existence and especially within the African-American church. Truth Center MCC and other affirming congregations are viewed as a movement towards liberation and justice for LGBTQ persons. The ministry issue for this project was that LGBTQ persons sought justice as they struggled against oppression in the African-American church. As a liberated, openly gay pastor of an affirming and welcoming congregation, how should the writer have assisted them as they sought justice and struggled against oppression in the African-American church?

**Motivation for the Project**

'What does the *Bible* say?' is usually the question that follows such a discussion. Many discussions with LGBTQ persons who attended traditional African-American churches revealed that they often heard that because of what the *Bible* said about their sexual orientation, God did not love them and that they were going to hell. So many LGBTQ persons have left the church or refused to go to church because of not being accepted for who they are. Still others remained in the African-American church oppressed by the condemnation while others remained in the African-American church apparently unaffected by the condemnation. There are others, however, who remained at a great price to their self-esteem and identity.

This project intended to expose how the *Bible* has been misinterpreted in the African American church. LGBTQ persons should know that biblical misinterpretation from the pulpit presented the biggest problem. The writer also intended to address traditional African-American churches condemnation of LGBTQ persons simply because
they were told by church leaders that God accepted only one form of sexual expression. It seemed the church had not accepted that people were different and everyone did not need to be like everyone else to be loved by God. LGBTQ persons who attended or remained in traditional African-American churches who embraced exclusionary values may not have received a healthy outlook in life. Consequently, some LGBTQ persons lacked a positive self-image because of the condemnation they received in the traditional African-American church, which was an integral part of the oppression they faced as human beings. Thus, the intent of this project was to participate in the building up and empowering the self-esteem of LGBTQ persons.

The overall intent in developing this model was to expose LGBTQ persons to systems of oppression that blocked their liberation so they may fight the many forms of oppression that keep them marginalized and down. As these systems are exposed, LGBTQ persons can transform their negative self-image to a more healthy expression of self while our society is transformed as well. With a more healthy expression of self, LGBTQ persons would be able to assist in the eradication of self-hatred in others and the community would be empowered to bring about change and acceptance.

Definition of Terms

The author was somewhat reluctant to define or label the term “African-American Church.” The African-American church was in itself a very diverse entity that included many different worship styles, formations and dogmas. From its inceptions as the invisible institution, as described by C. Eric Lincoln, to the mega-churches of today, its’ importance lived in the meaning it played in the lives of blacks and their experience in
America. Perhaps its meaning lived in the importance it played in our lives as an oasis from oppression in a racist and harsh society. Its meaning lived in being a refuge, a resting place, and an anchor for a community in need of a foundation. Its meaning lived in being a voice that cried for liberation and justice for a people without human rights.

The African-American church made a difference in the lives of black people. Now, some members of the African-American church want to deny some of its own the freedom to worship and be who they were created to be, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning people. The African-American church wanted to condemn LGBTQ people because it thought God condemned them. The church also wanted to deny the human rights of LGBTQ people. In the eyes of the writer, the African-American church was wrong.

When the author utilized the terms lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning persons, several sociological endeavors were combined. The primary source for the terms expressed was Rev. Irene Monroe’s introduction in the book Spirited: Affirming the Soul and Black Gay/Lesbian Identity, edited by G. Winston James and Lisa C. Moore. In her introduction, Rev. Monroe utilized the terms lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) as she approached giving voice to their spirituality. The author recognized that many Black persons would undoubtedly object to the word ‘queer’; in American society many blacks were considered ‘queer’ by whites. Persons of color were treated as though they were ‘queer’; separated from their families, castrated and whipped. Let us not forget “southern trees bear strange fruits”?

As a result, the word ‘queer’ has been internalized by persons of color with derogatory connotations.

1 Billie Holiday, Strange Fruit, by Billie Holiday and Lewis Allan. New York Commodore. 1939.
when it refers to someone who was different from themselves.

Although the writer did not object to her use of the word ‘queer’, he chose to defer from it because in his opinion it only reflected a matter of preference. Hence, the writer preferred the term, ‘questioning.’ This term came from his volunteer experience with Youthpride, a nonprofit organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning youth to have a safe space. Use of the term questioning, avoided the catch all phrases ‘same gender loving’ or 'gay and lesbian’, which thereby assume that all groups are covered when in fact those phrases left out other categories of people in the community. What was usually said when someone in our community expressed that he or she was bisexual? Respondents often said, ‘I wish you would make up your mind’ or, ‘How often have we looked over transgendered folks?’ Transgendered persons have experienced oppression from within and outside the community. The author contended that everyone should have a place at the table. Therefore, bisexuals, transgendered and those who questioned sexuality must be included. The women’s movement reminded us that the catchall phrase ‘man’ has been anything but inclusive. The terms 'same gender loving' and 'gay and lesbian' excluded others, much in the same way that 'man' excluded women in some contexts. It cannot be assumed that we are talking about all others with these two phrases. Therefore, the phrase, 'lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning' was used to recognize each other for who they were, people of God. Again, the researcher did not object to the term ‘queer’. The term queer also applied to those persons who were allies with LGBTQ persons; such a person would definitely be considered ‘queer.’
Methodology

The model of intervention used as a tool for liberation for LGBTQ persons assumed patriarchy to be problematic and therefore, must be addressed if cultural communities sought validation for all people. The project sought to do this when it established a focus group composed of 6 persons who were introduced to this model of intervention. The group met for four weeks for an hour and a half to two hours and concluded with a dialogue and open discussion about the worst sermon that participants heard about homosexuality and how this made them feel. The first two sessions were didactic sessions which focused on patriarchy and its influence on parenting styles and gender socialization methodologies. The second session focused on racism, sexism and classism. There was time for discussion in all sessions. In the last two sessions, members co-facilitated the group when they were divided into groups of two and talked about the different reading strategies for interpreting Genesis, Chapter 19 and shared what they experienced during the worst sermons they heard that focused on homosexuality.

A questionnaire and survey were developed to identify where members were in their spiritual lives when it came to dealing with oppression. The questionnaire also identified persons who felt marginalized and rejected by the church. Upon completion of the questionnaire, 6 people were identified to be part of the support group. The questionnaire used is located in Appendix A.
After focus group participants were identified, a second survey was administered that served as a before and after tool that evaluated the success, if any, of the model. The second survey used is Appendix B. The researcher made weekly observations of the groups in a journal and group members were also given a journal and asked to record their thoughts, dreams and feelings, if any, as they participated in the group. They were instructed to use the journals to record their daily thoughts and wrote down self-talk messages and thoughts that occupied their mind. A third survey was administered at the end of the four-part session that determined if the model was effective in making a difference in their lives. The major determination was made through observations by the facilitator.

The model of intervention consisted of 4 parts. It utilized: (1) the influence of patriarchy upon our society (2) racism, sexism and classism (3) biblical interpretation and from the reading strategies used to interpret Genesis 19:1-11, which rung true for you, and (4) the question 'what was the worst sermon you ever heard on homosexuality and how did it make you feel?'. The four parts are listed as Appendices C through F, respectively.

The Investigator

This section examined the authors’ view of the Bible, the church and his role as the Moderator of Truth Center MCC and how these views impacted this study. The author’s Bible, from which all references where drawn, was *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

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male, Christian, moderator of an affirming and welcoming congregation. However, Daniel T. Spencer’s work, “A Gay Male Ethicist’s Response To Queer Readings in the Bible”, an essay that appeared in *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible*, edited by Ken Stone, and presented in the literature review of the dissertation, clarified the writer’s misperception. Spencer included a fourfold typology for the use of the *Bible* in ethics. He drew this typology when eight biblical scholars were surveyed and critiqued that dealt with the issue of homosexuality and the *Bible*. For Spencer, the liberationist typology, with whom the author also identified, “focuses on exposing and transforming heterosexist structures and homophobic attitudes in their call for justice for lesbians and gay men. The liberationist approaches view the dominant expressions of church and society as oppressive and therefore in need of radical transformation.”

According to Spencer’s view, the researcher was not a liberationist. The liberal typology was where the researcher found himself to be. Spencer indicated that, “the liberal strategies focus on expanding access in society and the churches to include those who have traditionally been excluded but without critical questioning of the church or society itself. Proponents of the liberal approach find themselves on both sides of the debate on homosexuality, with many arguing that while homosexuality is not normative, the church should be inclusive and accept gay and lesbians.”

The researcher saw homosexuality as normative; however, he sought to become a liberationist, for one was greatly needed in the African-American church. The African-American church has not been inclusive of or accepted LGBTQ persons. Consequently, the researcher addressed the lack of an outcry

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4 Ibid.
for justice for LGBTQ people, however, church or society has not been critically questioned about the rights of LGBTQ persons. Marching in Gay Pride, whether Black or White, best provided a demonstration for social justice issues. None of the African-American churches, however, that the researcher has been affiliated with had a social justice ministry. Nor were there any direct actions, vocalized or non-vocalized, demonstrations or protests against oppression.

“Reading the Bible as Queer Americans: Social Location and the Hebrew Scriptures,” by Dr. Mona West, provided four reading strategies which to employ when biblical text is encountered. Her work is also addressed in the literature review. Dr. West’s defensive stance reading strategy is used most often by the writer with scriptures commonly used to condemn homosexuality. The defensive stance towards scripture was used against clobber texts that condemned homosexuality. The clobber texts addressed were Genesis 19:1-28, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Romans 1:26-28, I Corinthians 6:9 and I Timothy 1:10. The defensive strategy attempted to show how the church misinterpreted these texts and demonstrated that LGBTQ people belong in the church. It also placed blame on some other group of people; thereby the oppressive tactics of the oppressor were continued.

The defensive stance attempted to prove that LGBTQ people belonged in the church. Actually, the researcher found himself somewhat defensive towards everything and it was no fun. When you are defensive towards everything too much time is wasted trying to prove that you belong and leads you to put blame on anything or anyone so that others can see you belong. In the defensive stance others are blamed to take notice away
from oneself. As a result of this project, the writer became aware of these defensive strategies and attempted to stay away from blaming others. Blaming others led to the text being misinterpreted. Through this project it was discovered that there are other interpretations of scripture that did not blame others.

This new knowledge caused the author to wonder if these reading strategies had been known before leaving the church would the departure have been necessary. Upon consideration the same conclusion was reached – leaving was necessary. The messages received from the church were too condemning and negative. It was as if the church had poisoned the minds of its parishioners with message that God did not love persons who were not heterosexual and those persons were condemned to hell, just to name a few. As such, the researcher left the church with messages of self-hatred and a lack of trust for others like himself; more specifically, a lack of trust and hatred for other black, gay men. No self-love was apparent because the church condemned non-heterosexual actions and consequently the author felt that others who shared non-traditional relationships were also unlovable.

Leaving the church was a difficult choice and it was only made after the misinformation could be tolerated no further. The researcher experienced a love/hate relationship with the African-American church and spent his youth wrestling with issues surrounding sexuality and religion; therefore, there was an in and out affair with the church. The church should have been a special place to feel the spirit of God. But the church had problems that the researcher attempted to ignore. But then, reality reasserted itself. Michael Eric Dyson’s essay “When you Divide Body and Soul, Problems
Multiply: The Black Church and Sex,” which appeared in Traps: African American Men on Gender and Sexuality, illuminated this view. This work was also included in the literature review. In regards to the African-American church and homosexuality Dyson stated that there is erotic dishonesty, “the notorious homophobia of the black church just doesn’t square with the numerous same-sex unions taking place, from the pulpit to the pew.”

Homophobia in the African-American church was notorious, as if LGBTQ people were the worst people in the world. It was almost as if the African-American church said one thing and did something else. They condemned homosexuality on one hand and on the other, if you were homosexual, gifted and talented, they wanted to use you in worship service but you could not be open and out about your sexuality, at least not in church anyway. The African-American church wanted you to be silent and play along with the game. You were talked about from the pulpit to the pews if you were ‘out’ or not. Moreover, some of the same people who condemned you wanted a relationship with you when they thought no one was watching. If you played along with the game and sung, preached, and/or prayed, to usher in the spirit, you were accepted but had to stay in your place. This was depressing and it sent some lonely black gay men to excess and/or to live double lives.

For too long, the African-American Church has been focused on sin. The church viewed its primary mission as ‘saving souls.’ Why was saving souls emphasized to such an extent? Could it have been that they saw blackness as sinful? Was blackness seen as evil or was it a desire to wash the blackness out and become whiter than snow? Neither

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was reality nor was it going to happen. Rather than having embraced its own, the African-American church battled against those who dared to be different. For the African-American church, homosexuality was a sin; as a result, the church excluded a large portion of its members who hid who they were from most of the members and/or participated in unhealthy and risky behavior. Or those who bore the message from the church drunk or drugged themselves to numb the pain of rejection and hurt they felt from the church; their own surely did not receive them.

The author knew what it felt like to experience such hurt and pain, especially from a place that you loved. He also knew what it was like to abuse drugs and alcohol just to forget the pain or pretend, if just for a moment, that you were loved. However, you could only pretend for so long and sooner or later, when you could not pretend any longer your brokenness must be embraced and seen as an opportunity for who you really are to be discovered; a divine, creative, individualized expression of God, just like every other LBGTQ person.

No amount of psychotherapy could have healed the wound caused when the writer let go of the church that provided the foundation of his present self. Psychotherapy, however, could have helped with the drugs and alcohol. It also could have helped the writer find another church. But his greatest love could not be replaced. So, the author let go and created that love and passion somewhere else. He created a space where everyone was accepted, welcomed and included as part of the family of God.
The African-American church put pastors on pedestals. As moderator, the writer reminded his congregation that he did not have all the answers. As a church family, everyone had a part to play for the ministry to be successful; congregants must be reminded that we all were wounded healers.

The questions and survey were a reflection of internal turmoil experienced by the researcher. The results would definitely differ from others who investigated without emotional ties. This section of the dissertation allowed expression of the hurt and anger the author felt about having left the church. In the writer's opinion, it was time the African-American church grew up and became a place of worship that included everyone.

Outline of Dissertation

What were the oppressions that LGBTQ persons struggled against in this movement towards justice? There was much oppression that LGBTQ persons struggled against in the African-American church. Generally speaking, the African-American church oppressed LGBTQ people in many ways. Even though Womanist Theology had not addressed, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning issues, even when its conception included ‘women who love women’, it presented the idea that oppression was interconnected. The oppressions that LGBTQ persons faced were also interconnected. This project focused on the following forms of oppression: racism, sexism, classism and heterosexism/homophobia. These systems of oppression were rooted in patriarchy.
The project endeavored to do this when it presented an introduction of the issue along with background information. Framing the issue was followed with the writer’s autobiography and the historical background of the issue. This was done to share the researchers’ personal perspective on the subject matter and related his personal involvement with those who sought justice. The exposure in the brief autobiography in many ways paralleled the experience of many LGBTQ persons who struggled against oppression in the African-American church. Framing of the issue also discussed the church’s response to the issue and previous efforts to address the issue. The project then presented a review of literature. The literature review included a biblical study that examined texts traditionally known as the clobber text, which were texts traditionally used to condemn homosexuals. The biblical study also examined texts used against women and persons of color in the Bible. It also included a theological exploration of the author’s view of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, scripture and sin.

The empirical perspective illustrated an awareness of the issue though sociological and psychological material. The sociological and psychological contributions to be gained when the issue is addressed have been in place for some time. There was much to be learned from their explorations of the issue. An empirical investigation was included that presented other forms of thought on the subject matter. Other disciplines have begun to address the issue as well. Theoretical application of the project and evaluation concluded the project.
CHAPTER II

FRAMING THE ISSUE

Motivation for Research

The motivation for research was to empower LGBTQ persons through the unconditional love of God for all people, no matter who they were or whom they loved. Unfortunately, many LGBTQ persons held a negative self-image because of oppression. One’s self-image could be reoriented through healthy social constructs, biblical interpretation, as one looked at one’s own stuff and saw one’s self as a wonderful, loving, dynamic person of God. A reorientation of one’s perception was one of the researcher’s experiences.

Autobiography

The writer did not always accept himself and went through many situations that eventually led to a departure from the traditional African-American church. However, there were other experiences that led him back into the church. It was through a healing process that balance was found in his life. There were many LGBTQ persons who felt alienated and rejected by the African-American church. Perhaps these same persons and others went to extremes and were considered outcasts by society. To experience oppression, just because one was different, was a very hard road to travel.
It was commonly believed that we are the total sum of all of our experiences. Consequently, these experiences influenced the author’s ministry in action, both negatively and positively. The writer’s mission orientation was most greatly impacted by those influences. These influences included, but were not limited by, childhood experiences, church, significant relationships, psychotherapy, the Metropolitan Community Church and Science of Mind. All of these experiences were instrumental to the researcher as he came to the awareness of being a black, gay, Christian man. This section addressed issues surrounding his sexuality, the church and Christianity, blackness, maleness, and classism.

Sexuality

The author became aware of his sexual orientation as gay at a very young age and understood it was different from others. This understanding continued through youth. Being different was evident although knowledge of how to use the difference was not. Despite attempts not to be noticed by peers, the author’s sexual orientation was such it was noticed without question and accompanied by taunts and threats. Teachings of the African-American church were against this sexual orientation and a tremendous amount of shame and guilt associated with it as well. This resulted in feeling alienated from God and rejected by the church. These feelings were internalized as hatred and the hatred expressed as internalized homophobia.

There were two vital elementary school experiences that affected the author. The first was standing in front of the bathroom mirror as a 4th grader repeating the self-message that no one could know about the real desires of the author’s heart. The second
experience was being called several unwanted names by classmates as a 6th grader. The names included: “sissy,” “punk,” “he-she” and “faggot.” Was the researcher that different from other youth? Although the feeling of difference manifested itself, it was never labeled as such. School was a source of daily harassment. What was it about the author that brought so much unwanted attention and what could the other kids see that was not self-evident? Like other children, the desire to be accepted and liked by everyone was a strong but unrealistic expectation. When the desired outcome was not attained, the desire to disappear replaced it. Fantasies of becoming a wallflower surfaced just so the tormenting would cease.

In junior high, reflection turned inward and expressed itself in a love for reading. These readings were only shared with a close childhood friend. This friend and the books gave the greatest comfort in a disturbing world. The writer’s self-esteem was low because he did not understand himself and lacked a method to find himself. Physical desire for some of the boys in the author’s class raised more internal questions. The attraction to one particular boy led the writer to be expelled from school. The whole 9th grade student body knew about it and the author was embarrassed to face other students. The desire to be separated from those classmates was so strong that the author ran away from home before he entered the 10th grade.

Upon being caught in Jacksonville, Florida and returned home to Fayetteville, North Carolina, the researcher transferred to another high school. Since integration had begin some of the students from the black junior high school were transferred to the same high school. Despite this, survival was managed.
It was not until after seminary that the researcher began to question beliefs about sexuality. Everything was questioned following seminary. Including the messages taught by the church regarding sexuality, life and existence. The questioning led the author to departure from the church and long held beliefs about self. The answers were received from many sources and resources.

Leaving the church was a journey of self-discovery. Just before the author left the church, he suggested separation to his wife. They were married following an experience in which the writer truly believed that God had taken away his homosexuality. This experience included a car accident while in naval school that resulted in being unconscious for three days and hospitalized for six months. Upon returning home, the author accompanied his sister to a Sunday evening service at a storefront church and the presence of God was felt as never before. This experience was the only reason that marriage occurred and prior to the nuptials the writer’s entire life story was told and she said that she understood.

Although she did not want to separate, after their second child was born they agreed that it would be best not to bring the children up in hostility. Following her departure back to her hometown, the author was determined to find himself. This included a period of intense loneliness and isolation. The author questioned himself and wondered if the right decision was made. A distant relationship was maintained in order to communicate about the children. It was devastating to be separated from his children; however, the separation allowed the author to heal. Psychotherapy also helped.
The Church and Christianity

The African-American church has always been important. The church has been the writer’s greatest love and at times, worst enemy. The love included attending church regularly as a youth, being around church for extended periods of time and taking Bible Study very seriously. It was during this time that the foundation for biblical studies began. However, that love was reciprocated with a one-sided view of the religious world through the eyes of a Freewill Baptist Church. The author’s mother was instrumental involving the writer in church at a young age and the first altar call experience was at the age of six during a revival meeting at the neighborhood church. The writer considers this his foundational experience with God. Even though he remembered having an experience with God, what was most important was the sense of community felt in the presence of God. There were many times this connection was thought to be lost over the course of his life, however, now it was apparent this connection has and always will be there.

The author assumed or was taught to assume the belief that his church was the only one that was right and everyone else was wrong. This developed into a self-righteous attitude towards life as if he could do no wrong. This self-righteous attitude also prevented the ability to see people for who they truly were. His pastor taught that ‘once you get saved, God will take all of your sins away from you’ and that homosexuality was a sin. As a youth, the author believed the teachings of his church. However, his spirituality and sexuality were not congruent despite numerous attempts. In the process, he ended up losing touch with himself.
In the Navy, and just prior to marriage, the author joined the Church of God in Christ because of similarities to his church back home. While stationed in Charleston, South Carolina, the worship and preaching were inviting for everyone. Following discharge from the Navy and having moved to Atlanta to attend seminary, preaching from most pulpits was condemning; including the church he joined. Although the church didn’t directly teach self-hatred, that was the message from ministers and people in the church. There was no doubt that the author was hurt by the church and became weary of hearing damnation to hell and that God did not love him because of who he was and who he loved.

At the other end of the spectrum was his inability to live up to self and societal expectations. This created an in and out affair with the church. The desire to be in church was strong but he could not be there as a whole being; and led to the belief that something was ‘wrong in some way’. So it was back into the streets to be with people who accepted him unconditionally. The church would call and the author would run back only to take a back seat until he returned to the streets. The constant back and forth resulted in being wounded and living with constant emotional hurt and pain. As such, the writer felt separated from God, others and especially himself.

Although spirituality was important to the author, he was also aware of his sexuality. The traditional church was where self-hate was learned because change was required in order to attain God’s love. Despite the intensity of the desire to change and number of attempts, inevitably the writer returned to his heartfelt desires. The attempts to live by teachings of the church included “getting married,” “having children” and
“getting saved;” it was believed that if you were a homosexual and God saved you, your homosexuality would be taken away from you. What worked for others did not work for the author. When pretense was no longer an option, separation from the church was inevitable.

During times when condemnation was the message from the church, the author left. It was also during this time that questions of self and of the opinions of others arose. The opinions of others could no longer be accepted as fact. This realization did not come easy, it was only after years of self evaluation that the author learned to let go of stuff that did not apply.

Attending Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) has been a positive life influence. It was there that God’s love for all people was demonstrated. About the greatest gift that MCC offered was the opportunity to see that God used people that the traditional church condemned. God used LGBTQ persons to make a difference in other people lives and offered the writer a great sense of empowerment.

Science of Mind was a philosophy that the writer was introduced to later in life. The Science of Mind motto was ‘Change your thinking and change your life.’ It was quite effective as it changed the author’s thinking. It provided grounding and clarified issues that were prevalent regarding religion and spirituality. Most of all it helped him understand how all humanity was connected with the Creator.

Healing was also found as the difference between spirituality and religion became clear. In traditional churches you had to do it like they did it or you did not belong in their church. Through the study of spirituality, the writer was able to re-open himself to
the church and got involved in ministry. The new understanding that all of humanity was created in God’s image and everybody had their stuff and own issues. Power was given away when anyone prevented the writer from being true to himself in answering his call because of fear of what others thought.

Blackness

As mentioned earlier, the author experienced integration in high school. The 'clicks' that seemed the norm in the black junior high school were no longer evident or maybe the author saw 'clicks' because he didn't seem to fit in with others. However, being at the integrated high school validated his individuality. It was not considered to be out of character to be an individualized expression of the Creator at that school. The writer was exposed to his first Black Studies class at this high school; for the first time he learned about black history, inventors, and many of the contributions of black people to American culture and society. The black studies class definitely inspired a sense of black pride. During this time the author did not remember attending church that much; he believed that you could not be gay and Christian at the same time.

There were no role models on being black and gay for the writer. The introduction to sexual orientation was obtained through the school of hard knocks. This led to ridiculous situations that inspired guilt about the actions that took place and again he tried to live up to the standards of the church. The teachings of the church were definitely against gay people. Also, there was a tremendous amount of shame and guilt associated with being gay. At this point the writer felt alienated from God and felt rejected by the church. Not to mention the internalized homophobia.
Along with internalized homophobia, the author wrestled with being black in a southern town. However, there was a black college in town that gave rise to many black professionals, including teachers, doctors and dentists, as well as restaurant owners, hair shop owners and others in town. Upon turning eighteen years old, the author could not wait to vote because he understood voting was a way of being heard. He could not wait for his mother and a neighborhood friend to drive to the voting precinct because of the empowerment gained by walking to the precinct and casting his vote.

**Maleness**

In college, the author became aware of the terms 'feminine' and 'masculine'. Some thought his mannerisms were feminine and he was considered to play the submissive role. This caused the author to wonder if this was what the elementary kids saw? Even though he and his brothers worked with their father, the author was influenced by three women: his mother, who loved her family no matter what; his next door neighbor, who had the social gathering place and another neighbor who was an elementary school teacher. What impressed the writer most about the schoolteacher, besides her wonderful story telling, was that at the age of sixty-five, she when back to school to obtain her Master's degree. By the time he went to college, these three women were a well-established part of his life.

It seemed that our society had a low tolerance for the feminine aspect of life. Sufficient to say, the author internalized this hatred as well. Society exhibited a hatred for homosexuality, which the author understood was associated with the low tolerance for feminine aspects of life. Even though society felt this, the writer realized that he was not
alone. When he related with others he found that there were a lot of people who were different, who felt discriminated against and victimized because of it. Their own families treated them as outcasts. Some of them experienced hate simply because they were different. It was difficult sometimes to accept one’s self when one was not validated by one’s own family.

For years, the author was told by his father that he ‘could not do anything right’ and that he would ‘never amount to anything’. These thoughts were internalized and held the author back from living life to the fullest. Fear ruled his life and he lived in a constant state of fear; fear of not doing anything because he didn’t want to mess it up; fear of making something out of his life because he was told that he was not going to be anything. He felt that fear controlled his life. The author lived in so much fear and trepidation, he was afraid to say anything to anybody. Many times he just wanted to disappear so no one would say anything to him. It was obvious now that fear and low self-esteem that kept the writer down.

However, other relationships helped the author as he dealt with fear. Overcoming fear was not as difficult as it appeared to be. What helped the most was to develop healthy relationships. It was through developing relationships with other human beings that the author learned to overcome life’s imposing handicaps. Through relationships, he discovered the strength to take risks and did the best that he could. For the first time the author felt validated and heard. Sometimes you win and sometimes you lose, but you will never know until you try.
Relationships were a saving grace in the writer’s life. Like most persons, the impact of the relationships was not realized until it was over and the author had an opportunity to reflect on the experience. Unbeknownst to the author, the relationships were a means that helped inspire growth and aided in the development into a full human being. These relationships provided the chance to see how other people handled situations in life; from someone who was assertive, okay with one’s self, took care of one’s self and treated one’s self with love.

Classism

The author’s earliest memory of class is best described as realizing that we were a poor family; there were ten of us along with my parents. The most prominent memory was being in the kitchen with nothing to eat when the author heard his mother say a prayer. Not long after a neighbor who lived in the back of us knocked on the door and gave us a bag of groceries and said he thought we could use them. The writer’s father worked as a street sweeper and his mother only inside the home. Soon, however, she took a job as a cook on the evening shift. When she came home at night, she would open the door of our bedroom to check on us. In the author’s opinion we were a two parent low-income family but at the time we had no idea of what that meant.

Eventually his father was promoted to supervisor and they could have been considered a middle-income family. This allowed his mother to return working only in the home. The author was the first in his family to go to college. When he completed college, he went to the Navy and enlisted for a couple of years before officer training school. The author was the only black in his Navy class and for a short period of time the
only black officer on his ship. While in the Navy, the author was considered middle class.

Discharge from the Navy changed a lot of things for the writer, some of which included marriage, seminary, and fatherhood. After seminary, the writer had a decent job as a Mental Health Specialist and a second child was born. It was during this time that the author worked as a Mental Health Specialist and received more than money could have bought from his coworkers. It was soon after the birth of the second child that the marital separation took place. During that time the family lived in subsidized housing. After having separated, the author lived with a lover in an apartment. Upon having completed this dissertation, the author lives alone in his own home.

**Summary of Autobiography**

The author believed that his experiences enabled him to accept differences in others not only in the church but wherever they may have been found in life. Differences were not something to be ashamed of or used as a means that separated humanity; rather differences should be learned from and viewed as individualized expressions of God. Accepting himself was the source of his greatest healing and would not be traded for anything. To do so would have been to lose the expression of God that he was. Acceptance was the key to wholeness.
Historical Background of the Issue

In this century, the traditional African-American church condemned LBGTQ persons simply because what they believed the position of the Bible to have been. Most maintained that according to scripture, God condemned LGBTQ persons. Of course the argument rested solely on how they interpreted scripture, which was usually out of context and without the benefit of historical or cultural perspectives.

Translations of the Bible played into the condemnation as well. Translators brought their own biases, prejudices and issues. One must have also considered the original texts of the scriptures were Hebrew and Aramaic, for the Old Testament and Greek for the New Testament. Language remained a barrier worthy of consideration.

Homosexuality was not always condemned. For gay American Indians, “the earliest observers used the French term berdache to describe the men they saw who ‘did woman’s work and wore woman’s dress’. They also learned of women who excelled in male activities, as hunters, warriors, chiefs and healers.”1 Society had not taught us that sexuality regardless of preference should be embraced as a gift from God; rather that one should be hated for being different. As a result, many LGBTQ persons have not come to terms with their sexuality and spirituality, especially in this sex negative society.

Response of the Church to the Ministry Issue

The churches response to the needs of LGBTQ people has been varied. The traditional church, dependent on the denomination, responded to LGBTQ people by condemning, not accepting, or silencing them. Because of this, some LGBTQ persons

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did not want any involvement with the Church. Like the writer, the church had hurt them and they had not found forgiveness. As such, LGBTQ people wanted justice.

Some churches in the various denominations, however, stood their ground for justice for all people and were excommunicated from there denominations, such as Oakhurst Baptist Church and Virginia Avenue Baptist Church. These churches affirmed and accepted LGBTQ people. They opened their doors to the LGBTQ community and marched with LGBTQ persons for justice and equality. They accepted LGBTQ persons as human beings which was paramount to their understanding of being created in God’s image. These churches, along with some others, stood with Rabbi Michael Lerner, author of *The Left Hand of God: Taking Back Our Country From The Religious Right*, when he stated, ‘we need to reaffirm this central truth: every human being is a manifestation of the most holy and precious sacred energy of the universe, or in biblical language, is created in the image of God.”² We were embodiments of the most sacred and they saw the image of God in all of humanity. Still, some denominations were silent on the rights of LGBTQ people. It was in this context that silence equaled death applied.

**Contributions of Addressing the Issue**

Addressing the issue made several contributions to the church. Foremost, the human rights and dignity of all people were acknowledged as affirming congregations participated in non-violent demonstrations that brought awareness to the hypocrisy of the church that accepted some of its members and oppressed others. Addressing the issue also contributed to HIV /AIDS awareness programs being incorporated into the local

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church. This program endeavored to raise consciousness about the disease and served as a ministry that provided support, care and concern for those who were in need. It also provided medication advice and free medication for those who were not able to pay. This helped those persons to live happy and healthy lives. The community was educated about HIV and learned about the support that they could provide each other. Additionally, positive benefits of medication rather than waiting for ‘God to heal’ the person was introduced as a forum that educated and trained others as peer support persons. Participants learned that to sit back and wait was to sit back and watch the person die when medication could help them live. Unfortunately, some African-American churches lacked concern about HIV/AIDS. African Americans were about 27 years behind in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The response of the African-American church to this epidemic was depressing.
CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous efforts to address the ministry issue will be reviewed in this chapter. Included in this review of literature were the empirical perspective, theological perspective, biblical perspective and theoretical perspective. The empirical perspective, as stated earlier, presented sociological and psychological contributions that addressed the issue. The theoretical perspective presented many theories that guided this project. This project was empowered by these thoughts and selected group responses have been incorporated.

Empirical Literature Review

The empirical literature review presented several sociological and psychological books on the issue of struggling against oppression in society. These sources were relevant to LGBTQ equality and justice. These included classic standards and well as current books on the issue of LGBTQ person’s empowerment and will be discussed below.

Patricia Hill Collins’ Black Sexual Politics

*Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* by Patricia Hill Collins. This work sought to expose the historical forms of gender and sexuality as it related to how it was reproduced or resisted in new forms of racism in contemporary African-American communities. According to Hill Collins, a new Black
Sexual Politic was needed if the African-American community was going to address the social problems that affected the community. Also, a new Black Sexual Politic included new definitions of femininity and masculinity that were inclusive of the whole African-American community.

One of the ways that she suggested that this should be done was through infrapolitics. This moved beyond political parties, grassroots organizations and traditional modes of social movements. She indicated, “...the term “infrapolitics” is to describe the hidden behaviors of everyday resistance. Despite appearances of consent, people challenge inequalities of race, class, gender, and sexuality through conversations, jokes, songs, folklore, theft, foot-dragging, and a multitude of everyday behaviors...Everyday life contains many opportunities for resistance, if individual thoughts and actions can be conceptualized in this fashion.”¹ These were important insights to oppressed people that may not have had many avenues. This was also valuable information for the group that participated in the project, most indicated that they did not know how they should have responded to the oppression; they usually suffered through it. Hill Collins suggested that we needed to be more creative. New definitions for feminine and masculine were definitely needed. She addressed all of the issues in the struggle against oppression.

Review of Barbara Smith’s Work

Barbara Smith’s book, *The Truth That Never Hurts: Writings on Race, Gender and Freedom*, presented the story of how one individual made a difference in the cause of human rights for all people. She shared the story of Black ministers in her hometown of Cleveland, Ohio, that came together to condemn homosexuality. Entitled, “The Black Church Position Statement on Homosexuality,” the ministers condemned “HOMOSEXUALITY (including bisexual as well as gay or lesbian sexual activity) as a lifestyle that is contrary to the teaching of the Bible.” Although they claimed to have tolerance and compassion for homosexuals, their ultimate goal was to bring about “restoration.” Restoration, she stated, was their idea of changing homosexuals to heterosexuals and the Christian Right was sited as a source for their actions.

A lone individual stood up to this bigotry and hatred. It resulted in a nation-wide petition campaign, “one Black woman, Janet Perkins, a heterosexual Christian who works with the Women’s Project in Little Rock, Arkansas, has already spoken out...This is the kind of risk taking and integrity that makes all the difference.” One individual made a difference in the struggle against oppression in the LGBTQ community.

Review of Collins’ *Black Feminist Thought*

Patricia Hill Collins’ work, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, attempted to address the issues of social injustices in the lives of Black women. She indicated that nationally and throughout the Black

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3 Ibid., 129.
4 Ibid., 130-131.
diasporas, Black Feminist Thought made an important contribution. “By stressing how African-American women must become self-defined and self-determined within intersecting oppressions, Black feminist thought emphasizes the importance of knowledge for empowerment. Ideas matter, but doing "plenty of work” may matter even more.”

This was carried out in Black women’s activism; it not only changed the minds of women but institutions as well.

She also provided clear definitions for how domination worked. This provided invaluable ammunition as the issue of struggling against oppression was addressed. These definitions came from the experiences of African-American women.

“Whether viewed through the lens of a single system of power, or through that of intersecting oppressions, any particular matrix of domination is organized via four interrelated domains of power, namely, the structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains...The structural domain organizes oppression, whereas the disciplinary domain manages it. The hegemonic domain justifies oppression, and the interpersonal domain influences everyday lived experience and the individual consciousness that ensures.”

This impacted all of us as we remembered Black women’s struggles were “part of a wider struggle for human dignity and social justice.”

LGBTQ persons became self-defined and self-determined within the interlocked systems of oppression. As one understood how oppression was organized, managed, justified and carried out in everyday life, one was empowered by knowledge of the system. Being self-defined and self-determined was also empowering. Being self-defined and self-determined also disempowered the systems of oppression.

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6 Ibid., 276.
7 Ibid.
Review of bell hook's work

A review of bell hooks’ *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, provided an attempt to address the issue of struggling against the oppression in terms of how black men viewed themselves. She addressed the issue by raising the flag that

“…there is a crisis in the black male spirit in our nation. And the crisis is not because black men are an ‘endangered species,’ rather, it is a crisis perpetuated by widespread dehumanization, by the continued placement of black males outside the category of human, one that identifies them as animal, beast, other—which is precisely what happens when anyone deploys the phrase most commonly used to speak of animals, endangered species, when describing the lot of black men.”⁸

This uncovered the truth of how black men were viewed in American society. She also indicated “that unenlightened white folks began to use this phrase as more black female voices swelled in challenging black male sexism and calling on black folks to stop sexism and male domination in black life.”⁹ Patriarchal thought and practice influenced black males. She indicated that this was a “genocidal threat to black life” but by “coming together of free, whole, decolorized black males and females would constitute a formidable challenge to imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy.”¹⁰ This opened the door for black females and males to heal. This also allowed for black men not to accept the labels of others as they defined who they were. The idea that black men were endangered species described us as animals and along with labels came mistreatment.

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⁹ Ibid.
¹⁰ Ibid.
Review of Ayvazian’s Work

Andrea Ayvazian’s essay, “Interrupting the Cycle of Oppression”, appeared in Race, Class and Gender in the United States, edited by Paula S. Rothenberg. Systemic oppression was very prevalent in American society and it may be unclear as to the stance one should take. Ms. Ayvazian endorsed that one became an ally.

“What is an ally? An ally is a member of a dominant group in our society who works to dismantle any form of oppression from which she or he receives the benefit. Allied behavior means taking personal responsibility for the changes we know are needed in our society, and so often ignore or leave to others to deal with. Allied behavior is intentional, overt, consistent activity that challenges prevailing patterns of oppression, makes privileges that are so often invisible visible, and facilitates the empowerment of persons targeted by oppression.”

She described oppression as “the combination of prejudice plus access to social, political, and economic power on the part of a dominant group.” There was a dominant group in each form of oppression. Ayvazian indicated that all of us have multiple social identities and were all dominated and targeted at the same time. She also indicated that we all could be agents of change when we found ourselves in a dominant category. “Allied behavior usually involves talking to other dominants about their behavior. Allied behavior is clear action aimed at dismantling the oppression of others in areas where you yourself benefit-it is proactive, intentional, and often involves taking a risk.” When one served as an ally one had the best interest of others in mind. The more people that became allies the more the possibility of acceptance is created in our society.

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12 Ibid., 610.
13 Ibid.
Review of Fortunato's Work

John Fortunato’s work, *Embracing the Exile: Healing Journeys of Gay Christians*, described the spiritual and psychological journeys of people who were both gay and Christian. He also sought to help people in their journeys. In chapter 8, “Grieving Gay,” he stated, “the bottom line, of course, is that gay people just don’t get a choice. Oppression is simply what gay people face when they are authentic.”\(^{14}\) When faced with oppression, he stated gay people had three strategies: avoid it, fight it, or suffer through it.

“Avoiding the oppression usually means pretending that you are not oppressed. It amounts to being stuck at the denial or bargaining stage of grieving. This often takes the form of the closet.”\(^{15}\)

“Another ingrained way to deal with oppression is to fight it. But railing against the oppressor doesn’t work very well either. It is being stuck at the anger stage of grieving.”\(^{16}\)

“Then there’s suffering through it, a very common way gay people respond to their oppression. Suffering through is being stuck at the depression stage of grieving. Another word for it is being in despair.”\(^{17}\)

“Avoiding it, fighting it, or suffering through it don’t appear to be very helpful ways to deal with oppression. There seems to be only one way out. Deeper. Since being in exile isn’t negotiable, it might as well be embraced. And since it demands such drastic givings-up, it might was well be used as an opportunity for spiritual growth. Giving-up, after all, is for the spiritual journey. If you don’t have any choice about being in exile, then why not really be in exile? Why not affirm it with your whole heart and soul? It might just be a God-given invitation to spiritual deepening. It just might be a blessing in disguise. It just might be an opportunity. What gay people

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\(^{15}\) Ibid., 87-88.
\(^{16}\) Ibid., 89-90.
\(^{17}\) Ibid., 90.
ultimately have to give up is attachment to rejection and the need for people
to affirm their wholeness and loveableness.18

He wanted LGBTQ people to embrace their oppression as an opportunity for
spiritual deepening. This meant that one did not just stay on the surface, but went deeper
and explored until one became a critical thinker. The majority of the group suffered
through oppression since they indicated no response to the oppression. It would have
been great if the group was able to see oppression as an opportunity for spiritual
deepening and as a blessing in disguise.

**Summary of Empirical Literature Review**

The empirical literature review revealed that attempts to address the issue of
struggling against oppression of LGBTQ persons was just as interconnected as the
oppressions that effected us all. In everyday life, we had an opportunity to confront some
form of oppression. We could have stood up and cried ‘foul’ when we overheard racist
language, homophobic language, or any language that divided us. It revealed that we all
could have been change agents and allies to others who were different from ourselves.
The review also revealed that differences in others should be accepted and not
overlooked. Difference should also be viewed as an opportunity for spiritual deepening
and used as a starting point for a new inclusive community.

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18 Ibid., 90-91.
Theological Literature Review

The theological literature revealed that God was a God of the oppressed. It also revealed a theology of oppression that the oppressed lived with everyday. For LGBTQ persons, the God of liberation has been portrayed as the God of oppression. The theological literature review presented a liberated, LGBTQ affirming and inclusive God.

Review of J. Michael Clark’s Work

A review of *Defying the Darkness: Gay Theology in the Shadow*, by J. Michael Clark, spoke to articulating theology and ethics in the face of antigay/anti-lesbian violence and HIV/AIDS. “For those of us who are gay men and lesbians, our lives on the margins and at the edges have also become locations for violence, both in physical actions of gaybashing and in the subtler actions of homophobic prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion.” He made the point that gay theology or theology, came from the location where we experienced violence, self-hatred and discrimination. Gay theology included the percept of radical inclusivity. For clarity, Clark asserted “…one means of taking ethical responsibility and thereby avoiding the pitfalls of exclusion or vacuous political correctitude increasingly has become that of naming our social and ecological locations, describing the contexts from with we speak as completely and thoroughly as we can.” To that end, Clark revealed “…that my theology emerges from my particular location as a monogamously coupled, white gay male southerner and an HIV-positive

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20 Ibid., 4.
liberation theologian, one committed to profeminist theory and pro-earth practice and one marginalized by both academia and religious institutions.”

Clark did theology within the Judeo-Christian tradition. His use of the *Bible* was at a minimal and instead used trustworthy resources. Nonetheless, as he prepared to participate on the panel of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) in 1992, he discerned four potential basic resources for, or locations of, theological authority:

1. in scripture and the canon;
2. in the community of faith, whether Jewish or Christian
3. in the institutions and institutionalized expressions and traditions of such a community; and,
4. in the experience of people, particularly in the experience of those persons who have been oppressed by any of the other forms of religious expression and praxis.

He placed much emphasis on life in the margins or those on the edge, which are the fourth resource. “In other words, particularly for those of us who are gay men and lesbians in the primarily Christian West, our experience of oppression by much of the canon, scriptural interpretation and tradition, and church and synagogue becomes our authoritative standpoint for appraising all of the other basic resources.” Therefore, the margins or edge of our social location should be embraced since this was where gay theology began. What was experienced by LGBTQ persons in regards to oppression suffered at the hands of religious institutions was the catalyst for gay theology. Gay theology included the gospel of inclusion.

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21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., 9-10.
23 Ibid., 10.
Review of Flunder’s Work

When Clark’s theology was utilized for LGBTQ persons, the experience of oppression by much of the canon, scriptural interpretation and tradition, and church and synagogue became the authoritative standpoint against all other basis resources were appraised. We now turn to Bishop Yvette A. Flunder’s work, *Where the Edge Gathers: Building a Community of Radical Inclusion*. The work personified Clark’s fourth resource for theological authority. His fourth resource was the experience of people who were oppressed by any of the other forms of religious expression and praxis. Flunder was an inner-city pastor of City of Refuge United Church of Christ in San Francisco, California. In her work, she used examples of those who were most marginalized by church and society. She attempted to give everyone a seat at the table and wrote a teaching tool that was adapted to a twelve-step format. Bishop Flunder’s tool as called “Twelve Steps: The Refuge Radical Inclusivity Model (Working Assumptions for Faith Communities to Create, Sustain, and Celebrate Community of the Margin).” The teaching tool included:

**One**
Radical inclusivity is and must be radical.

**Two**
Radical inclusivity recognizes, values, loves, and celebrates people on the margin.

**Three**
Radical inclusivity recognizes harm done in the name of God.

**Four**
Radical inclusivity is intentional and creates ministry on the margin.

**Five**
Radical inclusivity’s primary goal is not to imitate the mainline church.

**Six**
Radical inclusivity requires a new way of seeing and a new way of being.

**Seven**
Radical inclusivity requires awareness, information, and understanding.
Eight
Radical inclusivity does not hide and works to undo shame and fear.

Nine
Radical inclusivity recognizes diversity on the margin.

Ten
Radical inclusivity must be linked to preaching and teaching.

Eleven
Radical inclusivity demands hospitality

Twelve
Radical inclusivity is best sustained and celebrated when everyone in the community is responsible and accountable.²⁴

The theology of those at the center was oppressive theology. Bishop Flunder gave us a theology from the experiences of life from those at the margins. It was a welcoming and radical inclusive theology. It was also an excellent example of gay theology.

Review of Douglas' Work

Kelly Brown Douglas was associate professor of theology at Howard University Divinity School, an Episcopal priest and author of *The Black Christ* and *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective*. In Clark's, *Defying the Darkness: Gay Theology in the Shadows*, she provided us with the second location of theological authority which was in the community of faith, whether Jewish or Christian. Many LGBTQ persons grew up and remained connected to the African-American church. In part three of *Sexuality and the Black Church*, she presented “A Theology of Black Sexuality.” Her theology addressed the major theological categories.

LGBTQ persons were created in the image of God. Douglas’ theology, “Created
in the image of the God of Jesus Christ” asserted that “any appreciation for what it means
to be created in the image of God and to reflect that image must begin with what makes
Christianity distinctive, God’s self-disclosure in Jesus…the first-century Jew from
Nazareth, is the ‘word made flesh,’ the embodied presence of God.”25 God was and is
with us. For Douglas, “the claim that God has become incarnate has made at least two
things clear. First, God’s embodied presence in Jesus affirms the testimony of the first
chapter of Genesis that all of God’s creation was good, including the human body…This
divine/human union leads us to the second message of God’s embodied presence: God is
present with us through our very humanity.”26 The human body was an instrument for
divine presence. It was the church’s chief confession since Nicaea (325) and Chalcedon
(451) that in Jesus there was a perfect union of both divinity and humanity.27 “You shall
love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your
mind.” This was the greatest and first commandment. The second commandment
charged us to, “… love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mat 22:37-39 )

Jesus

“By recognizing God’s embodied presence in Jesus as the “humanity of God”
Barth, whether he intended to or not, insinuates the very meaning of authentic humanity.
Such authenticity is found in a divine love for humanity that inspires human beings to

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26 Ibid., 112-113.
27 Ibid., 113.
also give of themselves in loving relationships.” Jesus’ ministry was about sharing God’s love with others, especially with those who needed it most. “What Jesus did—his ministry—reveals his divinity and what it means to share the love of God. His ministry was characterized by giving of himself to others so that they might experience justice, healing, belonging, self-worth, life, and/or empowerment.” Jesus was in fellowship with the outcasts and sought justice for the oppressed. He did not tolerate hate, prejudice of any kind, or that people were marginalized because of their physical, social, or economic condition, and neither did he tolerate neutrality in the face of human misery or injustice. His followers were to do the same. They should have also performed agape love—the love of God that was manifested in Jesus. “By perfectly manifesting agape, Jesus’ life and ministry, is the presence of God in the world, reinforce the understanding that to reflect the image of God is to do nothing less than nurture loving relationships.” Nurturing loving relationships also required that LGBTQ persons developed a loving relationship with themselves.

**Holy Spirit**

God’s love was revealed as nothing else if not life-generating energy. This was seen as the passion of God. “The passion of God, therefore, reflects two aspects of the word “passion”—as derived from the Latin term passio—refers to suffering, and it also refers to a powerful emotion, such as ardent love...God’s passion reveals the inextricable connection between God’s suffering and God’s love of life. God is willing to suffer for

28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 115.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., 119.
God’s ardent love of life.”

God’s passion signified love as well as suffering. For Douglas, “it is that divine energy within human beings, the love of God that compels them toward life-giving, life-producing, and life-affirming activity and relationships in regard to all of God’s creation.”

This divine energy in LGBTQ persons compelled them towards life-giving, life-producing and life-affirming actions for their community and lives.

**Revelation and Praxis**

Douglas presented this as ‘Sexual Discourse and Authentic Black Faith’ in which she encouraged “Black and Womanist theologians to engage in and promote a sexual discourse of resistance not only because of the need to restore the relationship between human sexuality and the God of Jesus Christ, but also to connect Black faith back with its ‘authentic’ religious heritage and to liberate Black people from the cycle of White cultural sin.”

Black church people view human sexuality as sinful and evil. They refused to have an open discussion about sexuality. Our enslaved ancestors “used their African worldview, culture, and religious heritage “to make Christianity their own,”

while Blacks today “betray their enslaved religious heritage in that they have adopted the dominant Western European and Euro-American tradition of spiritualistic dualism and pietism.”

There was no distinction between the sacred and secular reality in the African understanding. “Every dimension of the world and humanity according to numerous

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33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 120.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
African religions, is spiritual, is of God, and communicates God’s presence. It is no wonder, then, that the enslaved were able to give witness to God by emphasizing God’s very humanity.”38 African-American church people had a disembodied view of the incarnation.

“A sexual discourse of resistance is necessary to call Black people back to their African religious heritage, which rightly views human sexuality as divine. Such a discourse will make it abundantly clear that, on the one hand an African perspective has fostered an understanding of Christianity that supports the quest for Black life and wholeness, while, on the other hand, a Euro-American, “flesh-denying” perspective has fostered Black oppression, especially the denigration and exploitation of Black sexuality.”39

A Black sexual discourse of resistance affirmed the goodness of human sexuality. This allowed LGBTQ persons to view themselves as whole persons and not as a mistake or sinful.

**Human Nature and Sin**

Douglas captured this in her writing under ‘Sexual Discourse and the Cycle of Sin, ‘The Sinfulness of White Culture’ and ‘Homophobia: A Sin and Betrayal of Black Faith.’ She advocated for Black and Womanist theologies to be involved in sexual discourse in order to “...break the cycle of sin created by the White cultural exploitation of Black sexuality. White cultural attacks upon Black sexuality are inherently sinful because they alienate persons from their bodies and their sexualities and, hence, from God. Such attacks thwart Black self-love and the capacity for Black people to form loving relationships with others.”40 Blackness was seen as ugly and evil in our culture.

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38 Ibid., 122.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., 122-123.
Black church people insisted that they loved God, but their lack of self-love suggested otherwise. First our own bodies must be loved before we could love others. “Without self-acceptance, any acceptance of others is virtually impossible. Self-love is the absolute first step to loving others. And, ultimately, if we cannot love others, then we cannot fully love God, as our love for God is manifest through our love of others.”

Summary of Theological Literature Review

In summary, the theological literature revealed that the experiences of the oppressed by much of the canon, scriptural interpretation and tradition, and church and synagogue became the authoritative standpoint by which all of the other basis theological resources were appraised. The theological literature review also revealed that much of theology was from one’s own experience and was reflected back out into society in a more loving, caring and supportive way. It also revealed that self-love carried over to love of others and God.

41 Ibid., 123.
Biblical Literature Review

Biblical literature that attempted to address the issue of LGBTQ persons struggling against oppression revealed several sources. Experiences of oppression and exclusion provided us with a hermeneutic of suspicion, which was bound to be applied to scripture and canon, to institutions and tradition. A hermeneutic of suspicion became the liberation theologian’s criterion of selectivity that dismissed outright any oppressive elements in, and for choosing to focus on the prophetic strands of, our scriptures and our traditions.\(^{42}\)

Review of Soards’ Work

Marion L. Soards, was a professor of New Testament Studies at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. His work, *Scripture and Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church Today*, struggled with how Christians should have responded to and comprehended God’s will as it dealt with homosexuality. He set the stage with biblical authority and the Reformed Tradition in a section entitled, ‘The Necessity of Interpretation.’ He reminded us that using the *Bible*, as an authoritative source was not without difficulty. He stated, “the *Bible* was written long ago and far away: (1) in different times-from more than a thousand years before Christ to several decades after his death; (2) in different places-the Mediterranean and the Near East; (3) in different cultures-Semitic and Greco-roman; (4) in different languages-Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, with reference to and evidence of the influence of Latin.”\(^{43}\) Interpretation was key to understanding the text.

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\(^{42}\) Clark, 11.

\(^{43}\) Marion L. Soards, *Scripture & Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church Today*
He used as his basis for interpretation three concerns:

(1) What the Bible says to each of us as individuals
(2) What the Bible has said to those before us and with us in the life of the church.
(3) What the biblical writings said to their first readers, or what we perceive the author intended to say to the original audience.\footnote{Ibid.}

He suggested, "...that our primary task as interpreters is to ask (3); it is only when we have resolved this issue that we are in a position to ask and then critique (2) and (1)...we must ask whether our interpretations are congruent with the "plain sense" of the scriptures. In order to control, to guide, to criticize, and to guarantee appropriate interpretation, we must become informed and active readers."\footnote{Ibid.} We were all interpreters.

We brought ourselves to the reading of scripture.

**Review of Bailey's Work**

Randall C. Bailey's work, "The Danger of Ignoring One's Own Cultural Bias in Interpreting the Text" in *The Post Colonial Bible*, reminded us of the importance of Afrocentric biblical interpretation and its functions in times past. He stated, "A major difference between Afrocentric biblical interpretation and Eurocentric interpretation was the sense of the immanence of the supernatural and miraculous."\footnote{Ibid.} The Negro spirituals spoke of God intervening to help the oppressed.

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“The spirituals became a way of political communication among the initiated, which would be safe in the presence of the oppressor, in the same way that apocalyptic literature found in the Bible was coded to enable the Judeans, oppressed by the Greeks and Roman, and the members of the early church, oppressed by the Romans, to resist the oppression and to struggle for their freedom...Thus, the spirituals give us a glimpse of the history and freedom of black Christian interpretation.”

What happened to black Christian interpretation? As Bailey admitted, “we may have forgotten our legacy or we may not have taken seriously enough our own traditions.” All factors pointed to us not having taken our own traditions seriously enough. As the whole language world of the Bible was adopted in black life, also came the interpretation and symbols of the oppressor, as the article suggested, there was also a negative psychological aspect that was digested by blacks.

It was important to Bailey that we remembered to read and interpret the Bible through our own experience. Each of us brought our own unique gathering to the table. It was Bailey’s hope that the number of Black biblical scholars increased to do the scholarly work that needed to be done to present a true picture of Black Christian interpretation.

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47 Ibid., 72-73.
48 Ibid., 73-74.
49 Ibid., 74.
Review of Spencer’s Work

Daniel T. Spencer’s work was an essay in, *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible*. Spencer, was a gay male Christian ethicist, who sought to answer the question, ‘What are the goals and value of “queer readings” of the Bible?’ He indicated that much of the writings in the ‘early’ days were ‘apologetic’, classroom debates were confined to the ‘texts of terror’. He asserted, “Queer reading of Scripture-nonapologetic, using the lens of lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgendered experience to shed light on biblical texts were largely nonexistent or confined to seminary essays and journal entries.”

Spencer described his location “as an ethicist whose work seeks to bridge feminist, queer, Latin American liberationist and ecological writings, I have been interested in biblical hermeneutics to the extent that it can aid in constructing a liberationist ecojustice ethic through liberationist reading of the Bible.” His conviction, from his earlier work, ‘Bridging the Chasm’, was:

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51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., 194-195.
"...that it is not good enough to expose and name the ways the Bible has been used inappropriately to oppress gay men and lesbians and keep our voices silent. It is not enough simple to withdraw from churches whose practice is by and large oppressive rather than liberating for lesbians and gay people. We need to work at transforming this praxis. There will continue to be girls and boys who grow up within the church who will struggle with the contradictions between their own emerging lesbian or gay feelings and identity and the teachings and praxis of the church on homosexuality. Without challenging the church to transformation, gay men and lesbians in the wider society will continue to be denied opportunities, beaten, and murdered, and have these acts justified by Christians quoting the Bible...it is imperative that lesbians and gay men in the churches understand what is at stake in the debates on the Bible, and that we understand the arguments in order to demystify their power. We need to turn from a hermeneutics informed...

by an apologetic stance that tries to justify our place in the church to engage in the reconstructive task of hermeneutics that enlists the Bible as a resource for our liberation and challenges those who seek to exclude and oppress us."\textsuperscript{60}

The writer concurred with the author on this point. Being apologetic and trying to justify inclusion in the church was only trying to fit in. The reconstructive task was to make a difference as we engaged the Bible as a tool for liberation and challenged those whose interpretation was limited and exclusive.

Spencer drew on a fourfold typology for the use of the Bible in ethics as he surveyed and critiqued eight biblical scholars who dealt with the issue of homosexuality and the Bible. The fourfold typology is as follows:

1. \textit{Reactionary} approaches move directly from a literalistic interpretation of the text to ethical commandments or norms. They explicitly teach commitment to present alignments of sex and gender, and allegiance to a model of Divine-human relations that best protects this. Fundamentalism and the so-called Moral Majority are example of this position. Homosexuality is explicitly condemned and vigorously opposed. Proponents of reactionary perspectives are willing to use power-to react-against positions opposing them.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 195.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
(2) *Traditionalist* approaches may use biblical criticism in exegesis, but still move directly from exegesis to ethical principles. They tend to utilize other contemporary resource such as sociopolitical analysis and the social sciences. They also seek to maintain the status quo in sex and gender relations, but do so by cleaving to certain theological and religious traditions rather than using power to try to return to an earlier arrangement of gender relations. Traditionalist theologies maintain powerful distinction between Divine-human and human-human relations, which serves to curtail criticism of inherited patterns of power relations in society. They usually oppose homosexuality as sinful and morally wrong.\(^{62}\)

(3) *Liberal* approaches use biblical criticism informed by insights from other contemporary resources before stating ethical norms or principles. They acknowledge the need for some change in both the church and in society which they see taking place through processes of reform. Liberal theologies try to discern what should be kept from tradition and what should be changed. Homosexual relations should be judged by the same ethical standard use to judge heterosexual relationships.\(^{63}\)

(4) *Liberationist* approaches begin from a stated commitment to justice and explicitly incorporate a critical consciousness of power relations in examining scripture and its historical context prior to stating ethical norms and principles. In contrast to the first three approaches which all accept the given reality in the church and society as something to be maintained or reformed, liberationist approaches see the dominant expressions of church and society as oppressive and therefore in need of radical transformation. Proponents of liberationist approach with regard to sexuality critique the notion of a ‘normative’ heterosexual center to church and society. They focus on exposing and transforming heterosexist structures and homophobic attitudes in their call for justice for lesbians and gay men.\(^{64}\)

Most of the readings in the collection took a liberationist approach. Having knowledge of the approaches assisted greatly in the struggle against oppression where it was present.

After the approaches were reviewed it should be clear where one’s allegiance lies.

\(^{62}\) Ibid.
\(^{63}\) Ibid.
\(^{64}\) Ibid.
Summary of the Biblical Literature Review

In summary, the biblical literature review revealed several interesting correlations. All of the authors stressed biblical interpretation from the social location of the reader. The biblical literature review revealed that Black Christian church people have lost themselves in Black Christian biblical interpretation. We have not taken seriously enough our own traditions. Instead we have taken the biblical interpretations and symbols of the oppressor and it has had a negative psychological impact on us, as evidenced by self-hatred of our blackness, Black-on-Black crime and the dehumanization of our bodies. We should use our social location to bring about change for those to come behind us.

Theoretical Literature Review

Highlights of theoretical literature that related to the issue of struggling against the oppression for LGBTQ persons in the African-American church revealed several sources for review. The literature review consisted of an individual writer with the remaining sources works of edited essays and is as follows.

Review of Gallagher and Wilson’s Work

Bob Gallagher and Alexander Wilson were the authors of, “Sex and the Politics of Identity: An Interview with Michel Foucault”, which appeared in Gay Spirit: Myth and Meaning, edited by Mark Thompson. “Foucault’s declaration reflects an important question: Should gay people embrace a social identity that was largely created from the sexual mores of the late nineteenth century, or pursue “relationships of differentiation, of
Being ‘different’ was a theme that continued to develop in the literature review. He was “...most widely known for his three-volume *History of Sexuality*. His daring system of analytic thought, known as structuralism, made him a cult figure to students and intellectuals around the world...he was also known for his outspoken opinions on gay rights, making no secret of his own sexual orientation.”

Foucault was a historian, philosopher, critic and social theorist. Additionally, he was professor of history of systems of thought at the College de France in Paris and also taught in the United States; at Berkeley He indeed was an influential thinker.

“Foucault argues that history must not be regarded from an essentialist perspective—that is, using a generalized conceit such as ‘patriarchy’ or ‘class struggle’—but by directly examining how people actually construct and express their daily lives. If gay people are truly to know themselves, suggests Foucault, they must examine and rely on their own potential—in short, create themselves—rather than insist on conforming to the socially constructed role of the “homosexual,” a consciousness that has primarily been defined by others.”

This meant loving yourself enough to take control of your life. This implied that there should be the existence of high self-esteem. Perhaps the ‘down low’ phenomenon served as an excellent example from which we can all learn. It also suggested that we needed a new mindset; if it was not present, one should have been created. This challenge and

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66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
invitation suggested that we were responsible for our own fate and must determine our own destiny.

The Combahee River Collective’s Work

The Combahee River Collective’s work, ‘A Black Feminist Statement’, appeared in chapter 5, “Beyond the Margins: Black Women Claiming Feminism”, in Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought. “The Combahee River Collective was an important black feminist group that began in 1974 as the Boston chapter of the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO), founded in 1973. The name was inspired by a river in South Carolina where Harriet Tubman has mounted a military campaign during the Civil War to free 750 slaves.”69

Three members, Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith and Demita Frazier, wrote the group’s philosophy in 1977. “This black feminist manifesto is a clear articulation of the evolution of contemporary black feminist and the concept of the simultaneity of oppressions that black women suffer. It also emphasized the importance of eradicating homophobia and acknowledging the role of lesbians in the development of black feminist,”70 Black lesbians were important to black feminism but were many times left out. This ‘simultaneity of oppressions’ led to the interconnectivity of oppressions that are struggled against today. As with any black women’s movement, it was concerned about others.

70 Ibid.
‘A Black Feminist Statement’, was the philosophy of The Combahee River Collective.

“The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heteroexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As black women we see black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face.”

Review of Dyson’s Work

Michael Eric Dyson’s essay entitled, “When you Divide Body and Soul, Problems Multiply: The Black Church and Sex”, appeared in *Traps: African American Men on Gender and Sexuality*. At the time of this writing, he was the Ida Wells Barnett Professor of Journalism at DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois and a prolific cultural critic. He also previously pastured several Baptist churches. Dyson presented several issues that affected black communities and churches, such as “…historically black churches have a real opportunity to bring lasting change more quickly to their religious bodies. Such change is sorely needed in black communities and churches where issues of sexuality have nearly exploded.”

He admitted, “there is also erotic dishonesty in another sexual identity,” in reference to the black church, and that was homosexuality. The notorious homophobia of the black church just doesn’t square with the numerous same-sex unions taking place,

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71 Ibid., 232.
from the pulpit to the pew.” He critiqued the black church for its mistreatment of LGBTQ persons:

Central to the doctrine of Incarnation in the black church is the belief that God identified with the most despised members of our society by becoming the most despised member of our society. Sunday after Sunday black ministers invite us to imagine God as, say, a hobo, or a homeless person. Well, imagine God as gay. Imagine God as lesbian. Is the gay or lesbian body of God to be rejected? Better still, isn’t God’s love capable of redeeming a gay or lesbian person. The traditional black theological answer has been yes, if that person is willing to “give up” his or her sin-in this case, being gay or lesbian-and turn to God. But a more faithful interpretation of a black theology of love and liberation asserts that God takes on the very identity that is despised or scorned—being black, say, or being poor or being a woman—to prove its worthiness as a vehicle for redemption. We don’t have to stop being black to be saved. We don’t have to stop being women to be saved. We don’t have to stop being poor to be saved. And we don’t have to stop being gay or lesbian to be saved. Black Christians, who have been despised and oppressed for much of our existence, should be wary of extending that oppression to our lesbian sisters and gay brothers.

Summary of Theoretical Literature Review

The theoretical literature review revealed that other sources addressed the issue of struggling against oppression that LGBTQ persons face in the African American church and the African-American community. Foucault’s insight pointed to pursuing relationship of differentiation of the ‘down-low’ phenomenon. Dyson’s theology of homoeroticism was definitely needed in the African-American church and community.

Summary of the Literature Review

In summary, the literature reviews revealed many resources that empowered LGBTQ persons. The main point of the literature seemed to be that modern day writers

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73 Ibid., 324.
74 Ibid., 322-326.
who attempted to translate the Bible, in trying to justify hatred of LGBTQ persons, used the Bible as their primary weapon. This was seen very clearly in the Reactionary typology. More importantly, translators of the Bible did not seem to be faithful to biblical interpretation. As Soards suggested our primary task as interpreters was to ask “…what the biblical writings said to their first readers, or what we perceive the author intended to say to the original audience…It is only when we have resolved this issue that we are in a position to ask and then critique what the Bible has said to those before us and with us in the life of the church and what the Bible says to each of us as individuals.”

Also, the literature indicated that LGBTQ Christians could be empowered to live full lives in spite of the hostility exhibited towards them. Those who went through the struggle always seemed to have a story to tell so that others may know that oppression was something that one goes through. One should not give up but remain persistent in the pursuit of justice.

The literature review encouraged us to imagine God as an LGBTQ person. Could we see God as an LGBTQ person? We could and should make room for God as a LGBTQ person at the table. The literature review also suggested that LGBTQ persons are accepted by God without the need to become someone they are not. Why should LGBTQ persons be changed to be included in the family of God?

The literature search also indicated that being LGBTQ and Christian was being lived out throughout the world. LGBTQ Christians contributed to the spiritual well being of the world. Positive and affirming examples of LGBTQ Christians were presented. This empowered others to know that there were LGBTQ Christians and non-Christians

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75 Soards, 10-11.
living in liberty. Social justice then should happen for LGBTQ persons in the African-American church.
CHAPTER IV

BIBLICAL STUDIES

Most of the oppression that LGBTQ persons faced came from biblical interpretation in the church, as was presented in the biblical literature review. This chapter examined selected biblical texts and their interpretation from various biblical scholars. Included were two biblical texts, Genesis 19:1-26 and Romans 1:18-32, which were central to the oppression of LGBTQ persons and two other biblical texts, Genesis 9:18-28 and Ephesians 6:5-8, which were central to the oppression of blacks. This chapter also endeavored to determine how queer and black scholars dealt with these texts and their ideologies. It also attempted to determine if there was any similarity and/or difference in their approaches, methods, arguments, and view of authority of the text. The chapter also sought to discover the types of oppression and privileging supported by their use.

Also, included in this chapter was an attempt to ascertain the bible's influence regarding the oppressive ideologies argued to be in these texts. It discussed how the church used these texts to oppress some groups and empower others. The chapter concluded with lessons that each group could learn from the other about “healthy” ways of responding to oppressive texts/readings of texts.
Queer Scholarship

Dr. Mona West was a lesbian, trained biblical scholar and ordained clergy in the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UMC). West examined how queer scholars dealt with these texts and their ideologies and provided an excellent system for evaluating readings of queer texts. In “Reading the Bible as Queer Americans: Social Location and the Hebrew Scriptures,” she provided four reading strategies that could be employed when biblical texts were encountered: (1) a defensive stance toward Scripture, (2) an offensive stance toward Scripture, (3) outing the Bible, and (4) reading the Bible from the social location of being Queer. The defensive stance was used against scriptures commonly known in queer congregations as the clobber texts. These texts included Genesis 19:1-28, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:15, Romans 1:26-28 and the laundry list of 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10. In the offensive stance that West mentioned the writings of Elder Nancy Elder, moderator of MCC, contributed to the influence of the second strategy. The offensive stance identified “texts that affirm same-sex love and the goodness of human sexuality.” Nancy Wilson also developed the third reading strategy which ousted the Bible and identities of some of the biblical characters in the texts were reconstructed. In this reconstruction, some biblical characters were identified as queer. The fourth strategy that Dr. West identified was reading the Bible from the social location of being queer. This strategy engaged the entire message of the Bible with the lived experiences of the multi-faceted queer community.

2 Ibid., 33.
Black Scholarship

Black scholars also had a methodology that dealt with scriptural texts. Dr. Randall C. Bailey was an Andrew Melton Professor of Hebrew Bible at Interdenominational Theological Center. Dr. Bailey indicated that blacks in biblical studies were engaged in four different tasks. In “Academic Biblical Interpretation Among African Americans in the United States,” published in *African Americans and the Bible*, he described the tasks as: (1) the demonstration of African presence in the text; (2) the delineation of racist/white supremacist interpretations of the text; (3) exploring the history of interpretation within the African-American community and cultural interpretation; and (4) ideological interpretation of the text.”

Demonstration of African presence in the text affirmed that black people were there. When black people realized that they were in the *Bible*, this would be a cause for pride. The second task described racism and white supremacy in the traditions of interpretation in the text. The third task was the cultural-historical interpretation that attempted to address the issue of the importance of the *Bible* in the black community and its influence in black life. The last task, ideological criticism, endeavored to discover the story of the black community and how the text should be read.

**Genesis 9:18-28**

The first text considered was Genesis 9:18-28. The first scholar was Dr. Charles B. Copher, who was Professor Emeritus of Old Testament at Interdenominational Theological Center. The essay, “The Black Presence in the Old Testament,” in the book, 

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Stony The Road We Trod, Copher very successfully demonstrated African presence in the text. He maintained that there was difficulty surrounding this issue and he looked at several views about the subject. From these views he concluded that indeed there was a black presence in the Bible. He indicated that the curse of Canaan, which in many instances was interpreted as a curse upon Ham, descendants were listed in the Table of Nations in Genesis 10:1-14 and 1 Corinthians 1:8-16. Dr. Copher stated that “...according to this view, which proliferated into several versions, Ham and/or Canaan, more often Ham, was turned black as a result of Noah’s curse, and his descendants were doomed to bear the same color.”

Through this text, the presence of Africans was evident in the Bible.

Dr. Cain Hope Felder, former Professor of New Testament Language and Literature and Editor of The Journal of Religious Thought at the School of Divinity, Howard University, Washington, D.C, in Troubling Biblical Waters, presented another view on Genesis 9:18-28. In his book, Felder undertook the second task that Black scholars used to understand this text. He delineated the racist/white supremacist interpretations of the text. Dr. Felder described the text as an example of sacralization. Sacralization was described as “…the transposing of an ideological concept into a tenet of religious faith in order to serve the vested interest of a particular ethnic group.” Felder felt that this text stood out because it included the so-called curse of Ham. In his opinion, the significance of the text was not the curse of Ham, which is not a curse at all,

but that “the whole post-diluvial humanity stems from Noah’s three sons.” Interpreters stressed the curse of Ham in the text and missed the point that indicated all of humanity had their origin in Noah’s three sons. One of Noah’s sons, Ham, was black. This suggested that as human beings we were all related. Could it be the white interpreters had difficulty with this interpretation?

Gunter Wittenberg’s article entitled, “…Let Canaan be his slave” (Gen. 9:26): is Ham also Cursed?” in the Journal of Theology for Southern Africa, Wittenberg indicated that “the threefold division of mankind into the sons of Shem, Ham and Japheth, was a conventional means of classifying various groups according to social and economic practices in all fields of culture-the political organization, the social hierarchy and stratification, the economic basis and sources of maintenance and mode of life.” This seemed to be the fourth task that Dr. Bailey mentioned or the ideological criticism that endeavored to discover the story of the black community and how it should be read into the text.

People bought into the oppressive ideologies of this text because the Bible was viewed as the word of God. As such, the Bible was not questioned. Interpretations of the text by white interpreters enabled a church and society that accepted a negative view of blackness, which was understood as being condemned in the Bible, and to empowered whites. We were indeed indebted to Black Scholarship for liberating the biblical interpretation of the text.

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6 Ibid.
7 Gunter Wittenberg, “…Let Canaan be his slave” (Gen.9:26): is Ham also cursed?” Journal of Theology for Southern Africa, no.74 (Mr 1991), 51.
Queer theories and scholars used the defense mechanism against the clobber passage, Genesis 19:1-26. The defense mechanism implied that one must protect one’s self since there was no one else to do it. The most famous biblical passage condemned homosexuality was the account of Sodom in Genesis 19:1-11. Daniel Helminiak was a scholar and instructor, that wrote, “…since about the Twelfth Century, this story has been taken to condemn homosexuality. The very word “sodomite” was taken to refer to someone who engages in anal sex, and the sin of Sodom was taken to be male homogenital acts. So supposedly God condemned and punished the citizens of Sodom, the Sodomites, for homogential activity.”

This was based on the word ‘to know’ (yadha) which implied to know sexually. He maintained that if there was a sexual overtone here; it was male-male rape and not a healthy expression of sex between consenting adults. The term also meant ‘to get acquainted with.’ The defense for queer scholars and some other gay affirming scholars was that the Bible, in this scripture passage, saw male-male rape as homosexuality. Rape of any kind was not acceptable or a healthy expression for adults who consented of any persuasion.

Mr. Helminiak and queer theorists maintained the belief that Sodom was to be destroyed even before, as Peter Gomes, author of the Good Book put it, the “unpleasant incident at Lot’s door”9. We saw evidence of this in Genesis18:20-21. The New Revised Standard Version read, ‘…then the Lord said, “How great is the outcry against Sodom

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and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin! I must go down and see whether they have
done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me; and if not, I will know.”\textsuperscript{10}
Therefore, events that took place at Lot’s door had nothing to do with Sodom being
destroyed since angels where already on their way to destroy the city. Chapters 18 and
19 of Genesis exemplified how Abraham, Lot and the men of Sodom treated the angels.
Lack of hospitality was another defensive stance queer theorists and some other gay
affirming scholars used as the reason why the city was going to be destroyed.

Other sources also pointed to another interpretation of the text. John Boswell was
a gay historian and professor of history at Yale and author of \textit{Christianity, Social
Tolerance, and Homosexuality}, indicated that since 1955 modern scholarship revealed the
city was destroyed for inhospitable treatment of visitors sent from God.\textsuperscript{11} This was due
to Lot being a foreigner who violated the custom of Sodom when he brought unknown
guests into the city at night without the permission of town elders. Boswell maintained
that “when the men of Sodom gathered around to demand that the strangers be brought
out to them, ‘that they might know them’ they meant no more than to ‘know’ who they
were, and the city was consequently destroyed not for sexual immorality but for the sin of
inhospitality to strangers.”\textsuperscript{12} The defensive stance was maintained in this view of the text
that the city was destroyed for the sin of inhospitality.

How did black and other scholars interpret this text? One interpretation was that
of Dr. Randall Bailey, who was an Old Testament scholar at Interdenominational

\textsuperscript{10} Gen. 18: 20-21 NRSV (New Revised Standard Version).
\textsuperscript{11} John Boswell, \textit{Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western
Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century} (Chicago: The University of
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 94.
Theological Center. At the time of this dissertation in a yet to be published article, "Genesis 19:1-14-Sodom and Gomorrah", in Open with Caution: The Bible, Sex and Sexualities, he shed a liberating light on this well known scripture. He suggested that the reason that the men surrounded Lot's house was a military action since Lot could have been a spy that worked in conjunction with the visitors. Boswell seemed to have hinted at this suggestion as well but drew a different conclusion. Bailey also maintained that the men of the city wanted to know who the strangers were and be prepared in case they were spies. He provided the cultural-historical interpretation that addressed the importance of the Bible.

Scott Morschauser expounded on this view in an article in the Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. The article entitled, 'Hospitality, hostiles and hostages: on the legal background to Genesis 19.1-9,' he reminded us that Sodom had been at war and that Lot as he sat at the gate, was on 'guard duty', and tasked to determine who could or could not enter the city. "He is the last line of defense against spies and saboteurs: it is Lot who has offered 'legal' sanction to these unknown travelers behind the barricade of the town." He suggested that Lot, "by granting them sanctuary...in his official capacity as a 'gate-keeper', has assumed responsibility for his charges' welfare, and for their activities within Sodom itself. Their movements and actions are to be monitored-they are placed under a kind of temporary 'house-arrest'. It was easy to understand the concern of the

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15 Ibid., 470.
men of the city, as they demanded that the men be produced for interrogation.\textsuperscript{16} When Lot offered his daughters, he further suggested, "...that Lot’s actions are neither an expression of patriarchal privilege, nor justification for its abuse, but are to be considered within the practice of ‘hostage-exchange’...to be held-in safekeeping-until the condition or promise is satisfactory carried out."\textsuperscript{17} This was a great contribution to the understanding of this scripture text. He liberated that text for all believers.

Even though Mr. Helminiak and queer theorists supported the idea that Sodom and Gomorrah were to be destroyed even before the incident at Lot’s door, he and others asserted that the incident at Lot’s door was sexual in context, however negative. Could not ‘yadha’ also have been interpreted to mean to get acquainted with? What difference did Queer Scholars make in comparison with biblical translators who brought their own stuff to the table of biblical translating? If biblical translations have been viewed as oppressive to LGBTQ persons because of the one sided view that was held by ‘all the men of the city wanting to have sex with the angels’, were their interpretations oppressive as well? Great work has been done by Queer Scholars but in this text, there was more than one interpretation.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 472.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 475.
Romans 1:26-27

In Romans 1:26-27, John Boswell, wanted us to know what Paul meant by natural. In his book, Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality, he stated:

The concept of “natural law” was not fully developed until more than a millennium after Paul’s death, and it is anachronistic to read it into his words. For Paul, “nature” was not a question of universal law or truth but, rather, a matter of the character of some person or group of persons, a character which was largely ethnic and entirely human: Jews are Jews “by nature,” just as Gentiles are Gentiles “by nature.” “Nature is not a moral force for Paul: men may be evil or good “by nature,” depending on their own disposition. A possessive is always understood with “nature” in Pauline writings: it is not “nature” in the abstract but someone’s “nature.” the Jews’ “nature” or the Gentiles’ “nature” or even the pagan gods’ “nature.””Nature” in Romans 1:26, then, should be understood as the personal nature of the pagans in question.\(^{18}\)

Boswell seemed to out the Bible and read the text from the social location of being queer. For him, nature in the text evolved around what was expected from a person. He seemed to mean that, we knew what was expected from someone by one’s character. One’s character then told one’s story. This seemed consistent with truths held in ancient times. Boswell then stated that what was more important was that the persons Paul condemned went beyond what was considered natural for them.

John J. McNeill, author of The Church and the Homosexual, was an ordained priest and practicing psychotherapist, who was expelled from the Society of Jesus in 1987 because he refused to cease his ministry to gay men and lesbians, provided our next interpretation of Romans 1:26. He stated, “...the strongest New Testament argument against homosexual activity as intrinsically immoral has been derived traditionally from Rom. 1:26, where this activity is indicated as *para phasin*...English translation for this

\(^{18}\) John Boswell, 110-111.
phrase as been “against nature.” He first wanted to understand what Paul meant by the phrase. To this end, he provided two interpretations. The first interpretation he stated, “Paul apparently refers only to homosexual acts indulged in by those he considered to be otherwise heterosexually inclined: acts which represent a voluntary choice to act contrary to their ordinary sexual appetite.” McNeill suggested that ‘pagans’ made a strong choice as they abandoned that which was natural and went beyond what was not natural for them sexually. “The second possibility is that physis refers to the “nature” of the chosen people who were forbidden by Levitical law to have homosexual relations.” This implied that Gentiles, who had accepted the one true God had also accepted Levitical law.

Both John Boswell and Father McNeil wanted to put blame on the pagans. Since both interpretations used the defensive stance, the blame had to go to someone. These Queer Scholars seemed to buy into the blame game in an effort it appeared to have some sense of control. Father McNeil's defensive stance also raised a question about Paul’s theology. Paul maintained that Gentiles did not need to become Jews first and then Christians. Father McNeill’s interpretation seemed to be going against Paul’s theology.

**Ephesians 6:5-8**

The next text to be discussed was Ephesians 6:5-8. Dr. Clarice J. Martin was an Assistant Professor of New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary and an ordained member of the Presbyterian clergy. Her essay entitled, “The Haustafeln (Household Codes) in African American Biblical Interpretation: “Free Slaves” and

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20 Ibid., 55.
21 Ibid.
"Subordinate Women", in *Stony The Road We Trod*, indicated that the codes originated in the social world of the time. The codes were incorporated into the Church to keep peace with the hierarchy and patriarchal society. According to Dr. Martin, the codes "reflect an attempt to restrict the enthusiasm of women and slaves and thus restore order to the patriarchal household...The Haustafeln were also used to reinforce the hierarchical, patriarchal ordering of the husband-wife, father-child, and master-slave relationships and to justify them christologically." She addressed the second and third tasks of black scholars presented by Dr. Bailey. She described the racism and white supremacy in the traditions of interpretation in the text and she exposed the cultural-historical interpretation that attempted to address the issue of the importance of the *Bible* in the black community and its influence in black life.

Horace Griffin was a gay African-American Christian and religious academic, wrote in *Theology & Sexuality: The Journal of the Institute for the Study of Christianity & Sexuality*, that "...white Christian ministers, missionaries and masters supported slavery by appealing to such scriptural passages as Eph. 6:5." He maintained, "...slaves were mainly converted to Christianity by conservative white Christians who were sex negative." He indicates that slaves were attracted to and embraced this conservative white Christianity. He also maintained that the Baptist denomination attracted the largest number of African Americans because it lacked structure in worship

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24 Ibid., 93.
and de-emphasized education. Thus, Mr. Griffin provided us with the third task for black scholars and that was the cultural-historical interpretation that attempted to address the issue of the importance of the Bible in the black community and its influence in black life.

The hierarchical and patriarchal ordering, to date, still exists. These interpretations showed how white men were empowered by the Bible. The Bible was used to keep others in their place in society. These interpretations showed how the Bible was used as an instrument of control to keep white men in power.

**Similarities and Differences in Approaches**

There were slight differences that existed for each group as they approached the texts. For Black scholars, the approach was to describe racism and white supremacy in the traditions of interpretation in the text. For most queer scholars, the approach was to take the defensive stance towards the texts. Black and queer scholars sought to identify the attitudes that the interpreters brought to the text. Some queer and black scholars also sought to reinterpret the text and provided another meaning for the text. Both seem to want to arm themselves against the pain of inferiority and rejection.

There were many similarities in their approaches, methods, arguments, and view of authority of the texts. These similarities included the offensive stance, outing the Bible and reading the Bible for the social location of the queer community for queer scholars. For Black scholars the similarities included the realization that there was a Black presence in the Bible, the cultural-historical interpretation that attempted to address the issue of the importance of the Bible in the black community and its influence in black
life and discovered the story of the black community and how it read into the text. Both reading strategies sought to put people into the text. These similarities showed that for the queer and black communities both have a presence in the Bible that brought a sense of pride to both groups. Also, for both groups, the Bible was important to the life of each community. Each group also understood that when interpreters came to the table, they brought with them their histories and influences from their own lives.

Mona West described these similarities in her article when she stated, “…not only have we come to realize that readers make meaning of texts, but readers also bring a particular ‘self’ to the text shaped by a variety of factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, religious affiliation, socioeconomic standing, education, and sexual orientation… The scientific and objective stance of historical-critical methods of the last 100 years has indeed been a reading from a privileged location described as Euro-American, male, and heterosexual.”25 Both groups were fighting the effects of a patriarchal society. In a patriarchal society, white, heterosexual men were the privileged.

Summary of Biblical Studies

In conclusion, both groups presented healthy ways of responding to the oppressive texts/reading of these texts. They could have learned from each other that they had more things in common than they had different. Once they focused on the similarities, both groups could have empowered each other and brought about change in a patriarchal and heterosexist world. Both reading strategies attempted to read the Bible from the social location of each group. Both groups should have realized that one could not be liberated until we all were liberated.

25 Mona West, 28.
CHAPTER V
THEOLOGICAL INQUIRY

This chapter discussed difference and domination. Being different was not tolerated or appreciated in society. This was because one group dominated others. Domination was expressed through control. This chapter also discussed Queer Theory as it related to the interconnection of oppressions. The impact of heterosexism was brought to light by Queer theory. Heterosexism, as this chapter showed, prided itself on the belief that it was the only form of sexual expression. Racism and sexism will also be addressed. Lastly, the chapter provided a critique of the Black Church, Black Theology, Feminist Theology and Womanist Theology. Black Theology, in essence, combated racism while Feminist Theology confronted gender issues. Womanist Theology, on the other hand was concerned about the interconnection of oppressions, i.e. racism, sexism, and classicism for the well being of the black community. But as Audre Lorde pointed out, each emphasized one aspect of who we were; she encouraged us to be open to accepting all of the parts of ourselves.

Interlocking Forms of Oppression

Barbara Smith was one of the most important black feminist theorists and activist that emerged during the 1970s, who discussed the intertwining ‘isms’ in her essay, “Homophobia: Why Bring It Up” in The Truth That Never Hurts: Writings on Race, Gender, and Freedom. She indicated that political lesbians of color understood the
connection between oppression in the 1970s and 1980s. She related incidents where gays
and lesbians were faced with police brutality but there was no outcry against the violence
by the media. Hate groups and those who were supposedly opposed to oppression failed
to condemn the abuse of gays and lesbians. The oppression of gays and lesbians was
sanctioned by society

“Black women sounded the alarm when they decided to do something against the
oppression. Overall, black feminist theorists significantly contributed to general feminist
and nationalist scholarship when they called for the examination of the interlocking forms
of oppression (e.g., race, class, and gender) on women and men's lives. Barbara Smith,
bell hooks, and Deborah King were three among many of the prominent contemporary
figures that articulated this perspective.”1 For black liberation theology, one of the most
influential scholar was James Cone, although Bishop Demond Tutu demonstrated black
liberation theology in a very practical way. Feminism, done mostly by white women and
black liberation theology, done mostly by black men, overlooked these interlocking
forms of oppression. Black women had to face this dilemma. Feminism fell short in its
support of black women by overlooking racism. Black theology fell short in its support
of black women by overlooking sexism. Only those at the margins, black women, were
able to define for themselves, by creating a theology that addressed the issues that
affected them.

1 Jennifer Hamer and Helen Neville, “Revolutionary Black Feminism: Toward a Theory of Unity
and Liberation,” Black Scholar 28 no. 3 (Fall/Winter 98): 22.
Inequality of Heterosexuality

Queer Theory, on the other hand, presented the inequality of heterosexuality, as it assumed that everyone was heterosexual. Queer Theory gave us the term "heteronormativity.”2 This was the idea that everything and everybody without question had to be heterosexual. Heterosexism was defined as the belief in the inherent superiority of one form of sexual expression over another and thereby the right to dominate.3 The lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered social movements recognized heterosexism as a system of power.

“In the United States, the assumption that racism and heterosexism constitute two separate systems of oppression … might be better viewed as sharing one history with similar yet disparate effects or all Americans differentiated by race, gender, sexuality, class, and nationality. People who are positioned at the margins of both systems and who are harmed by both typically raise questions about the intersections of racism and heterosexism much earlier and/or more forcefully than those people who are in positions of privilege.”4 This was an important contribution.

Heterosexism marked bodies with sexual meanings. “Homophobia works effectively as a weapon of sexism because it is joined with a powerful arm, heterosexism... Heterosexism is the systemic display of homophobia in the institutions of society. Heterosexism and homophobia work together to enforce compulsory heterosexuality and that bastion of patriarchal power, the nuclear family.”5 Heterosexism

attacked any movement that redefined the nuclear family. But all were different; difference had a place in society. Queer Theory exposed the evil system of heterosexism.

**Racism**

Racism continued to exist in America. In white LGBTQ communities, racism still existed. What influence did patriarchy have in LGBTQ communities? Patriarchy stemmed from a system of control. Control for whom? As the previous discussion of patriarchy revealed, a control-oriented culture valorized and normalized the heterosexual male, who was viewed as the human standard against which all else was measured. White LGBTQ communities bought into the idea of patriarchy; as demonstrated by its refusal to deal with racist ideology. Was this the reason for two Gay Pride Celebrations in Atlanta and in other metropolitan areas? The Civil Rights and Black Power Movements fared no better when it came to the full participation of black LGBTQ persons. White organizations did not fight racism and black organizations did not want black LGBTQ people to be open about their identity. Patriarchy permeated liberation movements, which compromised their messages of liberation.

White lesbians and gays copied the dominant culture by not addressing the issue of racism. This was one of Barbara Smith’s criticisms of queer theory and queer politics. She indicated that they offered neither substantial antiracist analysis nor practice. She stated, “queer activists’ understanding of how to deal with race is usually limited to their including a few lesbians or gay men of color in their ranks, who are expected to carry out the political agenda that the white majority has already determined.”

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dominant society by having a representative for the group rather than attack the issue of racism in order to bring about change in society.

Sexism

Black men destroyed the difference as they despised the feminine within them. Black gay men should have been diligent and not copied dominant society, as it wanted to control black women. Rev. Dr. Jacquelyn Grant raised this issue in her essay, “Black Theology and the Black Woman” in the book, *Words of Fire*. Grant indicated that all forms of oppression were inter-related, however, “sexism...represents that peculiar form of oppression suffered by black women at the hands of black men.” She indicated that this peculiar form of oppression was particularly evident in the black church and in the black community. One of the reasons Grant offered for this behavior was the acceptance of the patriarchal system by black men. Black men forget that liberation came when all forms of oppression were liberated. It seemed that someone or some group must be dominated in society.

Sexism existed. Since patriarchy began, women received an inferior position in society. Sexism, of course, privileged men over women, which was rooted in theology. Women, who performed the same job as men, were not paid the same as men. Women were paid less to do the same job that men were doing. Not only was this seen in professional levels but also in personal and societal levels of women. Heterosexism played into society as it rewarded “Western society, the youthful, able-bodied, white,

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middle-class, and heterosexual male” that must be the breadwinner for the family. As our 2000 United States census revealed, women were heads of households as well. Their status was not recognized in a patriarchal society that was control-based. In a control-based society, the feminine was not considered human, and was treated as a second-class citizen.

Families introduced social constructs at home. “Unlike other forms of domination, sexism directly shapes and determines relations of power in our private lives, in familiar social spaces, in that most intimate context-home-and in that most intimate sphere of relations-family.” In our families, where one was supposed to feel safe and supported, LGBTQ persons experienced their first taste of oppression. “Politicizing ethnicity and religion requires manipulating understandings of group loyalty conveyed by family rhetoric. Similarly, because it is so closely linked to issues of gender identity and reproduction, sexuality remains important in constructions of family, and actual families remain deeply implicated in reproducing heterosexism.” The family wanted to reproduce to carry on the name. Heterosexism was assumed in the family and when one behaved differently, one experienced the effects of oppression. This oppression of LGBTQ persons was sanctioned, whether consciously or unconsciously, in our society. How did one struggle against a built in social system intent on destroying anything that opposed or differed from it?

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8 Smith, 128.
10 Patricia Hill Collins, “It’s All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race and Nation,” Hypatia 13 no. 3, (Summer 98): 64.
Critique of the Black Church

Heterosexism was particularly evident in ecclesial settings. From the pulpit, homosexual persons were not treated as if they were created in the image of God. In many congregations homosexual persons were condemned from the pulpit and were made to feel less than human. Yet, they remained spiritually connected to a God of their understanding, remaining, sometimes in those same churches where they were condemned, leading praise service or preaching. “Some heterosexuals will attempt to support tolerance and acceptance claim by acknowledging that gays have been allowed to remain in churches. However, mere acknowledgment of lesbians and gays in black churches was not equivalent to full acceptance of them...removing lesbians and gays would be detrimental to the worship and life of the church.”11 Full acceptance implied full participation in all aspects of the church openly.

Black women addressed their concerns regarding societal attitudes, family structure and church leadership in Womanist Theology. As Kelly D. Brown stated, “…womanist theology must also confront the notion that a woman must be silent in church or submissive to her husband. These notions are perpetuated uncritically within too many black churches…Womanist theology must articulate Jesus Christ’s significance in such a way that black church women as well as men are compelled to criticize those claims.”12 LGBTQ persons experienced the same oppression if they were open about who they were.

11 Horace Griffin, 96.
12 Kelly Delaine Brown, 15.
Victor Anderson was a third generation black theologian, who labeled black churches as a "...major institution that promotes forms of homophobia that keep black gays and lesbians silent and make them particular objects of the community's disdain and violence. Calling on black church leaders to recognize the natural rights of human beings, Anderson insists that they support 'litigations for fair opportunities in employment, health insurance, pensions, and social security' for gay and lesbian folk."\(^{13}\) Discrimination for LGBTQ persons did not stop in the church; it continued on in the form of violence towards lesbians and gays based on difference.

In the ecclesiology of Delores S. Williams, who was an influential womanist theologian, she spoke highly of the black church. However, she stated, "yet, the black church has also been a 'two-edged sword' for black women, as it has suppressed and made them invisible through the mind-set advocated by its 'patriarchally and androcentrically biased liturgy and leadership."\(^{14}\) She maintained that there were too many social problems for the church to be occupied with keeping women down. She "...calls on the black church to understand the means by which it is being manipulated. This is a manipulation that is not so much driven from the outside by white powers and principalities but, rather, internally by black male imitations of white male patriarchy."\(^{15}\) She also "...calls for a rise in consciousness and conscience within the black church...Williams says that, 'if the church does not participate in the work of bringing social salvation to the suffering and violated ones, it has no mission to speak of. It has no

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\(^{14}\) Ibid., 39.

\(^{15}\) Ibid.
life in Christ.’ Rather, Williams maintains, it is the responsibility of the black church to be the harbinger of change, the locus of organization, the backbone of the community.”16 The black church should have provided positive reinforcement for all black people.

Critique of Feminist and Black Theology

There were many movements that came along and left out LGBTQ people. There was no liberation for them in the African-American church. Many movements came along but in regards to LGBTQ persons, the movements were not conducive towards liberation. The movements at best, were interested in propagating their own cause and took on the mind-set of the dominate culture, which emphasized, ‘I got mine, now you get yours the best way you can’ mentality.

Kelly Delaine Brown provided parallels between feminist theology and black theology. She stated, “...both emerged as part of liberation movements that were primarily concerned with one aspect of social oppression...both feminist and black theologies have failed to adequately address black women’s multidimensional oppression, and hence, their theological concerns.”17 Feminist theology was concerned about women’s rights and gender oppression. Black theology combated racial oppression.

LGBTQ persons had theological concerns that were not addressed by black theology. The concerns of homosexual persons, in effect, were multidimensional oppression. LGBTQ persons were also absent from black theology and early womanist theology because of sexism. Black Theology provided liberation theology but it was not

16 Ibid.

17 Kelly Delaine Brown, 12-13.
sufficient for a gay theology alone. As Victor Anderson maintained, being black was only one aspect of life. He “...mounts an assault against the ‘cult of black masculinity.’” Which he defined as

“...a pervasive preoccupation of black intellectuals with the classical, heroic virtues of courage, manliness, strength, self-determination, and racial loyalty in their attempts to establish normative requirements for authentic race consciousness and criteria for the moral valuation of membership in the black community. In essence, his critique is that ontological blackness overrides and circumscribes other individuating aspects of one’s life-gender and sexual orientation, among others. As Anderson sees it, ontological blackness has no desire to focus on who one is, aside from one’s blackness.”

Black Theology and Feminist Theology had an ecclesiastical privilege in regards to LGBTQ persons. “In one of the earliest critiques of black theology by a black woman, Rev. Dr. Jacquelyn Grant, a womanist scholar and teacher of systematic theology at the Interdenominational Theological Center, observed that black theologians had not seriously addressed the issue of sexism. Although proponents of black theology claimed to write from the vantage point of the total black experience, Grant argued that black women were “invisible” in black theology.”

LGBTQ persons were also absent from black theology because of sexism. Women, in general, were allowed to go only so far and performed certain duties that were ascribed to them. Gays and lesbians were excluded from participating in certain duties also if they were out of the closet. They did not adequately address their issues and human rights could not be brought to the forefront. The idea that all forms of oppression were connected was missing from these theologies. The understanding of oppression as

18 Stephen Butler Murray, 34-35.
19 Jacquelyn Grant, 323.
interconnected was important for any attempt to construct a model that offered liberation for LGBTQ persons. It was also important to understand the gifts that LGBTQ persons brought to the table when gathered for God. The marginalized were not powerless. The marginalized brought a liberating agency to the table. LGBTQ persons were marginalized in society and church. “Existing on the margins of society and Church provides a people with a special epistemological advantage, a certain way of knowing, that is fundamental to creating a just society and Church.”20 Understanding the interconnectedness of oppression as one attempted to construct a model that offered liberation to LGBTQ persons was important in that it was when we were weak that we were strong. God spoke to the least of these. God was a God of the marginalized, the oppressed, and the least of these. They were in a position to clearly hear what God was saying to the church and society. It was this interconnectedness of oppression that united them with God.

Critique of Womanist Theology

Black women were soon united to fight their own cause. In 1983 black women came into their own as they recognized their own power. “Black women began to appropriate this concept after Alice Walker coined it in her book In Search of Our Mother’s Garden (1983)…Walker provides a description of a womanist…“You acting womanish,” which, according to Walker traditionally meant, ‘outrageous, audacious, courageous and willful behavior.’ Drawing upon womanish, Walkers says a womanist is ‘responsible, in charge, serious.’ She loves other women, ‘sexually and/or nonsexually.’

20 Ibid.
But she is not a ‘separatist.’ A womanist is ‘committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female.’ "21 Womanists were those who stood for what was right, not only for themselves but for the whole community. Womanist Theology was not just concerned about women of color but it was also concerned about the well being of the black community.

“To be black and female is to have virtually no claim to the privileges accorded in a white patriarchal society and/or Church. The black female reality is a marginalized reality. Yet, to be marginalized is not to be powerless. Marginality does not signify powerlessness.” "22 Although some black females experienced racism at the hands of white society, sexism at the hands of black males and classism at the hands of many segments in society, black women used this experience to transform their position in society. They knew from first hand experience what it meant to be different and the treatment that one received from society. African-American LGBTQ persons faced not only homophobia, but also race, gender and class oppression.

Kelly Brown Douglas, in her article, “Marginalized People, Liberating Perspectives: A Womanist Approach To Biblical Interpretation”, stated that “no theology emerges in a social, historical or cultural vacuum, …and the authority which we give the Bible itself are inevitable informed by who we are as embodied beings, how we experience life socially and culturally, as well as what we perceive as the meaning and

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LGBTQ persons brought all of who they were to the table – broken, condemned and marginalized. She offered hope from her own experience when controversial issues such as homosexuality or women’s roles in the church were addressed. She did not allow the Bible to be used as a weapon of terror and dehumanization. She asked questions such as, “Does the biblical witness accommodate both tyranny and justice? Or does the biblical witness suggest a preferred perspective on God’s revelation and hence a rendering and use of the sacred texts which would invalidate a biblical tradition of tyranny or terror.”

When Womanist Theology was defined, the four-part definition provided by the creator of the term womanist, Alice Walker, was used. She was not a theologian; however, the Womanist movement in solidarity with the experiences of all black women adopted her work. The four-part definition was what womanist scholars and theologians used to define their experience in the United States and all over the world under the heading of womanist. It was interesting that Womanists accepted Ms. Walker’s four-part definition for first and second generation Womanist but excluded and failed to recognize lesbians in their work. Walker included women loving women sexually in her definition but Womanist theologians of the first and second generations ignored this part.

**Difference**

The interlocked nature of oppression was based on difference. Audre Lorde who was the most revered and influential black feminist lesbian writer of the modern era, in “Scratching the Surface: Some Notes on Barriers to Women and Loving”, an essay in

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23 Kelly Brown Douglas, 41.
24 Ibid., 42.
Sister Outsider, provided definitions for racism, sexism, heterosexism and homophobia. She then stated, “…the above forms of human blindness stem from the same root—an inability to recognize the notion of difference as a dynamic human force, one which is enriching rather than threatening to the defined self, when there are shared goals.”25 Others did not recognize difference as a dynamic human force in our society. As the definitions of the above forms of oppression indicated, it was an inherent superiority of one group over another with the right to dominant. In these definitions, there was no room to be accepted or understood. If you were not like the dominant group then one would not be accepted; in addition to the idea that since you were not like the dominant group you must be destroyed. There was no room for tolerance.

Definitions of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and all of the other isms there was the central idea of domination. One group dominated others. This was true in a capitalistic society and was presented in Audre Lorde’s essay, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference” in Sister Outsider. She stated, “institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessary in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people.”26 If the rejection of difference was institutionalized how could those who were different embrace their difference? Institutionalized rejection of difference made it okay for the privileged to disregard those who were different. We saw again the sanctioned oppression of lesbians and gays. How did gays and lesbians handle this rejection? Was this the reason for increased suicide or feelings of self-hatred in gays and

lesbians? Ms. Lorde indicated that we were programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and that difference was handled one of three ways: ignored, and if that was not possible, copied what was thought to be dominant, or destroyed what was thought to be subordinate. LGBTQ persons moved to a place of acceptance and found their own voice.

Summary of Theological Inquiry

In summary, the experiences of the LGBTQ community revealed that God was a God for all humanity. LGBTQ persons were first of all, human beings. As such, all human beings had the right to be treated with respect and dignity. As this theological inquiry revealed, LGTBQ people used their experiences as building blocks for affirming themselves in a patriarchal and heterosexist world. They claimed their truth that God was also on their side.
CHAPTER VI
THEORETICAL APPLICATION

There were several theories that informed this project in struggling against oppression that LGBTQ persons faced in the African-American church. The theories were (1) patriarchy was the root of the problem that perpetuated oppression; (2) homophobia kept the church silent and in fear; (3) the Bible was misused in church and society; (4) LGBTQ persons were defined by sexual activity rather than as persons; (5) the African-American Church bought into the notion of ‘hate the sin but love the sinner’ philosophy and (6) interpersonal relationships, whether in a group or with another positive human being were a source of healing for LGBTQ persons.

Patriarchy

Patriarchal societies emerged with the development of agriculture.¹ The idea of private property flourished along with social classes, inter-class exploitation and control. Patriarchy affected society by the desire to control and established order in society according to the male point of view. This was accomplished by presenting a male God, restricting sexual expression and controlling the wealth. Thus along with the influence of patriarchy came sexism, classism and racism. In a matriarchal society, which was pre-patriarchal, the idea of control was not present and therefore, many forms of sexual expressions were accepted. Even the idea of marriage was a patriarchal control device,

which did not work well for some heterosexual couples, to make sure the children belonged to the ‘right father.’ The father wanted to ensure that wealth was passed down to the right child. Institutions such as the church, state, and national laws, the media, education, and biological and psychological theories all serve to instill and maintain this heterosexist social ideology. Social control over expressions of sexuality and gender is also maintained through violence, either actual or threatened.

“As Allan Johnson notes, patriarchal society is ‘male-dominated, male-centered, and male-identified.’ Besides variables such as race, age, and social class, the control model also hierarchically organizes gender and sexuality. Regardless of the form a patriarchal society takes, control-oriented culture valorizes and normalizes the heterosexual male, who is viewed as the human standard against which all else (that is, non-humans such as women and homosexuals) is measured.”

Heterosexuals were seen as the only accepted form of human expression. Thus for LGBTQ persons in the African-American community, who bought into the idea of patriarchy their self-expressions were not accepted or validated.

Patriarchy implied male domination. Rather than appreciating the feminine, anything that was considered feminine was despised while the masculine was accepted. In a patriarchal society, anything that was associated with feminine was seen as negative. Thus along with the disrespect for women, gay men were placed in this same category because of being seen as ‘wanting to be like women.’ Patriarchy, was a male ‘thing,’ and demanded control. It maintained a position of domination and conquered others. Thus, we saw when men were in control of nations; war became the norm as a means that other
people and their things were controlled. Patriarchy kept others separated and in turmoil against each other rather than uniting against a common goal. Many communities were divided against each other as they tried to get the approval of patriarchs.

In the black church and community there existed what Rev. Irene Monroe called black patriarchy. According to Rev. Irene Monroe, in black patriarchy, you found a hierarchy of oppression, and racism led the top. In this position, she stated that blacks and whites controlled the conversation and other minorities were excluded. In regards to LGBTQ issues, she indicated that people felt that LGBTQ persons brought this on themselves and African Americans did not see a connection between LGBTQ persons and themselves while many white LGBTQ persons did not see a connection with black suffering. Rev. Monroe, stated in Chapter 5 of *A Whosoever Church*, “...the struggle against racism is legitimate if we are also fighting anti-Semitism, sexism, classism, etc. All of these isms are merely tools of oppression that will continue to keep us fractured instead of united toward a common goal, a multicultural democracy.”\(^3\) She also maintained that this hierarchy of oppression existed in black queer denominations where homosexual men were in power yet nothing changed.

**Homophobia**

Because of this hierarchy of oppression, the black church was inundated with homophobia. Homophobia kept the African-American church silent and in fear. Heteronormativity was considered the only way of being in the world by African-American churches. In some instances this created hatred for LGBTQ persons. If the

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minister preached hatred of LGBTQ persons from the pulpit, this gave justification to the hatred of LGBTQ persons. In the African-American church, the minister was seen as God’s spokesperson. What the minister said was rarely questioned. According to Victor Anderson who was a third generation black theologian, black churches were a “...major institution that promotes forms of homophobia that keep black gays and lesbians silent and make them particular objects of the community’s disdain and violence.”

Homophobia kept LGBTQ persons silent and in fear because of hatred towards them. LGBTQ persons internalized this homophobia.

**Misinterpretation of the Bible**

It was the author’s belief that the *Bible* was misused in the African-American church. The *Bible* was used as a weapon against LGBTQ persons. For the writer, this also held true for other churches as well. For instance, the Episcopal church passed a resolution which admittedly “…rejects homosexual practice as incompatible with scripture, but...recognizes that there are among us persons who experience themselves as having a homosexual orientation and assure them that they are loved by God and that all baptized, believing and faithful persons regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the body of Christ.” Regardless of one’s sexual orientation, God loved us all! Sound reasoning seemed to be neglected in any local discussion of sexual orientation. The Constitution of the United States gave us the freedom to be who we were. But the Constitution of the United States was not considered in the interpretation of scripture in

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some churches. They worshiped the Bible as if it was God rather than the Bible being a tool that pointed us towards God. They focused on the finger that pointed at the moon rather than having focused on the moon. There were many different translations of the Bible. As Daniel Helminiak reminded us, when we spoke of homosexuality, did the Bible mean what we meant we when spoke of homosexuality from the twenty-first century context?

**Defined by Sexual Behavior**

The fourth theory spoke of society that only saw LGBTQ persons in terms of sexual behavior. This implied that society did not see LGBTQ persons as human beings and as such, treated them less than human. Rev. Dr. Jacquelyn Grant touched on this issue in constructive theology. She maintained that when LGBTQ persons were defined “...by specific sexual activities...that... makes us unable to recognize that we are all sexual beings and that sexuality is not only relevant when we talk about issues of homosexuality...But when we talk about other people – non-gay people – then we can talk about other things that impact people’s lives like justice, love, righteousness, and all that other stuff...”6 How soon we forgot that black people were defined by their bodies and as a result of that definition, were treated accordingly.

It was important to remember that all human beings were created in the image of God. Douglas reminded us of the testimony found in the first chapter of Genesis that all of God’s creation was good. She asserted our enslaved ancestors “...used their African worldview, culture, and religious heritage ‘to make Christianity their own.’” while Blacks

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today ‘...betray their enslaved religious heritage in that they have adopted the dominant Western European and Euro-American tradition of spiritualistic dualism and pietism.”

‘Hate the sin but love the sinner’ Philosophy

As one dealt with the issue of struggling against oppression that LGBTQ persons faced in the African-American church, some churches maintained the notion of ‘hate the sin but love the sinner.’ This philosophy kept LGBTQ persons in their place. It perpetuated self-hatred and internalized homophobia in LGBTQ persons. ‘Hate the sin but love the sinner’ also divided the family of God. In Sexuality and the Black Church, Douglas, reaffirmed that there was no distinction between the sacred and secular reality in African understanding. “Every dimension of the world and humanity according to numerous African religions, is spiritual, is of God, and communicates God’s presence. It is no wonder, then, that the enslaved were able to give witness to God by emphasizing God’s very humanity.”

African-American church people had a disembodied view of the incarnation.

“A sexual discourse of resistance is necessary to call Black people back to their African religious heritage, which rightly views human sexuality as divine. Such a discourse will make it abundantly clear that, on the one hand an African perspective has fostered an understanding of Christianity that supports the quest for Black life and wholeness, while, on the other hand, a Euro-American, “flesh-denying” perspective has fostered Black oppression, especially the denigration and exploitation of Black sexuality.”

A black sexual discourse of resistance would have affirmed the goodness of human.

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7 Douglas, Sexuality and the Black Church, 120.
8 Ibid., 122.
9 Ibid.
The community failed to become like Christ. In an article entitled, “Renewal of the Christian Community: A Challenge for the Pastoral Ministry,” the community failed in this aim, “…when we fail to live as a living body, when we fail in forgiveness and when we fail in humility. When a part of the body of Christ is not valued nor when one’s gift or gifts are not appreciated we are not living as a living body.”10 All of the parts of the body were important and of value. The dynamic in community created by humility was not ‘community for one’s self’ but ‘one’s self for the community.’ We needed each other and each other’s gifts.

Interpersonal Relationships

As the writer’s autobiography suggested, interpersonal relationships enhanced human development. Interpersonal relationships had a definite impact on how life is perceived by each and every one of us. Dependent upon how good or bad our interpersonal relationships were at various stages in our lives we carried good and bad experiences and usually acted accordingly. How did one behave when the interpersonal relationships that were supposed to nurture did more harm than good? How was this different for females and males? How was this different for LGBTQ persons? How was this different if you came from a poor black environment?

Interpersonal relationships were necessary for human development and people brought their issues with them. Adult issues are reflected in the development of their children. In an article entitled, “Gender and Ethnicity in Identity Formation,” written in *The New Jersey Journal of Professional Counseling*, Mark Chae, who was an assistant

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professor of Educational Psychology at Ruthers University, shed light on gender and ethnic socialization in the socialization process. As it regarded gender, Chae identified studies and research that indicated parents took the gender of the children into account when disciplining and acted accordingly. He stated, "...these perceptions have significant effects upon the identity development of males and females."\(^{11}\) Our identity development took place through the interpersonal relationships with many individuals in our lives. Our primary care givers had a great responsibility in our identity formation at a young age but we did not know their beliefs about maleness and femaleness and how each was supposed to act. Mark Chae stated, "...from birth, according to some studies, parents project expectations of gender-specific behavior toward their children"\(^{12}\) Not only were we influenced by heterosexism, our society was even more heavily influenced by patriarchy.


\(^{12}\) Ibid.
CHAPTER VII
THE PROJECT

LGBTQ persons received messages of oppression from the African-American church. How they struggled against the oppressions was the issue that this project sought to address. The project served as a model for belief systems to be examined and encouraged others to let go of things that did them more harm than good. The project attempted to assist them, whether they were in the church or not, to see themselves as people of God and worthy of life. The project also sought to enlighten LGBTQ persons regarding how a negative self-image robbed them of full productive lives.

Project Design

The methodology of the project assumed patriarchy to be problematic and must be addressed. The project attempted to address the issues of struggling against oppression as it established a focus group of 6 persons for the purpose of consciousness-raising and support. The group met for four weeks for a hour and a half to two hours. The first part of each group was a didactic session. Then, the group shared their experiences of being in the African-American church with each other as a means that provided support and growth.

A questionnaire was developed to identify persons, who identified themselves as LGBTQ persons and experienced oppression in the African-American church. The questionnaire also served to identify persons who had issues surrounding their spirituality
and sexuality. The first part of the process was to identify people from the church to take
the questionnaire. This process was open to visitors, regular attendees and members of
Truth Center MCC. After potential attendees took the questionnaire, 6 people were
identified to be part of the support group. The questionnaire is Appendix A.

The project consisted of 4 parts. It utilized (1) the influence of patriarchy upon
our society (2) racism, sexism and classism (3) biblical interpretation and reading
strategies used to interpret Genesis 19:1-11, which rung true for attendees, and (4) what
was the worst sermon ever heard on homosexuality and how did it make you feel.
Appendixes C through F, respectively, list the four parts.

**Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose and objectives in developing this project were: (1) to expose LGBTQ
persons to systems of oppression that blocked their liberation to aid them as they fought
the many forms of oppressions that kept them marginalized in the African-American
church. Once these systems were exposed, LGBTQ persons could (2), transform their
negative self-image to a more healthy expression of self while assisting in transforming
our society and (3) eradicate self-hatred and empower the community to bring about
change and acceptance. In struggling against oppression, it was very apparent that the
oppressed could not sit still while oppression continued. There were ways to fight
against oppression in a very productive manner.
After the 6 people were identified, a survey was administered that served as a before and after tool that evaluated the success of the model, if any. The survey was the second instrument, Appendix B. The group evaluated the presenter weekly. After each weekly topic discussion, the group completed an evaluation of the presentation. It provided an evaluation on each session. Appendix K was the evaluation tool. Attendees kept journals and recorded their thoughts, dreams and feelings, if any, as participants in the group. The journals were also used to record negative self-talk messages and thoughts that occupied their minds. At the end of the 4-part session, the after survey was administered in order to determine the effectiveness of the model. One-on-one interviews were scheduled before and after the group sessions. The writer called participants and met with them as their schedules permitted, if they were not able to speak by phone. After each group, the members were encouraged to express their feelings about the discussions in their journals. The author also kept a journal and recorded his observations of the group.

**Individual Interviews**

The individual interviews revealed interesting facts about participants. Though the participants listed themselves as a LGBTQ person, one member did not consider himself to be out. One member was not out at work. Other members considered themselves to be out as a way of life wherever they were. Even though they all felt that they experienced some form of oppression, there were two members that had issues accepting their sexuality and spirituality. For those two, one had issues accepting himself while the other dealt with reconciling his spirituality and sexuality.
Journals Entries

Participants did not submit journals entries to the writer for review. The author's journal entries indicated that participants appeared to gain insights regarding the purpose of the project. The most interesting point was in the area of group dynamics. One member was seen as the leader and usually was very vocal in the group. When a member of the group opposed new information that was presented, the result was a heated discussion in which remaining members refused to back down on their views. This was apparent when the writer presented the information on patriarchy. One member took exception to this information because it did not ring true with his experience. He shared that he grew up around strong black women who controlled the neighborhood and men took second place. The author did not challenge him nor did the group. This would have been an opportunity for him to really look at the relationships that he had with people in his neighborhood. This opposition was also noted during the scripture interpretation that took place during the third session. The group held on to the more traditional interpretation of scripture and would not accept other interpretations, which did not interpret the text of Genesis nineteen with a sexual meaning. They understood the text to mean that the men wanted to rape the angels and could not see in the text the idea of warfare with hostages. The group appeared to be stuck.

Group Interactions

At the beginning of the sessions, especially the first two, the members seemed to be very receptive to the information. It also seemed as if a light bulb was turned on for the first time. The writer also observed the interaction of the group. Two members were
more vocal than others being they had previous church experience. The group appreciated the information; but at first they were withdrawn and did not share their feelings. John Fortunato, in his book, *Embracing the Exile: Healing Journeys of Gay Christians*, spoke to the three strategies that gay people had when faced with oppression. He stated that they avoid it, fight it, or suffer through it. It became apparent to the author that the majority of the group suffered through oppression. There was much despair in some of the members. Even though new information seemed to be the catalyst for conversation in the group, it was only to down play the significance of the information, in that, it was not accepted. Some members appeared stuck in the oppression as if they had no way out. As the group progressed, they felt free to express feelings more openly in a safe space. The group, at first also was observant.

For the last two sessions, outsiders were invited to share in the discussion. When biblical interpretations were given, the more vocal members of the group, who were raised in church, objected to the more liberal interpretation given by Dr. Randall Bailey. Even though it was decided that one could form one’s own interpretation, more vocal members agreed with Dr. Daniel Helminiak. They were convinced that his interpretation was more believable and congruent with their formation. His interpretation, according to one of the outspoken members, was more in-line with what they believed to be the truth about the text. The more silent members remained quiet but observant. A couple of the members indicated that since the interpretations were so different, one could have one’s own interpretation and eased tension in the group. It was not discussed that this was a major undertaking. This vocal discourse reminded the writer of the
carefree method used in the past to interpret scripture during Bible Study in the traditional church, ‘sharing ignorance.’

J. Michael Clark argued in *Defying the Darkness: Gay Theology in the Shadows*, that this was where gay theology began. He took the stance that gay theology came from the location where we experienced violence, self-hatred and discrimination. Those who lived on the margins or edges of society had become locations also of subtler actions of homophobic prejudice from the church. Gay theology was radically inclusive for this reason. Those who felt excluded must be included. Fortunato told us to embrace the margins or the edges and to embrace the exile. He would have had us to know that being on the margins or the edge involved giving-up or embracing the exile and should be used as an opportunity for spiritual growth. This spiritual growth would lead us to affirm with Kelly Brown Douglas, in *Sexuality and the Black Church*, that all of God’s creation was good.

From the discussion about the worst sermon about homosexuality ever heard and what did you do, most of the group members indicated that they turned the television off. The majority of members indicated that they did not listen to the sermons. It was also worth mentioning that the same thing applied to gospel songs that interjected words like, ‘come out of homosexuality’. Whether it was a sermon or a song that was reminiscent with oppression, group members turned it off or did not listen. One member shared that he stayed to learn methods used to oppress. That way, one knew how to arm oneself against the weapons of the oppressors.
Strengths of the Project

There were several strengths of the project. One of the strengths was that the group came together and explored issues of spirituality and sexuality in a safe and supportive setting. Participants gained knowledge of the oppressions faced from the church and how others dealt with the issues was also a strength of the project. The group bonded and formed a focus group that continued to meet on a regular basis.

Weaknesses of the Project

There were several weaknesses of the project. One weakness that became very apparent was that a spiritual assessment tool was not administered at the beginning of the project. The writer was exposed to the spiritual assessment tool during a ministerial understudy as a Chaplain at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Decatur, GA. The author implemented spiritual assessment tools for patients entering hospitalization. This tool identified issues that the patients had with God, others and self. As issues were identified, they were addressed on a one-to-one basis or as a topic in the spirituality group. Participants in the project had issues with God, others and themselves. There was not enough time to discuss these issues in detail or to deal with them as fully as needed.

Another weakness of the project was that time allotted for discussion and sharing was too short. Participants wanted more time for sharing after issues were brought up. When preliminary instructions were discussed at the beginning of the project participants were made aware of time limits. Once a member started sharing this opened up memories in others but time did not allow for everyone to share. This suggested that the researcher, as leader, needed to control the dialogue.
Effectiveness of the Project

The goals of the project were (1) to expose LGBTQ persons to systems of oppression that blocked their liberation as they fought the many forms of oppressions that kept them marginalized in the African-American church. Once these systems are exposed, LGBTQ persons could (2) transform their negative self-image to a more healthy expression of self while assisting in transforming our society, and (3) eradicate self-hatred and empower the community to bring about change and acceptance. The writer endeavored to do this as he showed how the Bible was misinterpreted in the church and presented new information on patriarchy, which was assumed to be problematic and must be addressed if LGBTQ persons sought justice.

The goals were not met to the extent that the researcher thought they should have been. Simply exposing new information was not enough. Attendees rejected most of the new information presented because it conflicted with their personal experiences. The researcher’s assumption that the Bible was misinterpreted was also wrong. What became clear in the literature review was that there were many interpretations. Again, the group was not able to accept a different interpretation of some of the scriptural texts. This was dramatically demonstrated in the interpretation of Genesis 19. Some scholars interpreted the text in light of the war that was occurring in the land. The group would not accept this interpretation. They maintained the view held by the defensive stance in that they understood the text to mean that the men wanted to rape the angels. For the group, the text maintained a sexual meaning.
The African-American church also held this interpretation. This interpretation justified the churched as it condemned homosexual acts, through the belief that God destroyed the cities because of what happened at Lot’s door that night. The group understood it as rape and not as an act between consenting adults. This still gave the text a sexual meaning. The group did not move beyond the sexual meaning. This suggested how strong the African-American church was in the lives of people who attended. They could not get past its teachings.

The group was exposed to systems of oppression that blocked their liberation. The goal of understanding how the systems of oppression blocked their liberation was not met. A very vocal attendee who disagreed with information presented on patriarchy influenced the group. Patriarchy, as the researcher explained to the group, affected society by the desire to control and establish order in society according to the male point of view. In this attendee’s life, strong black women raised him, women controlled the neighborhood, and men took a back seat. He would not accept information presented on patriarchy. The author believes this blocked the liberation of the entire group since they followed the lead of the vocal member. Accepting one’s self was not an easy task.

The goal of transforming a negative image of self into a healthy image of self while assisting in transforming others was met by half of the attendees. The African-American church did a great job in separating spirituality and sexuality. All of the attendees did not grasp that their spirituality and sexuality informed each other.
However, three of the attendees had a healthy expression of self as demonstrated by a change in behavior that consisted of taking a more active role in church and volunteering in the community. For these attendees, the greatest change was seen in their spirituality. For them it translated into an acceptance of their spirituality and their sexuality.

As Foucault suggested, if LGBTQ persons were truly to know themselves, they must examine and rely on their own potential—in short, create themselves—rather than insist on conforming to the socially constructed role of the “homosexual,” a consciousness that was primarily defined by others. This meant loving yourself enough to take control of your life. This implied that high self-esteem was required. Perhaps the ‘down low’ phenomenon served as an excellent example from which we all should learn. This also suggested that we need a new mindset; one must be created even if we did not have one. This challenge and invitation suggested that we were responsible for our own fate. The group did not fully realize that they had the power to do this. It seems that they missed this point.

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CHAPTER VIII
EVALUATION

Before the project began, the subjects were given a questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was to solicit information about the participants' identity, discover if they felt oppressed in any way and determine their response to the oppression. All of the subjects were LGBTQ persons. Even though the 2000 census did not have a sexual orientation category other than heterosexual, the fact that persons in the project identified as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgendered or questioning, indicated that this population of our society was overlooked. This oversight may not have been negative necessarily. What could we have learned from it?

When the author reviewed Bob Gallagher and Alexander Wilson's work, "Sex and the Politics of Identity: An interview with Michel Foucault" in *Gay Spirit: Myth and Meaning*, edited by Mark Thompson, it shed new light on his thinking. Foucault proposed the question, "...should gay people embrace a sexual identity that was largely created from the sexual mores of the late nineteenth century, or pursue, relationships of differentiation, of creation, of innovation that will be an identity to one’s unique self?’ If gay people were truly to know themselves, suggested Foucault, they must examine and rely on their own potential—-in short, create themselves—rather than insist on conforming to the socially constructed role of the ‘homosexual,’ a consciousness that has primarily been
defined by others."1 Perhaps this explained why some gay people remained in the traditional church. They knew that those in the pews or the pulpit did not define their identity. Their identity was defined from above. This was how one took control of one’s own life. We had to look again at the ‘down-low’ phenomenon. When people were put in categories or labeled that was a way that control was established. What if people did not want to be controlled?

All of the subjects also indicated that they felt oppressed by the African-American church because of their identity as LGBTQ persons. We knew that oppression existed. Audre Lorde called racism, sexism, heterosexism and homophobia “...forms of blindness that stem from the same root—an inability to recognize the notion of difference as a dynamic human force, one which is enriching rather than threatening to the defined self, when there are shared goals.”2 Difference was a dynamic human force in our society but society did not or would not accept difference in others. Ms. Lorde in her essay, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference”, in Sister Outsider, stated, “…institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessary in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people.”3 Institutionalized rejection of difference was about domination and control of others for the sake of profit or benefit to the oppressor.

Fifty percent of the group was also aware of themselves as oppressors before coming into the group. Some of the men in the group understood male privilege. This was to say that they were aware of themselves having male privilege because they were males. Black men then should be careful that they did not promote institutionalized

1 Thompson, 25-26.
2 Lorde, 45.
3 Ibid. 115.
rejection of difference when it came to women. Rev. Dr. Jacquelyn Grant spoke to this issue in her essay, “Black Theology and the Black Woman”, in the book, *Words of Fire*, edited by Beverly Guy-Sheftall. Dr. Grant indicated that all forms of oppression were interrelated; however, “…sexism…represents that peculiar form of oppression suffered by black women at the hands of black men.”\(^4\) As she indicated, this particular form of oppression was particularly evident in the Black Church and in the black community. This behavior, she asserted, was due to the acceptance of the patriarchal system by black men.

**Comparisons of Survey**

Of those who indicated that they experienced oppression as a LGBTQ person, eighty-three percent felt they were oppressed by religion. By religion, the writer meant that their church teachings or doctrines and/or their belief system were oppressive. Most of the group had backgrounds from church upbringings. They were taught the same as the writer, from the pulpit, that God condemned homosexuals and that they were going to hell. Teachings of the church condemned homosexuals. They too left the church but continued to hold on to some of its teachings. Horace Griffin, in an essay entitled, “Their Own Received Them Not: African American Lesbians and Gays in Black Churches,” in *Theology & Sexuality: The Journal of the Institute for the Study of Christianity & Sexuality*, clarified this point. He argued “…some heterosexuals will attempt to support tolerance by acknowledging that gays have been allowed to remain in churches. However, mere acknowledgement of lesbians and gays in black churches is not

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equivalent to full acceptance of them...removing lesbians and gays would be detrimental to the worship and life of the church.”

In another critique of the black church, Victor Anderson, who was a black gay ethicist at Vanderbilt, “...names the black church as a major institution that promotes forms of homophobia that keep black gays and lesbians silent and make them particular objects of the community’s disdain and violence.”

Not to mention the internalized homophobia that one suffered in a homophobic black church. Violence was perpetuated against LGBTQ persons when it was vocalized from the pulpit.

Eighty-three percent also felt oppressed by heterosexism. Some men in the group indicated that it was assumed by their co-workers that they had a girlfriend or wife. They also experienced heterosexism in their families when their parents signaled that they wanted grandchildren. One of the benefits of Queer Theory was that it presented the inequality of heterosexuality; it was assumed that everyone had to be heterosexual. One definition of heterosexism was the belief in the inherent superiority of one form of sexual expression over another and thereby the right to dominate. Nowhere was this more prevalent than in our families and close social networks. The idea that everyone had to be heterosexual without any consideration of the individual was the rudest form of oppression. It was no surprise that one hundred percent of the group felt they had experienced oppression as a result of homophobia. “Homophobia works effectively as a weapon of sexism because it is joined with a powerful arm; heterosexism...Heterosexism is the systemic display of homophobia in the institutions of society. Heterosexism and homophobia work together to enforce compulsory heterosexuality and that bastion of

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5 Griffin, 96.
6 Murray, 37.
7 Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 128
patriarchal power, the nuclear family." The fact that people were different was not even considered.

Eight-three percent felt they had experienced oppression as a result of being black. One member of the group, who referred to himself as 'a big black man,' felt this oppression more than others. Seventeen percent of the group indicated that they had experienced oppression due to their gender. This also meant that 'a big black man' was viewed with fear and trepidation, no matter who he was. On the other hand, this suggested that our blackness was noticed first, whether you were male or female. As Patricia Hill Collins suggested in *Black Feminist Thought*,

"...whether viewed through the lens of a single system of power, or though that of intersecting oppressions (in this case racism and sexism), any particular matrix of domination is organized via four interrelated domains of power, namely, the structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains...The structural domain organizes oppression, whereas the disciplinary domain manages it. The hegemonic domain justifies oppression, and the interpersonal domain influences everyday lived experiences and the individual consciousness that ensures."  

We as individuals carried out this systemic oppression upon other human beings.

Sixty-six percent of the group felt they experienced oppression as a result of classism. Attendees who indicated that they experienced classism were also on a fixed income. Classism was experienced most when they searched for housing. One member stated that there was discrimination out there, and you were discriminated against by your own kind. Patricia Hill Collins' analogy applied here as well. We harmed each other.

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Self-hatred was also listed as a form of oppression. J. Michael Clark, in *Defying the Darkness: Gay Theology in the Shadow*, spoke to articulating theology and ethics in the face of antigay/anti-lesbian violence and HIV/AIDS. "For those of us who are gay men and lesbians, our lives on the margins and at the edges have also become locations for violence, both in physical actions of gay bashing and in the subtler actions of homophobic prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion." Kelly Brown Douglas expressed this clearly in the theological category of Human Nature and Sin in her writing under ‘Sexual Discourse and the Cycle of Sin, ‘The Sinfulness of White Culture’ and ‘Homophobia: A Sin and Betrayal of Black Faith.’ She advocated for Black and womanist theologies to be involved in sexual discourse in order to “...break the cycle of sin created by the White cultural exploitation of Black sexuality. White cultural attacks upon Black sexuality are inherently sinful because they alienate persons from their bodies and their sexualities and, hence, from God. Such attacks thwart Black self-love and the capacity for Black people to form loving relationships with others.” Blackness was seen as ugly and evil in our culture. African-American church people insisted that they loved God, but their lack of self-love suggested otherwise. Our own bodies must be loved before we could love others. As Douglas reminded us, “...without self-acceptance, any acceptance of others is virtually impossible. Self-love is the absolute first step to loving others. And, ultimately, if we cannot love others, then we cannot fully love God, as our love for God is manifest through our love of others.”

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10 Clark, 2.
11 Douglas, 122-123.
12 Ibid. 123.
The author also wanted to know what ways oppression affected them. Sixty-six percent of the group indicated that denial of rights by family members affected them. Fifty percent of the group indicated that they were affected by denial of rights by the church, and thirty-three percent indicated that they were affected by denial of rights by organizations such as jobs and social services. Sixty-six percent of the group indicated that they had no response when asked, ‘What has been your response to the oppression?’ Thirty-three percent reacted and listed ‘self-inflection, re-direction and empowerment.’

J. Michael Clark would have interjected that this was where gay theology began. One of his basic resources for or locations of, theological authority was “in the experience of people, particularly in the experience of those persons who have been oppressed by any of the other forms of religious expression and praxis.”\(^\text{13}\) The oppression of LGBTQ persons was a building block for gay theology.

Even though the group was composed of LGBTQ persons, they came from various economic backgrounds. This also rung true for the composition of the church. The congregation was composed of people from various economic backgrounds that included professionals, administrators, self-employed, those on limited income and those in some type of rehabilitation treatment program. They all experienced some type of oppression regardless of their economic status. What the group had in common was their identity of being a LGBTQ person. In other ways, socially, economically, and professionally they were different.

\(^\text{13}\) Clark, 9-10.
The Before Survey Results

Participants were also given a survey that indicated prior knowledge of and comfortableness with the subject. Survey results are included in Appendices G and H. Regarding the before survey, results showed that thirty-four percent of participants indicated that they were very comfortable with their sexuality, thirty-four percent indicated somewhat comfortable, sixteen percent were comfortable with their sexuality and another sixteen percent were not comfortable with their sexuality. Those who were very comfortable and comfortable were those who were okay with who they were. Those who were somewhat comfortable or either not comfortable were struggling with accepting themselves. It must be remembered that we were created in the image of God. Kelly Brown Douglas reminded us, "...the claim that God has become incarnate has made at least two things clear. First, God's embodied presence in Jesus affirms the testimony of the first chapter of Genesis that all of God's creation was good, including the human body...This divine/human union leads us to the second message of God's embodied presence: God is present with us through our very humanity."14

Thirty-three percent of participants indicated that they were very comfortable with their spirituality, fifty percent were somewhat comfortable with their spirituality, and sixteen percent were not comfortable with their spirituality. Participants came into the group with issues surrounding spirituality. Church teachings indoctrinated some of the members and prevented them from seeing themselves as connected to God. A few members had come to terms with their spirituality and sexuality and knew that they were connected to a spiritual source. A review of Bishop Yvette A. Flunder's work, "Where the

*Edge Gathers: Building a Community of Radical Inclusion,* reminded us that there was a seat for everyone at the table. In her teaching tool, *Twelve Steps: The Refuge Radical Inclusivity Model,* step two said, "...radical inclusivity recognizes, values, loves, and celebrates people on the margin."

Gay theology in action was being where the people were in their brokenness.

Seventeen percent of participants indicated that they were very knowledgeable about the system of patriarchy; seventeen percent indicated somewhat knowledgeable and sixty-six percent indicated not knowledgeable. Most of the group had heard of the term ‘patriarchy’ but had little to no knowledge of its relationship to the oppression of LGBTQ persons. It is the author’s hope that he conveyed the detrimental effects it had on our community and society. Of course, this goal was not met.

Sixty-six percent of participants indicated that they were very knowledgeable about the system of racism and thirty-four percent indicated knowledgeable. The group was knowledgeable about racism and their experiences with it. One member indicated that racism was very present on his job, where he felt that he had been overlooked for a higher promotion even though he was the most qualified.

Fifty percent of participants indicated that they were very knowledgeable about the system of sexism. Thirty-four percent indicated that they were somewhat knowledgeable about the system of sexism and sixteen percent of the participants indicated that they were not knowledgeable. The group felt that we lived in a sexist society. The group also shared the belief that even feminine men were discriminated against in society.

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15 Flunder, 134.
On their knowledge of other systems of oppression in society, sixteen percent were very knowledgeable, sixteen percent were somewhat knowledgeable and sixty-six percent were not knowledgeable. Becoming aware of the systems of oppression was a step in doing something about it. Only after we were aware of the oppressions would we be able to fight them. Paula S. Rothenberg, the editor of, Race, Class, and Gender in the United States, stated in the introduction to chapter 8, Making a Difference, "...eliminating these forms of oppression will involve changes at the personal, social, political, and economic levels. It will require us to think differently about ourselves and others and think about the world using new categories."16 Personally, we could all make a difference if we began to think differently. Fifty percent of the group was able to put this into action after the project. They started to make a difference in church by participating in the service whether it was to usher and acolyte. They also volunteered in the community at the Fulton County HIV Prevention Center, YouthPride and the Love Coalition which provided shelter for youth who were put out of their homes when they came out to their parents.

On their knowledge of the Black Women's Club Movement in America, fifty percent were knowledgeable, sixteen percent were somewhat knowledgeable, and thirty-four percent were not knowledgeable. The Black Women's Club Movement was presented as an example of an oppressed group in America that made a difference in their lives and in the lives of the black community. The writer wanted to show how black women did not take a back seat to oppression. It was mentioned in the group that some of them had never heard of the Black Women's Club Movement in America.

16 Rothenberg, 583.
On their knowledge of gender identity, sixteen percent of participants were very knowledgeable, sixteen percent were knowledgeable, thirty-four percent were somewhat knowledgeable and thirty-four percent were not knowledgeable. The author wanted to show how males and females were raised differently based upon gender. This explained why men acted the way they did in relationships. Women were socialized to keep the family together while men were socialized to separate.

Fifty percent of participants indicated that they were very knowledgeable about racial identity, thirty-four percent were knowledgeable, and sixteen percent were somewhat knowledgeable about it. The writer wanted to ascertain how the group saw their racial identity and being different in comparison to other racial groups.

The After Survey Results

Results of the after survey were included in Appendices J and I. After the session, to the question, how comfortable were you with your sexuality, thirty-four percent were very comfortable, fifty percent were comfortable and sixteen percent were not comfortable. There was movement from being somewhat comfortable to being comfortable. However, the percentage being not comfortable with their sexuality remained the same at sixteen percent. The information seemed to work for some but not for others. Had the institutionalized rejection of difference, as presented by Audre Lorde, in her essay, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference” in *Sister Outsider*, been so ingrained in them that any new information did not work? Or was there some deep hurt that needed to be healed? As Kelly Brown Douglas reminded us in *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective*, “White cultural attacks upon
Black sexuality are inherently sinful because they alienate persons from their bodies and their sexualities and, hence, from God. Such attacks thwart Black self-love and the capacity for Black people to form loving relationships with others.” And the writer would add failure to develop a loving relationship with one’s self.

For the question, how comfortable were you with your spirituality, thirty-four percent were very comfortable and sixty-six percent were comfortable. There was a very positive shift in the group’s comfort with their spirituality. Sharing of those in another fellowship clarified the difference between religion and spirituality for the group. As J. Michael Clark asserted in Defying the Darkness: Gay Theology in the Shadow, “...one means of taking ethical responsibility and thereby avoiding the pitfalls of exclusion or vacuous political correctitude increasingly has become that of naming our social and ecological locations, describing the contexts from with we speak as completely and thoroughly as we can.” There was action taken by some group members. Two members attended the YouthPride orientation, however only one was able to volunteer more time. Another member volunteered for several agencies in the community. For this member, this was seen as a complete turn-around.

To the question, how knowledgeable were you on the system of patriarchy, the survey indicated thirty-four percent were very knowledgeable, fifty percent were knowledge and sixteen percent were not knowledgeable. There was some positive moment to this question. However, a small percentage experienced no change in their knowledge of patriarchy. There were some disagreements with the material presented

17 Douglas, Black Sexuality, 122-123.
18 Clark, 4.
and a member’s experience. Strong black women raised this member and men were secondary. For him, the neighborhood was characterized as women being in control. He disagreed with the information on patriarchy.

On how knowledgeable were you on the system of racism, the survey indicated thirty-four percent were very knowledgeable, fifty percent were knowledgeable and sixteen percent were somewhat knowledgeable. On how knowledgeable were you on the system of sexism, thirty-four percent were very knowledgeable, and sixty-six percent were knowledgeable. The same percentages were also true for how knowledgeable were you on other systems of oppression in society, thirty-four percent were very knowledgeable; and sixty-six percent were knowledgeable. Racism, sexism, classism, and ageism were some of the oppressions that the group discussed. The group was able to see how in the LGBTQ community there was an obsession with the body beautiful mindset. As Audre Lorde pointed out in Sister Outsider, we have all been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that was not possible, copy what we thought was dominant, or destroy what was thought to be subordinate. The group felt that some copying was accomplished by trying to stay young.

On how knowledgeable were you about the Black Women’s Club Movement in America after the group session, eighty-four percent were knowledgeable and sixteen percent were not knowledgeable. To the question, how knowledgeable were you about gender identity after the group, thirty-three percent of the group indicated very knowledgeable, thirty-four percent of the group indicated knowledgeable and thirty-three
percent of the group were not knowledgeable. This indicated that there was no response to new information. After the session, thirty-four percent of the group indicated very knowledgeable and sixty-six percent of the group were knowledgeable about racial identity.

**Analysis of Survey Results**

When the before and after surveys were compared, participants’ comfort with their sexuality decreased and comfort with their spirituality increased. The discomfort with their sexuality and increase in their spirituality was contributed to information that the researcher presented about gender socialization was not as clear as the information and discussion about spirituality. In addition, participants continued to embrace the African-American churches’ teaching on the separation of spirituality and sexuality. Blackness was seen as ugly and evil in our culture. Kelly Brown Douglas reminded us, “...without self-acceptance, any acceptance of others is virtually impossible. Self-love is the absolute step in loving others.”

Without self-acceptance, it was difficult for some members of the group to understand that the human body was an instrument for divine presence. It has been the church’s chief confession since Nicaea (325) and Chalcedon (451) that in Jesus there was a perfect union of both divinity and humanity. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This was the greatest and first commandment. And the second was like it. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mat. 22: 37-39, NRSV)

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19 Douglas, Black Sexuality, 123.
20 Ibid., 113.
Overall, the group’s knowledge of patriarchy increased. The group’s knowledge of patriarchy was increased due to an excellent opportunity for dialogue and discussion of the topic. There was a strong disagreement regarding the information presented and one member’s experience. Because ‘strong black women’ raised him, he refused to accept the information about patriarchy being dominant in society since this was not his truth. He would not accept new information. This member influenced other members of the group.

In their knowledge about racism, the comparison showed a decrease from very knowledgeable to knowledgeable overall. On their knowledge about sexism, the comparison showed a decrease from being very knowledgeable to becoming knowledgeable. This indicated that the group had difficulty in accepting new information when the attendees disagreed with the new information.

In the area of knowledge of other systems of oppression, there was an increase from knowledgeable to very knowledgeable. The researcher believed the project was instrumental in presenting the group with information about systems of oppression that they traditionally suffered through, as Fortunato said in Embracing the Exile. The writer believed for the first time, that the group became aware of systems of oppression. However, exposing participants to systems of oppression was not enough. Overall, the group became somewhat knowledgeable about the Black Women’s Club Movement. Overall, the group’s knowledge of gender identity increased. In the area of racial identity, the group decreased in their knowledge from very knowledgeable to knowledgeable.
The group also experienced difficulty accepting other interpretations of the biblical texts in question. The biblical text that caused the most discussion was Genesis 19. As stated earlier in the group interaction, those from a church background maintained the traditional interpretation of the text and would not even consider that the text had been interpreted in another way. When biblical interpretations were given more vocal members of the group, who were raised in church, objected to the more liberal interpretation given by Dr. Randall Bailey. Even though it was decided that one could form one’s own interpretation, more vocal members sided with Dr. Daniel Helminiak. They were convinced that his interpretation was more believable and congruent with their formation. His interpretation, according to one of the more vocal members was more inline with what they believed to be the truth about the text. As Bailey asked, what happened to the black Christian interpretation of the scripture? As Douglas reminded us, our enslaved ancestors used their African worldview, culture, and religious heritage and made Christianity their own. We accepted the white Christian interpretation and ignored our own history and culture. There were requests for ‘Homosexuality and the Bible Workshops.’ However, the group did not object to the inclusion of other biblical interpretation.

The results also revealed that the group was not open to receiving new information and were not able to go beyond the surface of things as seen by the negative impact regarding biblical interpretation and patriarchy. The group maintained a traditional interpretation of scriptural texts that were used to condemn homosexuality. The interpretations of Genesis Chapter 19 by Daniel Helminiak and John Boswell were
accepted more readily than the interpretations of Scott Morschauser and Randall Bailey. Helminiak and Boswell saw a sexual incident, however negative, in their interpretation while Morschauser and Bailey saw a case for spies and war.

In the case of patriarchy, the group did not accept that we lived in a male dominated society because one of the group members shared his experience where he lived in a neighborhood filled with strong black women and men held a second place. Because of this, information about patriarchy and its effect on all the systems of society was not received in a positive manner. It was safe to say that the group did not fully embrace being on the margins or on the edge. The group stayed right on the surface when new information was presented. The writer believed that they failed to discover a new truth about themselves.

Daniel T. Spencer’s work, an essay entitled, ‘A Gay Male Ethicist’s Response to Queer Readings of the Bible,’ appeared in *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible*, edited by Ken Stone, sought to answer the question, ‘what are the goals and value of ‘queer readings’ of the Bible?’ He indicated that much of the early writings were apologetic. His conviction was that “...it is not good enough to expose and name the ways the Bible has been used inappropriately to oppress gay men and lesbians and keep our voices silent...it is imperative that lesbians and gay men in the churches understand what is at stake in the debates on the Bible, and that we understand the arguments in order to demystify their power.”21 In this regard, the project mission was not accomplished. LGBTQ persons have tried so hard to prove that they belonged in the church that they did not realize that they were being controlled by the debates to keep them in their place.

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21 Spencer, 195.
Evaluation of the Presenter

The evaluations of the presenter by group members revealed an interesting flow of events. The evaluation contained seven questions. Choices were strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. Appendices L through O are charts of the evaluations.

Part One

Part one of the project addressed patriarchy and its influence on parenting styles and gender socialization methodologies. Question number one was, ‘The purpose/objectives were helpful in meeting my needs?’ Thirty-four percent of the group strongly agreed, fifty percent agreed and sixteen percent disagreed. The large percentage of disagreement was largely due to the previously mentioned member’s experience of being raised by women. His disagreement based upon his belief that strong black women did not take junk off of anyone. He did not see that he was raised to separate from the women to find himself.

Question two was, ‘The material in the presentation was relevant to me?’ Sixteen percent strongly agreed and eighty-four percent agreed. There were no disagreements. Regarding question three, ‘The presenter was very effective in communicating the material.’ Fifty percent of the group was in strong agreement and the other fifty percent were in agreement. One hundred percent of the group agreed with question number four, ‘I developed new knowledge as a result of my participation.’ Even though, the information was new knowledge, only sixteen percent were in strong agreement that they felt competent in applying the information, which was question
number five. Fifty percent agreed while thirty-four percent disagreed. Question number six, ‘I will be able to use the information in my personal life,’ revealed that thirty percent strongly agreed while sixty-six percent agreed. Thirty-four percent were in strong agreement to recommend this presentation to a friend while sixty-six percent agreed with it. This information is represented in Appendix L.

Part Two

Part two addressed racism, sexism and classism. One hundred percent of the group agreed that the purpose/objectives were helpful in meeting their needs. Sixteen percent were in strong agreement that material in the presentation was relevant for them while eighty-four percent agreed. Thirty-four percent of the group felt the presenter was effective in communicating the material while sixty-six percent agreed. Regarding question four, eighty-four percent agreed that they developed new knowledge as a result of being in the group while sixteen percent were in strong agreement. Sixty-six percent felt competent in applying the information while thirty-four percent were in strong agreement. The same results were tabulated regarding being able to use the information in their personal life. Eighty-four percent of the group agreed with recommending this presentation to a friend while sixteen percent strongly agreed with recommending this presentation to a friend. This information is represented in Appendix M.
Part Three

Part three addressed biblical interpretation readings. Reading strategies included queer reading strategies and black reading strategies of *Bible* scholars. It also surveyed biblical interpretations of selected biblical texts. In regard to the evaluation, all of the group members were either in strong agreement with the presentation or they were in agreement. Comparisons for each question are represented in Appendix N.

Part Four

Part four consisted of questions and dialogue. The questions were ‘What was the worst sermon you have heard in response to homosexuality? How did you feel about it? What did you do about it?’ Most participants recalled sermons from television. This group was lively and all were in the strongly agreed and agreed range. The chart for part four was included in Appendix O.

Implications

Implications from the project were derived from the author’s struggle against oppression in the African-American church as a black, gay, Christian man. These implications were: (1) LGBTQ persons had to address internalized homophobia; (2) LGBTQ persons should develop healthy relationships; (3) LGBTQ persons should continue to offer themselves for healing; (4) LGBTQ persons should consider psychotherapy to deal with deep seated issues; (5) LGBTQ persons should be open to other avenues of spirituality besides the Church; and (6) black gay men should confront sexism and the cult of black masculinity.
Internalized Homophobia

Internalized homophobia was still present in the lives of LGBTQ persons in the African-American church. Internalized homophobia was the greatest oppression. Once damaged, one did not need outside assistance to condemn oneself. In the author's opinion, this was a result of slavery. Internalized homophobia consisted of abusing oneself, you did it to yourself. For example,

"...the minister of the largest African-American church in Washington recently made derogatory remarks about "dykes" and equated homosexuals with prostitutes and drug addicts. An "openly gay" member of his congregation (who ironically refused to let the newspaper use his name) and although he disagreed with his pastor's homophobia, he attended the church for the fellowship. We are sure he had his reasons for attending a homophobic church and withholding his name, but his reasoning came across like internalized homophobia. His thinking seemed like a black man attending a Ku Klux Klan gathering because they serve good hush puppies."

Even those who considered themselves open and out, internalized homophobia remained and should be healed if one was to struggle against oppression. John E. Fortunato in Embracing the Exile reminded us that we should embrace being on the margins as a means of spiritual growth. Internalized homophobia did not promote growth. Because of internalized homophobia, LGBTQ persons could not accept their differences and it would not allow LGBTQ persons to confront the patriarchal system.

Develop Healthy Relationships

LGBTQ persons should develop healthy relationships. Healthy relationships present the opportunity for LGBTQ persons to grow and learn how others dealt with oppression surrounding their issues. Many writers in the literature research indicated that

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they have gone through many issues. They shared their experiences with others through books. The value of developing healthy relationships was unparallel. In these relationships, there was an exchange of ideas that paved the way for developing communication skills. Healthy relationships allowed the sharing of ourselves with other human beings. Bell hooks demonstrated this through her development of consciousness-raising groups for women that served as a means of sharing and providing support.

Douglas reminded us that "By recognizing God's embodied presence in Jesus as the 'humanity of God.' Barth, whether he intended to or not, insinuates the very meaning of authentic humanity. Such authenticity is found in a divine love for humanity that inspires human beings to also give of themselves in loving relationships." Jesus' ministry was about sharing God's love with others, especially with those who needed it the most. "What Jesus did – his ministry-reveals his divinity and what it means to share the love of God. His ministry was characterized by giving of himself to others so that they might experience justice, healing, belonging, self-worth, life, and/or empowerment." Jesus was in fellowship with the outcasts and sought justice for the oppressed. He did not tolerate hate, prejudice of any kind, or the marginalizing of people because of their physical, social, or economic condition, and neither did he tolerate neutrality in the face of human misery or injustice. His followers were to do the same. They should also embrace agape love – the love of God that is manifested in Jesus. "By perfectly manifesting agape, Jesus' life and ministry, is the presence of God in the world, ..."

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23 Brown, Sexuality and the Black Church, 113.
24 Ibid., 115.
25 Ibid.
reinforce the understanding that to reflect the image of God is to do nothing less than nurture loving relationships.”

Agape love encouraged growth for all involved.

Continue to Heal

Healthy relationships encouraged emotional healing in the lives of LGBTQ persons. However, LGBTQ persons should continue to offer themselves for healing. The oppression that LGBTQ persons experienced did not go away by itself. Until dealt with, it remains. Failing to address the the hurt, rejection, and discrimination caused acting out in behaviors that are later regretted. Unfortunately, most persons did not have role models for living life as healthy LGBTQ persons. How many times had we participated in people-pleasing behavior in an effort to gain love, acceptance or approval? Until we healed ourselves of this behavior, we would continue to act out our behavior for the wrong motivation. John E. Fortunato said in Embracing the Exile, “the bottom line, of course, is that gay people just don’t get a choice. Oppression is simply what gay people face when they are authentic.” When faced with oppression, he stated gay people had three strategies: avoid it, fight it, or suffer through it. We must first find love, acceptance, and approval in ourselves before we could find the qualities in someone else. This work required a healthy and whole person accompanied by a willing spirit.

Psychotherapy

Sometimes hurts, regrets and disappointments were too deep for us to deal with alone. The author found psychotherapy as a wonderful experience. Trusting another human being with your ‘stuff’ took the power away from it and it no longer

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26 Ibid.
consumed the individual. Psychotherapy required finding the right therapist at the right time to address pressing issues. For the writer, psychotherapy was more than professional help. John E. Fortunato, in his book, *Embracing the Exile*, wanted LGBTQ people to embrace their oppression as an opportunity for spiritual deepening. Psychotherapy was one method where spiritual deepening could be accomplished. Mr. Fortunato was a psychotherapist that worked with LGBTQ persons on their healing journeys. There was nothing wrong with seeking professional help. There were numerous programs that allowed payment on a sliding scale based upon income. Fear of not being able to pay should not be an obstacle from attaining the necessary professional assistance.

**Spirituality**

Psychotherapy allowed us to get in touch with ourselves. Being in touch with ourselves presented us with the opportunity for greater understanding. We began to see that we were not bad people and that we were not condemned. We knew that God loved us. If the church wanted to condemn LGBTQ persons, another avenue of spirituality that affirmed one’s personhood must be sought. Spirituality allowed us to be connected with the God within us. Mr. Fortunato again, stated, “...since being in exile isn’t negotiable, it might as well be embraced. And since it demands such drastic givings-up, it might as well be used as an opportunity for spiritual growth. Giving-up, after all, is for the spiritual journey... What gay people ultimately have to give up is attachment to rejection and the need for people to affirm their wholeness and loveableness.”

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28 Ibid., 90-91.
accomplished through prayer, meditation, and reading devotional literature. Attending
places of worship that affirmed our wholeness was very important to self-esteem.

**Confront Sexism**

Black men should confront sexism and the ‘cult of black masculinity’ as it
oppressed women. The cult of black masculinity included gay men. Gay men then still
had male privilege. By being aware of sexism, black men stood in solidarity with
women. Black men appeared to despise the feminine within them. Rev. Dr. Jacquelyn
Grant reminded us in her essay, “Black Theology and the Black Woman” in the book,
*Words of Fire*, that “…sexism…represents that peculiar form of oppression suffered by
black women at the hands of black men.”29 Black men should be in solidarity with
women. This solidarity was especially needed in the struggle against black patriarchy.
Black patriarchy participated in a hierarchy of oppression that placed racism at the top. It
did not confront sexism or its sexist language. Black men should call attention to the
sexist language and behavior of black patriarchy. In this way, they served as allies that
dismantled sexism. An ally can bring about change.

**Conclusion**

In struggling against oppression, LGBTQ persons stood for justice. We
wanted justice in the African-American church. For too long, the church controlled and
kept us in our place. We played along with the game for too long and it got us nowhere.
The church was supposed to be a place for all who sought God. In the African-American
church, if you were different you didn’t belong. LGBTQ people have been in their place

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29 Jacquelyn Grant, “The Black Church and the Black Woman,” in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of
closeted and stuck. But we no longer bought into the oppressive attitudes of the African-American church. We struggled against the oppression found in the African-American church.

As Rev. Dr. James H. Cone said, in *A Whosoever Church*, “…fighting for justice anywhere always empowers a struggle for justice everywhere.”

Perhaps this was the impact of the project. The struggle for justice began where we were; in all of our brokenness, hurt and fear took a stand for justice. And perhaps, we were the ones that we had been waiting for.

One example of this was from a black, gay man in an African-American homophobic church. In the book, *Spirited: Affirming the Soul and Black Gay/Lesbian Identity*, an essay entitled, “Southern Sanctified Sissy: An Interview with First Lady/ Mother Anthony R. G. Hardaway” spoke of one black gay man’s experience with a homophobic church. He stated, “…we had to deal with more church sissies, church queens, than anything. Because the older ones were so brainwashed that they didn’t feel worthy; they wanted the younger ones to sit down, be quiet. The silence of the South.”

Mr. Hardaway, in this homophobic church, was a mentor to the youth of his church. He seemed to be one person that made a difference. In his own way, he broke the silence. As Dr. Cone, reminded us, fighting for justice anywhere always empowered a struggle.

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for justice everywhere. Clearly, Mr. Hardaway took a stand for justice. This was how we could become a multicultural democracy. Fight where you were.

The ministerial issue that this project wanted to address was that LGBTQ persons struggled against oppression in the African-American church. The author attempted to do this through a consciousness-raising group. LGBTQ persons were seen as different in society. Being different was seen as being on the edge of society, being on the margins or being in exile. Our difference is to be embraced as John E. Fortunato told us in *Embracing the Exile*. Being on the edge or on the margins could be used as a place of spiritual deepening. Spiritual deepening was one of the places some of us followed when confronted with rejection; others followed different paths.

The African-American church did a good job brainwashing its congregants; so much so that we in turn oppressed ourselves. Homophobia in the African-American church impregnated us with internalized homophobia. Even those who were in an affirming church had been so indoctrinated by the teachings of the African-American church that the poison could not be eradicated. As a result, we continued to give birth to self-hatred and could not trust those who reminded us of ourselves. We were struck in an unhappy, lonely, and depressing place. Homophobia in the African-American church drove us to dark and risky places while participating in unhealthy and risky behaviors became a familiar practice. But what choice did we have in the African-American church?
Some of us lived double lives. One life, which is projected to the public when the church doors open and the other is enclosed in closet doors, longing for a familiar touch, a body to embrace, running to any place for unconditional acceptance. Unconditional agape love was not found in the African-American church. Consequently, LGBTQ persons gave them what we thought they should see. But on the inside was the pain, hurt, and anger for not being accepted for who we were. There was also the misery of some who snuck around to be with same sex love and hoped they weren’t caught. But that was the risk LGBTQ persons took because who we really were was not accepted or embraced.

The African-American church must stop seeing LGBTQ persons as sinful. We were created in the image of God. Everything that God created was good. Sin implied having missed the mark or point. The African-American church missed the point that LGBTQ persons were created in the image of God. The African-American church was an exclusive place. We served an inclusive God but the church confused itself with God when it excluded those they thought God didn’t want. If you were out of the closet, you were excluded in the African-American church. The church sent out double messages, if you had something it could use you were welcomed for only that purpose.

The church used our time, talent and treasures and expected us to be under the control of the spirit. That was to say, the African-American church wanted us to forget all about our flesh while our heterosexual brothers and sisters got their fill of spirit and flesh in the name of God. It was all right for us to sing, pray, and preach in the church, but it was not all right to be out and accepted as divine expressions of God. We were not
seen as humans but as objects to be used. Objects see other objects. Healthy relationships with open communication became impossible in the African-American church when LGBTQ persons were seen as objects.

For too long, the African-American church told us that God didn’t love you if you were a LGBTQ person. For too long, the African-American church has told us that we were condemned because of who we were and who we loved. For too long, we bought into the teachings of the church. For too long we suffered through it, not even knowing that this was how we responded to oppression. For too long, we tried to fit in. We tried unsuccessfully to pray and fast it out but who God created us to be didn’t change. We got into all types of healing lines but as divine expressions of God no error had been made. Finally, we had to look within to discover God within ourselves. Ultimately, LGBTQ persons sought justice for themselves and for the marginalized when we realized that we were accepted as we were.

As much as the author wanted to keep the image of the African-American church pure and undefiled, it was all that and much more. It continued to teach poison and it continued to produce more of what it taught. Whatever happened to teachings on acceptance, love and tolerance? Where were teachings on tolerance, love and acceptance of others? If the African-American church taught more acceptance, love and tolerance, it would produce more acceptance, love and tolerance.

The African-American church must change and transcend its unenlighted ways regarding LGBTQ persons. All members must be welcomed as children of God. Only in this way could the church secure its hold as a place of liberation for all of God’s people.
The African-American church must reclaim the vision of Richard Allen when he was tired of Blacks being placed in the balcony of the church while Whites were seated in the main sanctuary. Even when the scripture said, “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ,” (Eph 6:5), he interpreted the scripture in the African worldview that saw God in everything and everyone. When LGBTQ members are accepted as full human beings with all the rights and privileges as the rest of the members, the African-American church would truly be a place of liberation and freedom for everyone.
Appendix A

Questionnaire

Please indicate your respond to each question below. This is required for all participants.

1. Do you identify as a LGBTQ person?
   □ Yes □ No

2. Do you feel that you have been oppressed in any way?
   □ Yes □ No

3. Do you feel that you are oppressed because of your race?
   □ Yes □ No

4. Do you feel that you are oppressed because of your gender?
   □ Yes □ No

5. Have you experienced any oppression that you can contribute to being a LGBTQ person? Please check all that apply.
   Religion   Heterosexism   Homophobia
   Race       Classism      Other__________________________

6. In what ways would you say that the oppression has affected you?
   Denial of rights-family
   Denial of rights-church
   Denial of rights-organizations
   Other__________________________

7. What has been your response to the oppression?
   Reacted   Don’t Know   No Response

8. Do you know what to do to fight against the oppression?
   Yes       No

9. Are you aware of being an oppressor?
   Yes       No

10. What is your gender?
    Transgendered Female Male
Appendix B

Survey

Please answer each question as you see yourself now.

1. How comfortable are you with your sexuality?
   Very comfortable
   Somewhat comfortable
   Comfortable
   Not comfortable
   Do not care to answer

2. How comfortable are you with your spirituality?
   Very comfortable
   Somewhat comfortable
   Comfortable
   Not comfortable
   Do not care to answer

3. How knowledgeable are you on the system of patriarchy?
   Very knowledgeable
   Somewhat knowledgeable
   Knowledgeable
   Not knowledgeable
   Do not care to answer

4. How knowledgeable are you on the system of racism?
   Very knowledgeable
   Somewhat knowledgeable
   Knowledgeable
   Not knowledgeable
   Do not care to answer

5. How knowledgeable are you on the system of sexism?
   Very knowledgeable
   Somewhat knowledgeable
   Knowledgeable
   Not knowledgeable
   Do not care to answer
6. How knowledgeable are you on other systems of oppression in society?
   Very knowledgeable
   Somewhat knowledgeable
   Knowledgeable
   Not knowledgeable
   Do not care to answer

7. How knowledgeable are you about the Black Women’s Club Movement in America?
   Very knowledgeable
   Somewhat knowledgeable
   Knowledgeable
   Not knowledgeable
   Do not care to answer

8. How knowledgeable are you about gender identity?
   Very knowledgeable
   Somewhat knowledgeable
   Knowledgeable
   Not knowledgeable
   Do not care to answer

9. How knowledgeable are you about racial identity?
   Very knowledgeable
   Somewhat knowledgeable
   Knowledgeable
   Not knowledgeable
   Do not care to answer
Appendix C

Part One

How do we struggle against the oppressions in community?

Patriarchy

Patriarchy and its influence on parenting styles and gender socialization methodologies

Patriarchy

- David Augsburger defines patriarchalism as the product of four interlocking premises:
  - That male physical strength is a part of intended natural law (biological)
  - That families and societies are naturally based on aggression, domination, procreation, and spouse and child protection (cultural)
  - That property, production, and the distribution of goods are the natural domain of men (economic)
  - That male superiority, dominance, and privilege are a part of received religious revelation (religious)

Four interlocking justifications

- Have provided until recently an unquestioned position for the domination of half the world’s people by the other half. Such patriarchal beliefs are oppressive by definition because they are premised on the domination of one gender over the other.

Patriarchy has traditionally promoted:

- Misogyny-the hatred of things associated with women
- Homophobia-the fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or homosexuals

Heterosexism

- An ideology and system of power that defines what constitutes normal and deviant sexuality and distributes social rewards and penalties based on this definition. Heterosexism and its assumptions of heterosexuality operate as a taken-for-granted ideology. For example, the term sexuality itself is used so synonymously with heterosexuality that schools, churches, and other social institutions treat heterosexuality as natural, normal, and inevitable.

Heterosexism and Parenting

- Parents view their children through the lens of gender schema
- This effects the identity development of males and females
- Identity development is constructed primarily through the relationships in which one has engaged.
- These beliefs about gender orientation may be directly related to the degree to which parents adhere to gender schema.
- Socialization processes related to gender orientation start at an early age.
- From birth, according to some studies, parents project expectations of gender-specific behavior toward their children
Patriarchy and Gender Differences

- Relational (interpersonal) social processes are more closely linked to female identity development compared to males who have been found to be more self-oriented (intrapersonal).
- Archer (1989) contended that females are more likely to develop identity statuses in the area of family and sexuality priorities (domains related to intimacy).
- Female identity development revolves around who she can be in relation to others.
- She faces the issue of what it means to be a woman in society and in relation to others.
- A woman's sense of self is contingent upon her successfully resolving issues of connecting with others in ways that satisfy herself as well as those in her communal context (Archer, 1993).
- In contrast, male identity development rests on the capacity to master and handle nonsocial realities, in which his talents and interests are directed toward achieving a sense of personal competence (Archer, 1993; Skoe & Marcia, 1991).
- Archer (1993) noted that male identity development is a matter of separating oneself for action to defend against domination by others.
Appendix D

Part Two

How do we struggle against oppression in the community?

**Racism, Sexism & Classism**

- The need to understand prejudice and discrimination.
- The need to recognize when same gender loving people are oppressors.

The need to understand prejudice and discrimination

- Entails the preparation for discrimination and prejudice
- Adolescents from ethnic minority groups will be forced to confront issues of prejudice, discrimination, and structural (i.e., institutional) barriers against opportunity (Carter, 1995; Phinney, 1992)
- Phinney and Tarver (1988), in a qualitative analysis of structured interviews revealed that African American adolescents, compared to White Americans, had a better understanding of prejudice
- Demo and Hughes (1990) described African American socialization as teaching children to become aware of institutional and cultural barriers that exist in society

**Participating in Sexism**

- African American males were more oriented toward equality and institutional barriers, whereas females were more likely to be oriented toward ethnic pride and adherence to their cultural background
- Ethnic minority men are socialized to develop a deep awareness of ethnic barriers and may develop a compensatory sense of exaggerated masculinity characterized by sexist attitudes, anti-femininity, and aggressive solutions to disputes

**Influences on Sexism**

- Spencer, Cunningham, and Swanson (1995) added to this dialogue an interesting perspective, linking African American child-rearing strategies with what they refer to as “hyper-masculinity.” The authors wrote, “The parental use of contempt and humiliation to socialize the emotions of fear and distress in boys is hypothesized to be of major importance in fostering an exaggerated masculine style.”
- African American males were more likely to have pre-encounter attitudes compared to females who were found to score significantly on inner-directedness, a manifestation of higher identity functioning
- African American men scored high on the pre-encounter status, suggesting that they had internalized American cultural values (patriarchy)
Appendix E

Part Three

How do we struggle against the oppressions in the community?

Biblical Interpretation

Reading Strategies
- Queer scholars
- Black scholars

Queer Reading Strategies
- The defense stance is used against those scriptures, commonly know in queer congregations as ‘the clobber texts’ or as Phyllis Trible would describe as ‘texts of terror.’ These texts include Gen 19:1-28, Lev 18:22 and 20:13, Rom 1:26-28 and the laundry lists of 1 Cor 6:9 and 1 Tim 1:10
- The offense stance identifies texts that affirm same-sex love and the goodness of human sexuality
- In outing the Bible, the identities of some of the biblical characters in the texts are reconstructed and are identified as queer.
- In the fourth strategy, it attempts to engage the entire message of the Bible with the lived experiences of the multi-faceted queer community

Black Reading Strategies
- In the demonstration of African presence in the text, the point is being made that black people were there
- The second task is to describe the racism and white supremacy in the traditions of interpretation in the text
- The third task that Dr. Bailey mentions is the cultural-historical interpretation that attempts to address the issue of the importance of the Bible in the black community and its influence in black life
- The last task, ideological criticism, endeavors to discover the story of the black community and how to read it into the text

Of the reading strategies used to interpret Genesis 19:1-11, which rings true for you?

Queer scholars

(1) Daniel Helminiak, a scholar and instructor, indicated, “...since about the Twelfth Century, this story has been taken to condemn homosexuality. The very word ‘sodomite’ was taken to refer to someone who engages in anal sex, and the sin of Sodom was taken
to be male homogenital acts. So supposedly God condemned and punished the citizens of Sodom, the Sodomites, for homogenital activity.

(2) John Boswell, was a gay historian and professor of history at Yale and author of *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* indicates that since 1955 modern scholarship reveals the city was destroyed for inhospitable treatment of visitors sent from God. This is due to Lot being a foreigner and violating the custom of Sodom by bringing unknown guests into the city at night without the permission of the town elders. Boswell maintains that “...when the men of Sodom gathered around to demand that the strangers be brought out to them, ‘that they might know them’ they meant no more than to ‘know’ who they were, and the city was consequently destroyed not for sexual immorality but for the sin of inhospitality to strangers.”

**Black Scholars**

(3) Dr. Randall Bailey, was an Old Testament scholar at Interdenominational Theological Center, who in unpublished material, shed a light that liberated on this well known scripture. He suggested that the reason men surrounded Lot’s house was a military action since Lot could have been a spy working in conjunction with the visitors. Bailey also maintained that the men of the city wanted to know who the strangers were so that they were prepared in case the men were spies.
Appendix F

Part Four

How do we struggle against the oppressions in the LGBTQ community? Dialogue and open discussion.
What was the worst sermon you have heard in response to homosexuality? How did you feel about it? What did you do about it?
Appendix G
Before Survey Chart Part One

![Graph showing percentages for sex, spirit, patriarchy, racism, and sexism.](image)
Appendix H

Before Survey Chart Part Two
Appendix I

After Survey Chart Part One
Appendix J

After Survey Chart Part Two
Appendix K

Presentation Assessment

Part ______

Code #______

Please evaluate this presentation. You will be evaluating the material presented by the presenter.

1. The purpose/objectives were helpful in meeting my needs.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

2. The material in the presentation was relevant to me.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

3. The presenter was very effective in communicating the material.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

4. I developed new knowledge as a result of my participation.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

5. I feel competent in applying the information I gained from the presentation.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

6. I will be able to use the information in my personal life.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

7. I would recommend this presentation to a friend.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree
Appendix L

Evaluation of Presenter Part One

![Bar chart showing evaluation scores for different presenters. The x-axis represents the level of agreement (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) and the y-axis represents the score range (0 to 100). Each presenter is represented by a different symbol (e.g., #1, #2, #3).]
Appendix M

Evaluation of Presenter Part Two
Appendix N

Evaluation of Presenter Part Three

[Bar chart showing percentages of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree]
Appendix O

Evaluation of Presenter Part Four

![Bar chart showing evaluation results for different presenters. The chart includes the percentage of responses for Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree for each presenter. The legend indicates the color code for each presenter: #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6, #7.]
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