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Microlevel Fragility of the African American LGBT Community in North Carolina After House Bill 2

William Flozell Clements
Walden University

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Walden University

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Microlevel Fragility of the African American LGBT Community in North Carolina After

House Bill 2

by

William Flozell Clements Jr.

MS, Walden University, 2012

BS, Georgia Southern University, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

May 2019

Abstract

Social marginalization and isolation of target populations are growing areas of concern for policy administrators. African American Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (AA LGBT) individuals are not permitted full political, economic, or moral citizenship and thus are in society but not completely of it. Legislation such as North Carolina's House Bill 2 (HB2) has the potential to dissolve the social contract connecting life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness at the microlevel. The emerging U.S. trend of moving societally from universal access in microlevel institutions toward more market-based strategies poses a formidable challenge for this target population. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the impact of substantive public policy such as HB2 on the lived experiences of AA LGBT community members at the microlevel in North Carolina in order to provide positive social change via public policy and administration. The theoretical basis for this study was Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory with emphasis placed on the impact of HB2 at the microlevel. Data were gathered from 10 telephone interviews with members of the AA LGBT community who were 18–30 years of age. Data from the study were deductively coded and subjected to a thematic analysis procedure. Findings indicate that substantive policy has a considerable impact on minority target populations. Consequently, this study will assist in raising awareness amongst policymakers regarding the lived experiences of racial and sexual minorities because of public policy and contribute to the overall understanding of the spillover effects of substantive law regarding the lived experiences of minority target populations.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my best friend, the love of my life, my sweet wife, Layne Clements. Your unending affection and belief in me as your husband motivated me to complete this study and to stand tall as a scholar. I am thankful to have such an understanding and loving partner. Thank you for understanding the numerous eight-hour mornings and the many other sacrifices that you made to allow me to accomplish this goal such as the countless hours you spent proofreading and editing while serving as my biggest critic/supporter. I truly cherish you with all my heart and I am forever indebted to you for all of your support given to me throughout this journey. I have always promised you a great life and I know that this work will be a staple to the collective work of a good life that we build together. It is also dedicated to my nephews, Keelan and Kory. I hope that this accomplishment serves to motivate you two in all the activities in your lives and that it encourages you both to believe in yourselves and to always aim for the highest goal. I would also like to thank my parents for always making sure that I had enough to dream and to pursue that dream. Last, but not least, I want to thank Dr. Goldman and Dr. Tafoya for all your assistance with this work. I will be eternally grateful to have you both as committee members. To all, I must say thank you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Policies are routinely drafted and implemented to address certain problems. As cited in previous research, the public relies heavily on the framing of policy positions by policy administrators due to what the public perceives as the administrators' expertise (Lachapelle, Montpetit, & Gauvin, 2014). In the state of North Carolina, the introduction of the General Assembly's Public Facilities Privacy & Security Act, also known as the Single-Sex Multiple Occupancy Act or House Bill 2 (HB2) has directly impacted a specific segment of the population, particularly those who are members of binary (African American gay and bi-sexual men) or tripartite (African American lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women) minority statuses. This bill impacts racial minorities by creating both binary and tripartite minority statuses on this population. For the purposes of this study, the target population was non-single sex African American lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (AA LGBT) members. HB2 impacts North Carolina's AA LGBT populations by overriding all ordinances regarding wages, employment, and public accommodations, which adds to marginalization and isolation of this specific target group. The North Carolina legislature convened and passed HB2 with a vote of 83-25 in the House and 32-0 in the Senate. The framing of public perceptions regarding minority populations are greatly impacted by the public's trust of legislators and policy experts (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Consequently, substantive policy has the potential to result in the establishment of "policy bubbles" that target populations such as the AA LGBT population in North Carolina. However, when specific laws are enacted that directly impact the livelihood of specific portions of society such as members who

have minority statuses or those more vulnerable physically and/or emotionally, the role of policymaking must be done with a great degree of care and concern for the most jeopardized populations.

This study evaluated the AA LGBT population in North Carolina regarding their lived experiences after the implementation of HB2. An area of concern for the field of public policy is the functions performed by rules when they are introduced and implemented as substantive legislative law. Substantive legislative law amounts to new and prescribed law. Legislative rules such as HB2 greatly influence public discourse, can prescribe negative target population caricatures, and may damage microlevel interactions of a policy subgroup.

For this study, it was important to utilize a framework that allowed for the impact of public policy to be observed at a societal level, which for this study was the AA LGBT population in North Carolina. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory (EST) comprises of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Although Bronfenbrenner's theory accounts for human interaction across a broad spectrum that ranges from the home and intimate settings to the lived experiences and transitions during the lifetime of the human organism, EST also allows for specific sections of society to be isolated and observed. For this study, I used Bronfenbrenner's microsystem to better understand the impact of substantial law and policy on the lived experience of the targeted LGBT group at the most intimate (microsystem) level in North Carolina.

Background

The ability of public officials through their policies to frame target populations via narrative has the potential to shape the public conversation, build social constructs and caricatures of target populations, and directly influence the establishment of personal identities of target groups. Research has examined the role of policy in influencing microlevel behaviors such as political involvement (Lachapelle et al., 2014), familial support (Miller & Stack, 2014; Ward, 2005), and community involvement (Lasala & Frienson, 2012; Miller, 2007). In other words, microlevel interactions are being substantially impacted by the implementation of policy that creates or reinforces negative stereotypes, and such policy actions have been shown to greatly impact the lived experiences of target populations. Thus, it would behoove policymakers to be mindful of the interpretive effects of policy on target populations within the polity.

Under current policy in North Carolina, legislation prohibits members of the LGBT community from using public facilities more conducive to their gender identity, which introduced significant levels of anxiety and apprehension in that community. As a result of suspending employment protections for this at-risk population, more incidents of discrimination could be expected.

Rulemaking is central to the policymaking process. The rulemaking process includes the input of stakeholders, constituents, and consultants. As a result, rulemaking becomes the vehicle through which public values are manifested in policy (Crow, Albright, & Koebele, 2017). In other words, the practice of adopting policy involves many ideas, goals, and motivations. Additionally, substantive law such as North

Carolina's HB2 contains a variety of actors who bring a variety of social constructs, caricatures, and motivations to the planning process. Thus, policymakers must navigate through the plethora of social constructions to arrive at sound policy.

Policies and rules such as North Carolina's HB2 are likely to inadvertently add to the marginalizing and discriminating acts that already plague the AA LGBT population and therefore increase the hardships subjectively experienced. Previous research has identified the impact of victimization practices such as social marginalization, bullying, and discrimination on both mental and physical health in sexual minorities (Nemoto, Operario, Keatley, 2005; Lasala & Frienson, 2012; Miller, 2011). In other words, policies that promote such marginalizing behavior will directly contribute to societal ills of this population. Consequently, substantive laws that target already vulnerable populations such as AA LGBT individuals in North Carolina will create a growing amount of microlevel hardships because of such policy.

Bills such as HB2 also allow for the open discrimination of vulnerable populations both economically and socially, which will have a direct effect on microlevel interactions. Previous research has identified the impact of social isolation on members of the LGBT community and the role of marginalization in the rupturing of familial structures (Giroux, 2004; Grady, Marquez, & McLaren, 2012; Hill, 2009).

Problem Statement

Social marginalization and isolation are growing problems in the state of North Carolina. The creation of substantive or legislative rules such as the drafting and implementation of the North Carolina General Assembly's HB2 allows for the

elimination of employment protections and discrimination in public accommodations for LGBT members and has added to the social marginalization of North Carolinians. Legislators often suggest that these rules and policies are “common sense” or demanded by their constituency. However, research has shown the impact of social isolation and marginalization on the overall development of the individual can be catastrophic (Giroux, 2004; Monheit, 2012). Successful assimilation into society creates a sense of identity and belongingness in the community. Bronfenbrenner’s EST provided a framework to better understand the impact of policies and rules such as North Carolina’s HB2 on AA LGBT members at the microlevel. This substantive legislation could potentially create serious obstacles regarding the successful ecological transition of the AA LGBT community members into broader society at the microlevel. To date, there is little, if any, formal evaluation of how public policy impacts the lived experiences of AA LGBT individuals at the microlevel in North Carolina after the passage of HB2. To understand the lived experiences of this community, it was vital that a qualitative phenomenological study be conducted to determine the impact of such policies on the lived experiences of the LGBT community members.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological, nonexperimental study was to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of AA LGBT members ages 18-30 as they occurred at the microlevel in North Carolina post-HB2. The importance of a well-informed electorate is a vital component to any democratic government due to the reliance of governance on representatives. Consequently, when the electorate is

uninformed or ill-informed, it is possible that bad legislation implemented by their representatives can result in unequal and unfair policies, which may affect minority populations at the microlevel (Ciuk & Yost, 2016). Laws and policies influence nearly every aspect of human life; however, there are certain laws that are substantial in nature that reward certain groups at the expense of others. Because public policy has the potential to impact both the private and public interactions of the polity, its role in human development is worth inquiry. Human development and behaviors function as a culmination of the interpersonal experiences that occur at the microlevel of the ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). Therefore, it is important to understand what it is like to experience the world as a member of the AA LGBT community as they operate in the microlevel in which they are the targets of such substantial laws in North Carolina as HB2. Although there is research that highlights the perceptions of AA LGBT members that occur at isolated levels of society, the results of this study allow policymakers the ability to better understand the lived experiences of binary and tripartite members of minority populations at the microlevel.

I conducted this study in North Carolina. Given the broad spectrum of socioeconomic backgrounds contained in the general population, this location allowed for a diverse group of AA LGBT members to be selected. The results of this study consisted of detailed descriptions of lived experiences by this specific target population after the implementation of HB2. Ten participants who were AA and between the ages of 18 and 30 years of age were chosen for this study. In phenomenological inquiry, saturation is not necessarily the goal, but obtaining rich descriptions is the goal of this mode of inquiry (

Ihde, 1971; Monheit, 2012). By understanding the impact of HB2 on this population as it occurred at the microlevel and by providing a deeper understanding of the impact of targeted public policy on members of minority communities, I sought in this study to contribute qualitatively to the field of public policy. By conducting a hermeneutic-based phenomenological inquiry of 10 members of the AA LGBT community in North Carolina, public policy administrators and analysts can better understand the impact of policies such as HB2 on the everyday experiences of binary and tripartite minorities regarding race and sexual orientation as they occur at the microlevel of society.

Research Question

The overarching question that guided this study was:

RQ: How do AA members of the LGBT community who are participating in this study describe the effects that the public policy, the North Carolina General Assembly's HB2 has had on their microlevel experiences in North Carolina's current political and economic climate.

Major Hypothesis of the Study

Due to the microlevel fragility that exists in both sexual and racial minority communities, the hypothesis for this study was that the introduction of North Carolina's HB2 would add to the social marginalization experienced by the nonsingle sex AA population who had been in the past and were currently marginalized in their microlevel interactions. The inclusion of substantive policies that influence the direct interactions between individuals present the opportunity for microlevel experiences to be impacted.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation for this study was Bronfenbrenner's EST (1979) with emphasis placed on the interactions of human organisms as they occurred at the microlevel post-North Carolina's HB2. According to Bronfenbrenner, the environment to which the human organism is exposed would ultimately impact the development of the organism. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), interactions that occur at the microlevel would impact the ecological transitions of the human organism to other levels of society. The social institutions that would be identified as microlevel institutions would be home, school, peers, and the interactions that exist within the human organism's neighborhood. The impact of North Carolina's HB2 on microlevel interactions of AA LGBT study participants was the focus of this study. A more detailed explanation of the EST is presented in Chapter 2.

Nature of Study

I used a phenomenological approach for this work. Social marginalization of target populations was of interest in this study. A qualitative study is directly associated with human perception and understanding (Stake, 2010). The purpose of the hermeneutic style of inquiry is based on interpretation (Tabone, 2009). The phenomenon examined in this study was the social marginalization of AA LGBT individuals. I interviewed members of this target population who had resided in North Carolina for 1 year or more for this research study. I maintained collected data, interview audio and audio transcripts, in Atlas ti.8. I evaluated transcripts using word frequency to determine common themes.

Operational Definitions and Terms

Ambivalent sexism: The frequently conflicting positive and negative feelings and beliefs commonly held regarding gender and gender roles (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

Benevolent sexism: Positive sexist attitudes that men hold towards their female counterparts (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

Bisexual: A male or female who is attracted to members of both the male and female sex.

Bullying: Actions that exclude, harass, or offend others and have a negative impact on an individual's work (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, and Cooper, 2003).

Cultural racism: The systematic manner in which White dominance is reinforced in everyday life such as in the media and in advertisements (Oliver, 2001).

Discrimination: The objective state of marginalization or deprivation or activities by governments to restrict minority activities (Basedau, Fox, Pierskalla, Struver, & Villers, 2017).

Ecological transition: Shifts in roles or settings that occur throughout the lifespan; for example, new sibling, entry into a new school, being promoted, graduating, new job, children, and so forth. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Gay man: A man who is psychologically, emotionally, and sexually attracted to men only.

Gender identity: An individual's sense of maleness or femaleness that may or may not be consistent with their biological sex (Lev, 2007).

Lesbian woman: A woman who will only have sexual relations with women (Brogan, Frank, Elon, & O’Hanlan, 2001).

Poverty: poverty is defined as the varying degrees to which a person lacks any one of the following nine resources: Financial, Language (ability to speak in formal register) Emotional, Mental, Spiritual, Physical, Support systems, Relationships/role models, Knowledge of middle class hidden rules (Payne & Ortiz, 2017).

Self-worth: The value that an individual places on themselves regarding worth.

Sexual orientation: An individual’s attractiveness towards a person due to physical, emotional, or romantic reasons (Carroll, Gilroy, & Ryan, 2002).

Social exclusion: Social, economic, cultural, and political barriers that can prohibit minorities from participating in a meaningful labor market, political process, and civic activities (Mayan, Turner, Ortiz, & Mofatt, 2017).

Social mobility: The ability of a person to enhance their own skills, resources, or orientations in society (Reeves, 2015).

Stereotypes: “[B]eliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of members of certain groups” (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996).

Stigma: An attribute that is deeply discrediting that prevents the discredited individuals from full participation and acceptance in social life (Han, Proctor, Choi, 2014).

Assumptions

My assumption for this study was that the study participants were honest during the interview process. Previous research has identified the impact of substantive law and

policy on target populations that could add to the social marginalization of target populations (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Liu, Robinson, & Vedlitz, 2016;). Given the growing degree of interconnection and cooperation between various identity groups in public microlevel institutions such as schools and public centers, it was therefore vital to understand that social cohesion is essential to the overall human development of members who belong to minority communities.

Scope and Delimitations

In this study I examined the effect of substantial public policy on the lived experiences at the microlevel of AA LGBT individuals post-HB2. The research focus of this study was of binary and tripartite minority study participants in North Carolina between the ages of 18 and 30 and the microlevel fragility they encounter. Theories such as EST have been used in previous research to identify the effect of government intervention on individual behavior and decision-making processes. The creation of negative social constructions of target populations, for example, racial and sexual minorities, in policy drafting context presents real-life problems that members of target populations would encounter when interacting within broader society. In the current research study I analyzed how public policy has impacted the study participants who were members of the AA LGBT community at the microlevel post-HB2 in North Carolina. The EST provided a foundation for analyzing microlevel fragility resulting from the drafting and implementation of substantive public policy like North Carolina's HB2. The research was limited to study participants who were AA LGBT people between the ages of 18 and 30 and who have resided in North Carolina for at least 1 year. Previous

research has identified the growing trend of accumulation by dispossession and the social marginalization of target populations because of such practices (Hill, 2009). An analysis of AA LGBT experiences post-HB2 allowed for an in-depth understanding of microlevel interactions within this group. Future research could be conducted on the impact of such policies on the Hispanic LGBT populations who experience a keen sense of social marginalization as well.

Limitations

A potential limitation of this study was oversaturation. This was a possible limitation because it was a specific group in society that was to be studied. There has not been much research to date that has examined the impact of substantive law and policy on target populations and the impact of such policies at the microlevel for this group. The focus of this study was to analyze the lived experiences in only one geographical area, and it may not be representative of the overall experiences of members of this target population as they exist in other areas of North Carolina or beyond. This study was not longitudinal in nature and therefore may not observe all ecological transitions that occur on in the experiences of the study participants. The study also allowed for participants with access to a telephone and a computer to participate. The limitations are discussed further in Chapter 5.

Significance of Study

The results of qualitative phenomenological study may encourage policy creators to assess substantive policy on the lived experiences of target populations. The state of North Carolina has gained national attention due to implementation of the North Carolina

General Assembly's HB2. Substantial legislative policy introduces sets of rules that may alter behavior that would otherwise have occurred naturally at various levels of ecological systems. The function of policy can at times be said to associate meaning to certain entities or groups rather than being focused on overt action and mandates. The prohibitions introduced by HB2 would have an impact on interactions as they occurred at the microlevel for members of the AALGBT community. The results of this study could be used to better understand the hardships that AA LGBT community members perceive occurring at the microlevel that have resulted from the implementation of such legislation.

Potential Impact of Study on Social Change

The impact of public policies on individual behavior is extensive and influences behavior such as political participation by establishing incentives for specific populations and creating legal and/or social barriers for target populations as they navigate and experience public and private life at the microlevel. Past and present research has identified the impact of public policy on individual behavior (Innes, 2013; Miles, 2014; Weng, 2015). Therefore, this study, by examining the feedback regarding the effect of sweeping substantive policy on a target population, allowed for this established policy (HB2) to be examined and some of its effects determined. In other words, this study allowed for the lived experiences of AA LGBT community members whose members represent binary (racial and sexual) and tripartite (racial, sexual, and gender) marginalized populations to share their lived experiences. This study added to the understanding of policymakers of the plight of target populations that resulted from

substantive legislation. This study assisted in determining both positive and negative externalities of substantial policy, thus fostering more governmental responsibility in public policy.

Summary

The purpose of Chapter 1 was to introduce the research problem and focus of the study. The first chapter consisted of the background, problem statement, purpose of the study, the overarching research question, major hypothesis of the study, theoretical foundation, operational definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and the potential impact of study on social change. Chapter 2 introduces existing research on EST and the microlevel fragility and social marginalization of the AA LGBT population, which I identified a gap in the literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Social marginalization and isolation of community members are growing problems at the microlevel for members of the AA LGBT community in North Carolina. The purpose of this phenomenological, nonexperimental study was to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of AA LGBT community members ages 18-30 as they occurred at the microlevel in North Carolina post-HB2.

The growing polarization of the American polity is an area of concern for the discipline of public policy due to the distrust, anger, and hostility present during civic discourse. A growing amount of research has identified the key role of public perception in drafting and creating policies to address perceived microlevel problems such as the policing of minorities, the pay scale of females, same-sex marriage, and sexual identity. As a result, certain policies could add to the marginalization and isolation of certain populations (Bevan, & Jennings, 2017; Liu et al., 2016; Mettler & Soss, 2004). In other words, the drafting and implementation of policy that targets specific populations such as North Carolina's HB2's targeting of sexual minorities are likely adding to the negative experiences of an already isolated population. Such legislation shares a resemblance to previous laws such as Jim Crow laws and Black Codes, which isolated minorities from experiences as they occurred at the microlevel. Therefore, the implementation of substantive public policy that impacts the dyadic relationships of target populations with majority populations would have negative impacts on minority microlevel experiences.

Description of Literature Review

The first section describes the literature search and the various strategies used to discover relevant literature. The second section addresses the theoretical foundation of the research, which was EST. In the third section I review current research as it related to key variables and concepts that occurred at the various ecological levels within both communities. The fourth section includes a summary and conclusion of the literature search. I conducted an exhaustive review of the literature on AA LGBT populations.

Databases Used

The search for relevant material involved searching a variety of scholarly databases and sources. The sources explored included peer-reviewed journals, books, and reports. The sources were accessed using Political Science Complete, ProQuest, SAGE Full Text Collection, and the Walden Library.

Keywords and Keyword Combinations

The keywords used in the databases regarding AA LGBT microlevel experiences included *African American* in conjunction with the following: *lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, family, and acceptance*. I also searched for specific policy processes by using terms such as *public policy, target populations, social constructions, fragility, social services, sexual minority, coalitions, multiple streams, and citizenship*.

Search Process Summary

I used the keywords to search through approximately 300-325 academic journal articles. Applicable journal articles were stored and designated to specific areas of inquiry regarding AA LBGT microlevel experiences, for example, access to social

services. The journals reviewed included the following: qualitative studies of AA LGBT microlevel experiences, results from multiyear longitudinal studies of AA LGBT development, anthropological studies identifying the culture of AA LGBT family structures, case studies of members within this population, and microlevel interactions.

Theoretical Foundation

This study was focused on the interaction between members of the AA LGBT communities at the microlevel as defined by Bronfenbrenner's EST (1979). EST is composed of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. However, this study focused only on the AA LGBT lived experiences at the microlevel.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggested that there is a consensus that what matters for development is the environment as it is perceived instead of how it may exist in objective reality (p. 4). The application of this theory was explored by identifying current literature that highlights the challenges presented to the AA LGBT community regarding successful development and assimilation into society. Understanding the lived experiences and perceptions of the AA LGBT community at the microlevel could contribute to understanding why such discrepancies exist in regard to poverty, low academic performance, healthcare discrepancies, higher unemployment rates, proneness to violence, and other identified societal hardships.

Systems Defined

Microsystem

The term microsystem was based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) original conceptualization. For the purposes of this work, the microsystem was identified as the

most intimate unit within the EST. Therefore, I used the term microsystem to identify the environments in which the developing person lives, for example, family, schools, community groups, and so forth. For clarity sake, it was important to identify that the microsystem is a system in which dyads can be established and influence can be wielded for both the individual person and the person with whom they are interacting. Consequently, it was helpful to consider the microsystem as a haven for routine interpersonal relationships between individuals to occur and develop. As a result, the microsystem was important regarding how interactions within intimate settings affect the development of the individual.

Of grand importance was the role that these personal relations play on the overall development of the individual within the microsystem. There is a growing body of research that identifies the vital roles that family and community play in the development of children regarding sexual behavior and race (Farr, Oakley, & Ollen 2013; Cornelius, 2009), school performance (Kadhiravan, 2011), overall health (Rosenbaum & Blum, 2015), and drug use (Brown & Floyd, 2013). Therefore, the early negative experiences of life which occur at the microlevel such as poverty, neglect, and isolation arguably have the most lifelong negative effects on the development of the individual (Graves, 2017)

Mesosystem

The mesosystem was defined as the interrelations among two or more microsystem settings in which the developing person actively participates (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), such as relationships developed at school, relationships established at work, and the social friends a person chooses to interact with outside of

their microsystems. To assist in adding clarity to the definition of the mesosystem, it can be viewed as the linking of microlevel institutions. There are voluminous amounts of research that have explored the role that interactions at the meso-level play in impacting individuals by either causing conflict (Subhi & Geelan, 2012) or harmony (Ahlin & Antunes, 2015) in the individual's perception of themselves. Essentially, the microsystems to which an individual is exposed, both voluntarily and involuntarily, will have tremendous future effects on the individual. Therefore, it is important for public policy to better position members of minority communities in the best microsystems possible to promote positive self-development and stronger sense of responsibility and inclusion.

Exosystem

The term exosystem was used to identify a setting in which the individual is not directly involved, but is still impacted by decisions made at this level, such as the board of education, human resources at a person's place of employment, and local ordinances being enforced (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Consequently, there is a notable relationship that exists between decisions made at local levels and the behaviors exhibited by individuals at the microlevel because of this correlation.

Macrosystem

The term macrosystem represented the broadest of EST systems. The macrosystem is unique in its encapsulation of culture, ideology, social structures, and individual expectations (Arnold & Armstrong, 2012); unlike the exosystem, the macrosystem incorporates national ideology and is not only influenced by only local

decisions. The role of customs and mores in broader society provides the foundation on which societal customs and norms are established. Essentially, with culture and ideology comes the threat of false consensus and collective bias. If the attitudes and beliefs shared by the community are of marginalization and the placing of negative stigma on its outliers, then the society could inadvertently introduce negative externality to its law-abiding outlier population.

Chronosystem

The term chronosystem was used to introduce the component of time in regard to the development of an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The chronosystem included historic moments regarding the developing person.

Theoretical Propositions

EST suggests that the interactions at various ecological levels have an impact on the development and assimilation of the human organism into larger society. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), to understand the role of the human organism in society, the role of the environment in which human organisms exist must first be included. As a result, the five systems proposed (micro, meso, exo, macro, and chrono) and the interactions of the individual at each level was said to influence the overall development of the human organism. This theory also accounted for the integration of the human organism to systems outside of their immediate environment. Therefore, the ecological model is still being used to better understand the influence of lived experiences on the perceptions of target populations and the interpretive effects of substantive public policy on these populations.

The first proposition of this theory is that the immediate environmental surroundings of the developing human organism are of immense importance (microsystem). According to EST, human development takes place through increasingly complex reciprocal human relationships, which occurs throughout the lifespan of the human organism at various ecological levels including the microlevel (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The gradual increase in complexity involves the developing individual's perceptions and assumptions regarding objects, symbols, and language. As a result, in larger society, each of the associations are of importance to minority dyadic relationships in society. Consequently, enduring forms of social interactions known as *proximal processes* are likely to be very effective at influencing perceptions and assumptions as they exist at the microlevel.

The second proposition relates to the role of form, power, content, and the direction of proximal processes. Another way of framing this statement is to suggest that the human organism will learn from other human organisms within their immediate environments; however, as the human organism develops, it will become more vulnerable to remote influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). As a result, it is possible for the mature human organism to be influenced by environments that transcend their immediate environments over the course of the human lifespan. Subsequently, immediate social environmental conditions such as poverty and parents' level of education will be very influential to the developing human organism, but as the individual ages, they will be less susceptible to the influence of their immediate environments.

Conclusively, the ecological systems in which the human organism lives can be described as a set of Russian dolls (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Therefore, the development and integration of the human organism is hypothesized to influence the assumptions, perceptions, and behaviors of the human organism as it travels throughout the various ecological systems. The following section will review how this theory has been utilized in previous research. Because of the influence of the microlevel in constructing identity, community, and establishing a societal sense of belonging, public policy at the microlevel will be the focus of this study.

Ecological Systems Theory in Previous Research

Much of the research utilizing the EST as a framework has focused on human adaptation (Boden & Tengo, 2012 ; Kohl & Steffgen, 2013), social changes (Holland, 2017; Lorenz, 2013), and the role of climate-related environmental harms regarding the human organism (Burns, Warmbold-Brann, & Zaslofsky, 2015). There has been a growing interest regarding the field of social ecology and this occurrence has led to an extensive body of research evaluating the interactions of human organisms as they interact at different levels. As a result, the field of public policy can begin to better understand the impact of substantive legislation on the well-being of the populace by understanding the impact of policy on the social interactions of various groups including, but not limited to, racial and sexual minorities. There has been evidence suggesting that interactions within a life course has the potential to both positively and negatively impact the human organism at different levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Leong & Grand, 2008).

Consequently, EST has been utilized in voluminous social behavioral studies to identify the interactions as it relates to both individual and social change.

The field of psychology has also benefited from the EST. Current psychological research has evaluated the impact of microlevel human development attributes such as the academic performance of students (McLinden, 2017), the impacts of poverty on microlevel interactions (Tartakovsky, 2009), and the effects of discrimination and bias on the development of individuals (Leong & Tang, 2016). Therefore, EST is not specific to only areas of social science but can also be used in areas of psychological inquiry. As a result, EST has proven beneficial and viable to areas of inquiry; this is especially true regarding studies which seek to examine the behavioral impacts of negative experiences within various ecological systems on the human organism.

What positions the EST as appealing to various disciplines is its ability to give importance to public policy regarding understanding the developing human. The influence of culture is great, especially regarding the assimilation of minority populations at the microlevel into larger societies (Leong & Grand, 2008; Leong & Tang, 2016; Seaton, Neblett, Cole, & Prinstein, 2013). Accordingly, culture has been shown to produce developmental and social results. Occurrences such as bias, discrimination, and prejudice are influenced to some degree by culture which serves as a driving force for public policy. As a result, the EST framework is appropriate for research considering the societal effects of policy on the individual at the microlevel.

Rationale for Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's EST was chosen because of its precise application to key variables and concepts such as discrimination, prejudice, bias, and homophobia that could be reflected in public policy for members of the AA LGBT community. The perception of reality matters more than actual reality as it relates to the overall development of the human organism (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Therefore, utilizing a theory which allows for the perception of the individual to constitute an influential portion of the lived experiences of a community was needed. The focus of this research targeted towards the lived experiences of this community as they occurred at microlevel and the ecological transitions which occurred as the human organism transitioned into larger society.

A strength of this framework was the ability of the research to be conducted as a natural experiment due to there being an apparent difference between what happens in "real-life" and what is observed within laboratories (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Because of this proposition, it was valuable to understand the interactions of this community as it occurred naturally and not within a controlled environment. If variables were introduced into this study, there was a considerable risk of harming the validity of the research. Consequently, for the purposes of this research, it was important not to introduce or withdraw any variable due to the risk of creating an artificial environment (Beuving, 2015). Essentially, this framework is only concerned with instances and situations as they occur in a natural setting such as the lived experiences of the members within the AA LGBT community at the microlevel.

A final benefit of the naturalistic mode of inquiry when positioned with the EST was the ability to understand the impact of societal roles on the interactions between human organisms and how these experiences could be influenced by public policy at the microlevel of the ecological system. This research presented from a frame of interpretivism which suggests that the world emerges from the perceptions and assumptions which are held by members of society (Beuving, 2015). Thus, this framework allowed for lived experiences by the participant to be encapsulated and the effects of these experiences accounted for in the creation of the participants' perceptions and assumptions. Consequently, the experiences of the participants were considered and the impacts of their previous experiences on their perception pondered to apply to the field of public policy.

Ecological System's Theory Relation to African American Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Community

The present study sought to better understand the lived experiences of AA LGBT community members who live in North Carolina ages 18-30 at the microlevel post-HB2. For minorities, cultures usually differentiate from those within larger society and as a result, minorities were introduced into larger society in which meanings, symbolism, and objects held very different meanings. This theory allowed for the experiences of the individual to be interpreted holistically. Given that this research sought to understand the lived experiences of a specific community (AA LGBT) at a certain level (microlevel), naturalistic inquiry was used to incorporate the mental categories of its members as it

applied to ecological transitions or shifts in roles or settings which occurred throughout the lifespan of the human organism (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

This theory related to the present study because this study sought to understand the impact of substantive policy, e.g. HB2 on microlevel experiences of AA LGBT members. Previous utilizations of EST have observed interactions that occurred across various levels such as the macro-level (Carabine & Wilkinson, 2016), microlevel (Corcoran, 2000) and exo-level (Hong & Garbarino, 2012). In other words, the ability of the EST to isolate sub-groups and populations allowed for the successful implementation of this theory. Therefore, through previous research, the valid application of EST has been established and its applicability verified. Thus, this study benefited from using this theory to support research on microlevel interactions of AA LGBT individuals.

The research question presented in this study allowed for three major questions within social sciences to be addressed. Arguably, the role of the social sciences performs three functions: it describes what people say and do, it explains what people say and do, and it explains both the things said and done (Beuving, 2015). As a result, the research question was framed to inquire about the microlevel lived experiences of the AA LGBT community. Unlike much of the previous research utilizing EST, the research question allowed for the lived experiences of this community to be articulated and the impact of each lived experience on microlevel to be better understood.

This study built upon the existing theory by better understanding how being a human organism who is binary and tripartite in minority status impacted their perception and assumption of society at the microlevel. Current literature has established the role

which public policy performs regarding assisting or harming minority communities (Schweiger, Wendi, & O'Brien, 2005; Sipsma, Ickovics, Lin, & Kershaw, 2012).

However, current literature has focused largely on observation and empirical data, but what is less present in the research is the perception of specific occurrences as they occur from the mental constructs of the participants. Therefore, there was a possibility to better understand the role of public policy from the perspective of an AA LGBT community member by using their perceptions in a qualitative study of their descriptions of their own lived experiences as it occurred at the microlevel.

Key Variable and Concepts in the Literature

The section below reviewed and synthesized key variables as they occurred within the review of the literature. This section of the literature review directly applied the key variables and concepts found in the literature review to the phenomena which was under investigation for this study, e.g. AA LGBT microlevel fragility. Therefore, the following section sought to identify a concise synopsis of the current literature and to establish the relevance of the problem in society. The following sections were separated to concentrate specifically on AA LGBT experiences as they occurred within the microlevel of the societal ecosystem. Each section sought to identify what was known about the phenomena (AA LGBT lived experiences at the microlevel) being studied.

Ramifications of Policy on Public Problem Definitions at the Microlevel

The implementation of public policy involves the ability to shape public discourse as well as to determine matters that are deserving of public attention. Government action as public policy is likely to affect microlevel interactions and ultimately determine what

is discussed within the public and private arena (Froio et al., 2017; Jones, 2001). That is to say, public policy and elected officials are able to greatly impact public opinion and definitions by politicizing moral behavior and bias, e.g. sexuality and racism. Consequently, instead of a government performing the role of a reactionary mechanism, policies can also be proactive in identifying microlevel behavior as a public problem regardless of empirical evidence to support such claims.

Political actors can not only identify a problem, but to also characterize the problem. In other words, politicians and policymakers can influence how a problem is presented, defined, and framed (Liu et al., 2016; Chong & Druckman, 2007). In similar fashion, defining problems based on undesired behavior, e.g. homosexuality, public policy not only represents a collective attempt to curve or stifle certain behaviors, but the characterization of target populations goes beyond the behavior and impacts the identity and microlevel acceptance of specific populations as they occur at various ecological levels. Therefore, AA LGBT populations are characterized as the problem and this contributes much to feelings of inclusiveness and community at the microlevel due to public policies which are implemented.

The enactment of policy is accomplished through a type of problem characterization called “issue linkage” which can be detrimental to target populations and their public image. The role of linkage is prevalent in shaping policy to address certain populations of citizens (Liu et al., 2016). In other words, associating a problem with other public issues is a frequently utilized avenue of drafting policy. On the other hand, if the problem is identified based on hyperbole and bias, all the while being void of empirical

evidence, a critical component of effective governance is absent. Therefore, because of the frequent use of issue linkage in conjunction with the absence of empirical evidence, issue linkage poses a unique problem for communities such as the AA LGBT population.

Government policies constructed in an anticipatory nature pose a substantial danger to target groups and minority populations despite the good intentions of such policy. Proactive problem-solving has been identified as an overriding concern within government (Froio et al., 2017; Jones, 2005; Mayhew, 2006). However, anticipating problems becomes problematic because policymakers then make policy decisions without empirical and factual variables to arrive at logical conclusions. The drafting of such anticipatory policy becomes vulnerable to the inclusion of hyperbole, exaggeration, embellishment of fears, and negative stereotypes of target populations. As a result, public policy void of factual support and empirical evidence presents a substantiated danger to minorities, especially the AA LGBT community, and their interactions at the microlevel.

Conclusively, the interpretive effects of public policy on target populations will assist in shaping their personal identities under a particular policy. Previous literature within the discipline has identified the influence of policy in the structuring of norms and beliefs toward and of target groups (Mettler & Soss, 2004; King & Smith, 2008). To clarify, previous literature has established the impact of public policy on the fostering and development of identity under policy which targets specific populations. As a result, instead of policy having positive effects on the polity, the ill-conceived policy could not only enforce negative stereotypes of target populations, but also assist in sustaining negative self-perception of members of the target population.

Social Constructions of African American Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender as a Target Population in Public Policy

Negative social constructions of AA LGBT members are contributing to the negative treatment of this group in numerous private and public microlevel institutions, e.g. school, daycare, and workplace. Previous research has suggested that neoliberalism has hijacked spaces of cultural representation and replaced concepts such as equality and tolerance with free-market principles such as strong private property rights or accumulation by dispossession (Giroux, 2004; Grady et al., 2012; Hill, 2009). That is to say, microlevel institutions are now greatly impacted by the private sector which commodifies relationships as they occur between various members of society at the microlevel. As a result, members of the AA LGBT community are facing isolation and negative interactions within both public and private institutions due to the personal attitudes held by teachers, administrators, and employers because of the negative social constructions imposed by the public policies enacted.

The actions of policymakers and elected officials contribute substantially to the social constructions of target populations and morality. Previous research has addressed the shifting of America's moral compass within the past few decades further to the right regarding microlevel occurrences such as economic inequality which has severely undermined the sense of community shared in America (Monheit, 2012). Because of the role that morals play in politics, it is difficult to suggest that public policy and policymakers do not reflect wider societal attitudes toward target populations such as the AA LGBT community, but in more liberal states such as New York and San Francisco

the reciprocal is arguably true. In other words, elected officials must appeal to the voters to be elected and represent the opinions of the electorate once in office. As a result, policy and policymakers are mechanisms which influence the social construction of group identities and impact the interactions of targeted populations with the members of the overall society as interactions occur at various ecological levels; more specifically, the microlevel.

The ability of public policy to assist in changing social constructions is of immense importance regarding microlevel interactions of AA LGBT communities. To clarify, public policy contains elements that could either reinforce or challenge existing social constructions. Previous research has suggested that the rationalist approaches to policy is based on the assumption that investigation produces a self-evident truth (Splash, 2014). This is especially true in regard to the AA LGBT community and negative social constructions such as male femininity, female masculinity, and transgenderism being the result of underlying mental health issues. In other words, it is within the power of public officials and their policies to assist in reconstructing the current projection of AA LGBT more positively and supportively.

Policy, being authoritative in nature, has detrimental impacts on groups whose negative social constructions have been embedded within policy, e.g. House Bill 2. Previous work on the impact of public policy on attitudes towards LGBT populations has identified not static, but dynamic perceptions on this population based on the specific identity e.g. gay, lesbian, or transgender (Lewis et al., 2017). For that reason, substantive public policy which isolates, and targets minority populations will create a negative

microlevel environment for minority members who are included in the AA LGBT community. Branding via legislation can have detrimental effects on minority populations despite amendments to such policies. The negative social construct within the public policy will have the same degenerative impact on target populations regardless of attempts to rectify the policy. Consequently, policies which reinforce negative stereotypes such as HB2 will have long-lasting and detrimental impacts on targeted populations like AA LGBT populations.

Impact of Public Policy on African American Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Microlevel Fragility

Though elementary at first glance, the impacts of concepts such as “good” and “bad” in public policy contributes much to the drafting and implementation of sweeping policy. Research has evaluated the role of perceptions of “good” and “bad” in formulating and introducing policy; essentially, doing “good” things for “good” people and being tough on “bad” people (Schneider & Ingram, 1997). Because of the associations that terms such as “good” and “bad” denote societally, it is viable that the historic association of Black with marginalization and a queer lifestyle with “ungodliness” will translate into public policy seeking to get tough on “bad” behavior and “bad” images, e.g. black skin and queer lifestyles, to ultimately label the AA LGBT community as “ungodly” and/or “bad.” Consequently, dyadic relationships and behaviors, as they occur at the microlevel, are greatly influenced by who and what is deemed “good” or “bad.”

Both government action and non-action have resounding impacts on the behavior of members of society. Current literature has identified that government plays a key role in societal interactions of minority communities as they occur at various levels, especially the microlevel (Gadsen, 2017; Clifford, 2012; Pimpare, 2007). Therefore, both government action and non-action contribute to benefits or burdens and aid in social constructs which contribute to stereotypes and stigmas. Accordingly, public policy is a powerful tool to improve the plight of marginalized groups at the microlevel and to contribute to positive interactions regarding behaviors towards marginalized populations.

The dependence of public policy on the overall emotionality of the polity positions AA LGBT members as the target of both racial and sexual majorities. As earlier literature illustrates, emotionality is an important predictor of public policy outcomes (Fording & Schram, 2017; Redlawsk, Tolbert, Altema-McNelly, 2014). This population is positioned opposite both social and ideological paradigms and therefore, are vulnerable to policies implemented as a result of negative judgments, images, and stereotypes which derive from emotions. Such emotionality will influence dyadic relationships at the microlevel. As a result, the democratic nature of both state and national politics exposes this group to negative perceptions.

Positive perception is vital to the successful development of AA LGBT individuals; however, public policies are positioned as major obstacles to this vulnerable population at times. In recent years, research has identified the impacts of public policy in substantiating and enhancing the negative public perceptions of vulnerable minority communities (Federico, 2004; Federico, 2005; Gilens, 1999; Stokes, 2007). Historical

occurrences such as slavery and the taxonomy of Blacks as capricious, illiterate, and non-Christian added to the isolation of Blacks in early America (Jordan, 1969; Marger, 2003; Federico, 2004). Consequently, AA LGBT individuals find themselves at an area of intersectionality which does not allow for the projection of a positive image in the American public due to race or within their own communities because of their queer lifestyles.

The AA LGBT community represents an isolated block of the electorate and is often overlooked when considering the implementation of substantive public policies. There has been much literature which shows that both major parties in the United States have distanced themselves from AAs (Glazer, Grofman, & Owens, 1998; Mendelberg, 2001; Walton, 1975; Nteta & Schaffner, 2013). As a result of such distancing, AAs are not being heard and the lived experiences of this minority group are greatly impacted by the public policy which is enacted. That is to say, substantive policies such as North Carolina's HB2 were created and implemented by members of society who do not resemble this specific population (AA LGBT members).

The role of social construction in democratic policy designs is impactful and long-lasting within minority communities, especially as they occur at the microlevel, e.g. AA LGBT communities. An example of the enduring impact of the public policy would be Affirmative Action. Affirmative Action has opened numerous avenues of social mobility for minorities in America. As a result of the enforcement of such policy, minority involvement within microlevel institutions increased (Wilkins & Wenger, 2014; Tyler, 2004; King & Smith, 2008). Therefore, if public policy such as Affirmative Action could

have beneficial impacts on a minority population, then the reciprocal must be true as well. In other words, restrictive public policies such as HB2 will result in impactful and ongoing effects on the behavior of an already isolated target population (AA LGBT population) at the microlevel of society.

African American Gay and Bisexual Microlevel Fragility

Gay men within the AA community are a vulnerable population due to the marginalized status of this group at the microlevels, e.g. at home and within microlevel public institutions such as schools. As produced in previous research, AA males lack personal and public support regarding establishing an identity and experiencing feelings of inclusiveness (Lemelle Jr. & Battle, 2004; McCoy, 2009; Hunter et al., 1998). As a result, any public policy which adds to feelings of disassociation and marginalization may have exponential negative effects on the lived experiences of this population. Accordingly, substantive policies which impact the rights and privileges of either a racial or sexual group will further expose an already isolated group to further marginalization.

AA gay men encounter an elevated negative public opinion of themselves within their own communities within microlevel environments. Research has posited that opinions of AA gay men within their own communities have added to the closeted behavior and increased developmental stress of this group (Lemelle Jr. & Battle, 2004; Miller, 2007; Lasala & Frienson, 2012). Microlevel interactions within AA communities which are influenced by negative views of AA gay men damage the ability of the individual to successfully transition into larger society. Hence, the public opinion of the

AA gay man within their own community adds to the broader negative public opinion of this group.

Possessing masculinity as a gay man in the AA community is littered with cultural and indirect microlevel obstructions. The role of masculinity in the AA community presents various roles which the male must fulfill, e.g. worker, intimate partner, and father (Adams, 2007; Young, 2004; Adams, 2005). Thus, the cultural and familial impact of direct and indirect dyadic associations, e.g. mother and father, father and son, mother and son, and sister and brother interactions, could possibly add to the social and personal distress of AA gay men. As a result, AA gay men witness and encounter perceptions of “maleness” which do not align with definitions they hold as queer black men who identify themselves as gay and this difference increases the developmental obstructions faced by this population of individuals.

AA gay men are exposed to substantial levels of negative rhetoric within familial and religious institutions. Previous research has identified the positive role which religious institutions have in the lives of AAs (Battle & Crum, 2007; Lee, 2007; Pitt, 2010). Due to the dyadic relationships which exist within microlevel institutions such as the home, exposure to negative rhetoric within such institutions are likely to result in negative social consequences (Garett-Walker & Torres, 2017). Therefore, if religion could positively impact the lives of AAs, then negative impacts are probable if the spiritual experience themselves are negative. Consequently, given the role of religion in the lives of many AAs, religious views will contribute much, either positive or negative, to the lived experiences of AA gay men.

AA gay men are positioned as a subgroup within a minority community and this association increases the likelihood of social marginality, e.g. gay Black men within “Black America.” Evidence has identified the prevalence of unsupportive or homophobic family members within AA heterosexist family structures (Miller, 2008; Hunter, Shannon, Knox, Martin, & Ehrenkranz, 1998; Pitt, 2010). Because of the isolation which AA gay men experience within the family structure, feelings of loneliness, helplessness, and not belonging provides the opportunity for negative self-perceptions and further feelings of inadequacy to be introduced and sustained by negative dyadic relationships as they occur at the microlevel. The feelings of belonging to a racial and sexual minority minimizes feelings of community as they occur within the AA microlevel structures.

African American Lesbian and Bisexual Microlevel Fragility

AA lesbians are an integral part of the AA community and the critical roles in which they perform are vital to the sustainability of the Black household. AA lesbian couples are raising children at almost the same rate as AA married couples, and that Black same-sex couples raise children at twice the rate of white same-sex couples (American Psychological Association, 2004). Given these figures, the introduction of any public policy which impacts jobs, opportunities, or issues of inclusiveness are exemplified when referring to the AA lesbian population. Therefore, AA women who identify as lesbian will serve an integral part via raising children, assimilating them into broader society, and forming strong dyadic relationships with their children to aid in later ecological transitions.

Black women who identify as “lesbian” are unique because of the critical role that Black women have in the AA family. The literature on the role of women in AA households being defined as mother-centered and highly economically important to the households has been well established in previous research (Collins, 2000; Moore 2006, 2008, 2009, 2011). In like manner, the historical importance of lesbian mothers in AA families still perform the same role, but without as much extended family support. Consequently, any substantive policy which impacts the ability of AA sexual minority women to work and perform economically will have detrimental impacts on the AA family structure at the microlevel.

Lesbians who are members of the AA community encounter unique challenges regarding family. Previous literature has suggested that religion, particularly Christianity, is used to define family which is oftentimes opposed to the lesbian way of life (Miller & Stack, 2014; Ward, 2005; Beaubouef-Lafontant, 2009). Given the high influence of AA religiosity in AA family life, women who identify as lesbians are placed at a disadvantage regarding having religious and spiritual support regarding parenting, education, and moral support from an influential pillar within the AA culture. As a result, lesbians may experience more hardships regarding performing the functions of a parent due to their lifestyles which are at odds with AA religiosity.

Black lesbians find themselves as part of a multiple marginalized community. Unlike their AA gay counterparts, lesbians are not only a racial and sexual minority, but they are also women in a male-dominated society. Current research has identified the high degree of homophobia in the AA family as the primary reason for AA lesbians not

“coming out” (Miller, 2011). However, refusing to come out has lingering effects on identity development which could carry over into future ecological transitions of this group and could cause more marginalization at the microlevel which could be exaggerated by public policies that effect their lived experiences. Consequently, AA lesbians face a triad of minority identifications; racial minority, sexual minority, and gender minority.

African American Transgender Microlevel Fragility

The role of family in the development of an individual is the foundation of dyadic relationships within the microlevel. However, the implementation of sound public policy could assist in alleviating many of the hardships endured by the AA transgender community. Previous research has identified the communicative struggles of transitioning transgender populations in society regarding sexual and gender identity (Norwood, 2012; Goffman, 1959; Burkitt, 1991). To rephrase it, transgender individuals who experience a desire to adopt the social role of the other sex face hardships when communicating the transitioning of identity performance, e.g. changing of pronouns, alternating usage of voice, and other physical alterations to family members who have pivotal roles at the microlevel. Thus, established communicative obstacles will limit the assistance received by transitioning AA transgender individuals which will add to the fragility of their experiences at the microlevel due to public policies.

Negative perceptions of social interactions as they occur with public services at the microlevel by members of the AA transgender community, e.g. public safety, public response to service needs, and access to social services, contribute to the microlevel

fragility of this policy target population. Previous research has identified the prevalence of negative attitudes towards public services within this population (Kenagy, 2005; Nemoato et al., 2005). Moreover, negative perceptions of public services will add to further marginalization and isolation from public services which are needed within this community. Consequently, negative perceptions of social services are likely to produce negative experiences with the institutions and reinforce both negative views and experiences with public agencies at the microlevel while adding to the fragility of this community.

Public policies can provide valuable and essential resources that are important to the welfare and lived experiences of AA transgender people at the microlevel. Public policy is created with the possibility of negative externalities being faced by certain populations of the politic (Nagler, 2011). That is to say, public policy has the ability to aid minorities by constructing policies that promote inclusion, assist rather than desist from services, and isolate target populations at the microlevel. Therefore, the role of public policy to provide such resources can greatly improve the lived experiences of vulnerable populations such as the AA transgender community.

Access to public services can improve the lived experiences of AA transgender individuals due to the critical function that public services serve within this vulnerable population. Previous scholarship has identified the increased need for public services by members of the AA transgender community (Nemoato et al., 2005; Clements-Nole, Marx, Guzman, & Katz, 2001). Specifically, members of the most vulnerable populations, e.g. racial and sexual minorities, have a higher need for public services and

policies which do not add to further marginalization and social isolation, but policies and services that address issues such as healthcare, housing, and public safety that is specific to minority populations (target populations). As a result, public policy which addresses these issues positively could increase the health, wealth, and prosperity of AA transgender individuals, but the public policy that address the issues negatively will undoubtedly serve to further hinder this population.

Previous Approaches and Methodology

The section below attempted to identify similar studies that have been performed on the selected phenomena. The studies included in this section focused specifically on microlevel experiences which occur within the AA LGBT community and included the methodology used by the researchers for their study. The methodology used within these studies mirror the approach utilized for this research.

There has been a tremendous amount of research that has examined the impact of environment and culture on the AA Lesbian (Collins, 2000; Moore, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2011; Miller & Stack, 2014; Ward, 2005; Beaubouef-Lafontant, 2009), Gay (McCoy, 2009; Lemelle Jr. & Battle, 2004; Miller, 2007; Adams, 2007; Young, 2004; Adams, 2005), Bi-sexual (Collins, 2000; Moore, 2006, 2008; Miller & Stack, 2014; Ward, 2005; Beaubouef-Lafontant, 2009), and Transgender (Norwood, 2012; Burkitt, 1991; Clements-Nole, Marx, Guzman, & Katz, 2001) microlevel interactions. However, none of the previous studies identified the role of public policy in the direct microlevel interactions of this community. As a result, studies relating to the role of public policy on target populations were selected.

To clarify, the logical progression pertaining to this study attempted to parallel public policy such as smoking bans to the present policy under investigation for the following reasons: smoking policy restricts microlevel behaviors and also presents obstacles in regard to employment, employability, and economic opportunity, e.g. smoke-free work sites (Stucki, 2017). Much like smoking bans which have been supported by religious advocacy coalitions in the name of public health (Henriques, Leonardo, & Beatriz, 2012), public policy aimed at curbing microlevel behaviors such as sexual deviant behaviors are supported by similar coalitions, e.g. Protestant, Pentecostal, and Catholic faith traditions (Ogland & Verona, 2014). Thus, the impacts of policy will share similarities in their microlevel impacts.

Qualitative Approach to Microlevel Experience

The goal of this work was to better understand the lived experiences of AA LGBT community members and therefore, it was important that the methodology used aided in interpretation of such experiences. Previous research has identified many real-life examples are from stories (Giacomini, Hurley, & Dejean, 2014). To put it another way, participants of interviews will likely use stories to communicate their rationalizations and perceptions. Accordingly, the interview questions for this study allowed for the participant to express their experiences in a way that was comfortable for them and allowed for elaboration of story. Thus, a better understanding of the participants' lived experiences were gathered in order to comprehend more regarding the effects of public policies on certain members of society.

Major Themes Within Literature

The following section identified themes which were recurrent throughout the literature review. Identified themes were addressed in detail below and were written to add clarity to their usefulness regarding the research.

Negative Impact of Social Constructions in Policy Towards African American Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender at Microlevel

The role of caricature in policy, for example heroes, victims, and villains, influence policy and determine which individual(s) belongs to a certain group. The language and content of policy can assign a social or political standing to the targeted population, whether intentionally or not (Mettler & Soss, 2004). To put it another way, social identities via policy embed themselves into the public psyche and conscience (Giroux, 2004; Grady et al., 2012; Hill, 2009). This embedding of attributes and behaviors of target populations influence microlevel interactions. Consequently, symbolism in public policy, e.g. “Welfare Queen,” presents enormous obstacles for sub-groups to overcome at the microlevel.

Interpretive effects of Policy on Target Communities

The nature of public policy to solve problems and allocate resources is essential to its functions and thus, policies will impact attitudinal responses by target populations to government. Therefore, policies which are designed to allocate resources to a specific population based on shared characteristics will also run the risk of singling out others. Previous work has identified the role of “good” and “bad” on the allocation of resources through policy (Schneider & Ingram, 1997). More current research has also shown the

framing of public policy around caricatures and symbolisms which include associations of “bad” and “good” (Liu et al., 2016; Chong & Druckman, 2007). For that reason, withholding protections such as discrimination protections and restroom access will impact the way minority members view themselves. Hence, attributing resources and protections to particular populations and withholding resources from others will impact target communities.

African American Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Trouble Communicating at Microlevel

Vital to the evolution of the human organism is effective and efficient communication pertaining to identity and social roles. Past research has identified that many AA LGBT individuals find it hard to maintain relationships with extended families (Miller & Stack, 2014; Ward, 2005) and to adapt to socially accepted gender roles (Norwood, 2012; Burkitt, 1991; Miller, 2007; Lasala & Frienson, 2012). To explain, AA LGBT individuals are likely to encounter social isolation, marginalization, and negative interactions as they occur at the microlevel, e.g. home, school, and within the community. For that reason, trouble communicating with family and individuals who form dyadic relationships with the individual at the microlevel is likely to harm the developing human organism in numerous ways.

Studies Related to Research Question

Prior research seeking to better understand the lived experiences of a particular group has made use of phenomenological inquiry. The overarching research question for this proposed study inquired to the lived experiences of AA LGBT community members

ages 18-30 in North Carolina post-HB2 to better understand the effects of public policy on certain members within society. There have been vast amounts of phenomenological studies seeking to understand the lived experiences of societal minority communities regarding microlevel interactions, e.g. aspirations (Robicheau & Krull, 2016), relationship dynamics (Towner, Dolcini, & Harper, 2015), and encountering negative stereotypes (Koone, 2012). As a result, phenomenology has been used as an approach to access the essence of the lived experience on behalf of the human organism such as AA LGBT populations.

Summary and Conclusions

To date, the field of public policy has identified the far-reaching ability of policy to impact various populations within society. There has been research performed which has cautioned that public policy could stigmatize vulnerable populations, e.g. racial, sexual, and religious minorities (Froio et al., 2017; Ingram & Schneider, 1997). To explain, there is a voluminous amount of research which has examined the impact of public policy on shaping attitudes and participation of target populations at the microlevel. However, to date, there has been no literature in which I have found that examined the lived experiences of both binary and tripartite minority members as they occurred at the microlevel in North Carolina, i.e. AA LGBT members. As a result, this study sought to contribute to this growing area of research to add to the discipline of public policy and to foster positive social change by better identifying how public policy could influence the lives of binary and tripartite minority populations.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the impact of substantive and legislative public policy on the lived experiences of the study population of AA LGBT community members ages 18-30 in North Carolina by collecting their perspectives and experiences of being a member of a racial and sexual minority at the microlevel post-North Carolina's HB2. I used an interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological approach to understand the impact of substantive public policies on the lived experiences of the population studied. The study population consisted of 10 study participants who were AA and members of the LGBT community and who were 18-30 years of age. The central concept of this study was to better understand the lived experiences of the study participants as influenced by substantial legislative policy (HB2) as it occurred at the microlevel of society. The major sections in Chapter 3 are research rationale, research question, the role of the researcher, methodology, instrumentation, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

I collected the data for this study during telephone interviews using semi structured interview questions. The interview questions allowed me to address the main points of the interview while maintaining the ability to be flexible regarding both probing and follow-up questions.

Research Question

RQ: The overarching question that guided this study is: how do AA members of the LGBT community who are participating in this study describe the effects that the public policy, the North Carolina General Assembly's HB2, has had on their microlevel experiences in North Carolina's current political and economic climate.

Rationale for Using Phenomenological Approach

The ability to comprehend, understand, and interpret other human beings is significant in human science. To achieve this the researcher must find a way to study the human being in their humanness (Ihde, 1971; Van Mannen, 1990), especially when inquiring about the perceptions of human participants and their lived experiences due to the implementation of certain public policies. Due to the constant shifting of the ecological landscape that occurs within the human lifespan, maintaining the ability to record the effects of external stimuli on the perceptions of the participants as they occur at the microlevel is of value when seeking to understand their lived experiences after the enactment of specific policy affecting specific populations such as minority groups. Phenomenological inquiry will also address the developing of phenomena as it occurs in consciousness (Copoeru, Pavlo, Haru, & Augustin, 2010; Van Mannen, 1971).

For this research, it was important that occurrences, rather real or imagined, were captured and analyzed. Phenomenology allows for anything that presents itself to consciousness to be empirically measured or subjectively felt (Cooper et al., 2010; Van Mannen, 1971). Fittingly, the role of interpretivism or naturalistic inquiry suggests that

social order will follow from human understanding of the world (Beauving & de Vries, 2015). As a result, the potential of phenomenological inquiry to allow the researcher to acknowledge subjective occurrences combined with the possibility of interpretivism to support the assertion that the individual experiences the world via their mental constructs allow for a study that thoroughly acknowledges the world from the position of the participant(s). Consequently, the role of the subjective experiences of the participants, such as discrimination, prejudice, and self-worth, can be included and analyzed.

When observing human experiences from a position of phenomenological inquiry, the influence of terms and meanings in regard to the human organism and how it perceives reality becomes apparent. Phenomenological inquiry allows for the exploration of lived meanings (Copoeru et al., 2010). Discrimination, prejudice, and racism have been found to have negative effects on the development of the human organism. Therefore, it was of importance to identify the terms and meanings associated with other terms to understand how they influence the lived experiences of minorities. Accordingly, phenomenological inquiry provided the most effective mode of inquiry to better understand the lived experiences of the members of this community as they live out meanings and terms resulting from the public policies that affect them.

Rationale for Eliminating Other Qualitative Designs

For the nature of this research, there was no need to build a theory through the systematic generation of a research (Swanson & Chermack, 2013). Grounded theory operates within a positivist frame suggesting that each justifiable assertion can be scientifically proven (Caldwell, 1994); however, this research utilized interpretivism as

an approach, which suggests that not all human constructs can be examined via empiricism. I did not attempt in this research to build a theory because I sought to understand the lived experiences of this specific population and therefore eliminated the need for using grounded theory as a design.

Narrative theory would have been appropriate for this study, but I deemed it not to be the best qualitative approach. There is a large degree of overlap between narrative theory and phenomenology, but for this study, attention was to be given to the lived experiences of the AA LGBT population and not to lived experiences expressed in stories. Narrative theory studies experience as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, in the attempt to understand the lived experiences of the individual, phenomenological inquiry presented the best opportunity to observe the essence of the phenomena. As a result, I found narrative theory not to be the best approach for this research.

Ethnographic research was not chosen as the selected qualitative approach because of its focus on group behaviors (Creswell, 2007). In this study I did not seek to examine the behavioral patterns of a particular group but sought rather to understand the lived experiences of individuals. However, the purpose of phenomenology is not to offer opinion, but the opposite. Husserl defined phenomenological *epoche* as the ability to bracket the researcher's ideas to observe the phenomena as it is presented to the individual (Meixner, 2014). Therefore, instead of stating an opinion about meaning, the phenomenological researcher seeks to understand the experience as it occurs to the participant.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

I contacted the Millennial Caucus to gain approval to give an informational presentation regarding the study to their members during some of their scheduled meetings; I also utilized their social network. I offered sign-up sheets requesting e-mail addresses and telephone numbers at the end of the presentation to obtain interested participants for the study. After interest was received to participate in the study, I emailed an electronic screening questionnaire to the participant that when completed determined the eligibility of each participant. The Millennial Caucus only assisted in the recruitment efforts.

Participants were informed of the study, the type of research required, and the risk involved in participating in order to assist them in determining whether they wished to participate. Each participant was required to give informed consent to participate in the study. Informed consent is the foundation of trust between the researcher and the participant. It is necessary for the environment to be comfortable and safe for each participant (Manda & Parija, 2014). To assist in generating a safe and trusting environment, informed consent must be given with the understanding that the participant has the option of opting out of the research at any given time without any fear of negative consequences.

The participants in this study were 10 AA LGBT members of North Carolina. The participants were between the ages of 18 and 30 and had lived in North Carolina for over 1 year and self-identified as a member of the LGBT community. Researchers should

create a sample that will produce rich descriptions on the phenomena being examined (Miles, 2012).

My study required an in-depth examination of the 10 selected participants who had the desire to participate and consented to being interviewed over the telephone about their lived experiences as they occurred in North Carolina post-HB2. I interviewed each participant, and they provided rich and in-depth accounts of their lived experiences. Participant accounts centered around living as racial, sexual, and, for female participants, gender minorities who functioned in North Carolina's political and economic climate.

The sampling strategy for this qualitative study was purposeful or purposive in conjunction with snowball sampling. Unlike quantitative research, the goal of this sampling strategy was not to be representative of the population sampled but rather to allow for the purposeful selection of settings, persons, and activities to provide relevant information (Maxwell, 2013). To implement purposeful sampling, the following characteristics were met before participant selection began. The screening criteria in place required that the participant meet the following: (a) they must have been between the ages of 18 and 30, (b) they must have lived in North Carolina for at least 1 year, and (c) they must identify as a member of the AA LGBT community. Due to the possibility of convenience sampling, the first participant was chosen at random from prescreened individuals and this individual referred other members within this target population to partake in the study. Supported by the need in this study to understand the experiences of a very specific community, it was logically sound to closely match the sample population with the research question to understand the lived experiences of this community. Panels

would be considered people who are uniquely able to be informative because they are experts in an area or were privileged witness to an event (Weiss, 1994). Therefore, purposive sampling and snowballing were utilized to allow for the involvement of informed participants.

As with any phenomenological research, it was vital to recruit participants with an in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon being studied. Previous researchers suggested that it is of great importance, they (participants) must be individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon being explored and be able to articulate those experiences (Creswell, 2013). As a result, it was important to recruit members of the AA community who identify themselves as either lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. The participants were between 18 and 30 years of age and had lived in North Carolina for at least one year. As a result, the study included 10 participants who were to be interviewed and the essences of their lived experiences regarding the aftermath of HB2 were sought to be understood by the researcher.

Role of the Researcher

My role in this research was that of an observer-participant. The role of the naturalistic observer is to be close to the participants as they respond to what life has done and does to them (Goffman, 1989). My role involved conducting the interviews and recording audio of the responses the participants provided with the Atlas.ti.8 software. However, there were possible areas that need to be identified regarding researcher predisposition.

Being that I am an African American male, I am aware of many of the perceived and real obstacles that exist in the Black community. This similarity with the participants was managed utilizing the Husserlian method of *epoche* and bracketing, but there were no power or close relationships with the participants which needed to be managed. However, I was unaware of experiences which affected members of the LGBT community at a personal level. Therefore, I immersed myself in literature which examined the hardships and lived experiences of members within the LGBT community. It was important that the data guides the research; however, there was much ambiguity to be found in the notion of data (Van Mannen, 1990). For the purposes of this research, the lived experiences described by the participants constituted and guided the research.

There were a few ethical considerations regarding this research. This research had the possibility of participants experiencing a loss of privacy, having to relive painful experiences, and there was a chance that the participants would experience a degree of psychological trauma. This research was not conducted within my own work environment and does not include conflicts of interest, power struggles, or the use of incentives.

Research Design

A hermeneutic interpretive phenomenological study was utilized to gain a better understanding of the effects of certain public policy on the lived experiences of these community members by using structured, open-ended questions providing rich descriptions of their subjective experiences. According to the hermeneutic style of inquiry, knowledge is based on interpretation (Kennedy, 2006). As a result, the interview

process was used to provide rich descriptive experiences of the members of the AA LGBT population.

Vital to the decision to utilize qualitative research was the role that personal experience plays regarding using phenomenology as a mode of inquiry. The term qualitative can be associated with human perception and understanding (Stake, 2010). The information obtained was derived from the experiences and perceptions of the selected participants via telephone, semi-structured interviews.

Interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways to understand other human beings (Fontana, 2007). Therefore, given the role that exposure to the microlevel ecological system plays in the development and behaviors of the human organism, it was appropriate to ensure that the experiences of the individual be recorded in a manner which provides for rich and deep descriptions to aid in the best mode of understanding how public policies affect individuals. Therefore, the utilization of the phenomenological approach was appropriate to ensure the collection of the lived experiences of each participant.

Qualitative research also fits the EST framework regarding its ability to dynamically adjust to the lived experiences of specific individuals within specific environments even as they change. Qualitative research has the unique ability to be interpretive, experimental, naturalistic, situational, and what is of most importance for this study is its ability to be personal (Stake, 2010; Beuving, 2015). As a result, the qualitative approach allowed for the opportunity to understand the perceptions and lived experiences of individuals within their natural environments. However, only when

combined with naturalistic inquiry did the appropriateness of this research design become apparent.

Instrumentation and Materials

A formal instrument for this study was not used, but an interview script was used to aid in the interview which involved the participant sharing their lived experiences as it referred to the research question. The goal was to capture each participant's personal experiences and descriptions using concrete and lived-through terms (Patton, 2015). Interviewing was chosen as the best instrument to conduct this research because of its ability to present open-ended questions which allowed for in-depth responses regarding people's experiences, perceptions, feelings, and knowledge (Patton, 2015). Therefore, the interview provides a unique opportunity to better understand the lived experiences of the participants. All interviews were audio-recorded using a digital audio recording device and analyzed by uploading the audio into the computer software program, Atlas.ti8, to uncover themes. Each participant was made aware of this section and had to sign an informed consent form before any interviews were performed.

An interview guide was been created (See appendix C) to help ensure that the same line of inquiry was used with each participant. Interview guides were useful because they served to assist the researcher in developing questions and to help make decisions about what to pursue in greater depth (Patton, 2015). To ensure that the interviews remain productive, the guide also provided for important topics to be checked-off as the interview commenced. As a result, the interview guide was helpful in ensuring

that there was constant direction during the interview and that there was a standard among the interviews as to help eliminate any biases.

Procedure for Recruitment and Data Collection

Coordination with the Millennial Caucus was established regarding recruitment efforts before distributing information to any participants. In-person meetings with the Chair of the Millennial Caucus was conducted to ensure a mutual understanding of assistance for the recruitment efforts. No interviews were conducted until permission from Walden University's IRB was gained. The Millennial Caucus was asked to assist in recruitment only and was not present during the interview process.

In the case of low recruitment, I would have looked to expand the age range. The literature review did not uncover a gap in research based on age difference, but rather the interaction of this community as they network throughout the microlevel ecological system. Therefore, broadening the age range would not have a significant impact on the research question and the overall study. I would have also engaged in snowball and/or chain-referral sampling to aid in the case of low recruitment. Consequently, the research had included alternative strategies to assist in the case of low recruitment.

I, the researcher, collected the data by means of telephone interviewing. Each telephone conversation with the participant was recorded using a hand-held digital audio recorder. At the conclusion of the interview, the digital audio file was uploaded into Atlas.ti.8 software and analyzed for themes. Each interview lasted between approximately 30-80 minutes. Each participant was interviewed once to gain an understanding of each participant's lived experiences. The full interview was audio-

recorded, but the researcher also took handwritten notes during the interview to highlight recurring themes. After the interview, the participants were notified of a follow-up email for the purposes of debriefing and answering any of their remaining questions that they had. Every participant was emailed the transcript to review for accuracy and to ensure that the document correctly depicted their position(s). Each participant also received an email which provided a printout of LGBT Resource Centers in North Carolina along with toll-free helpline telephone numbers. The data received during the phone interviews was then transferred to Atlas.ti.8 for further coding and analysis.

Data Transcription and Analysis

Data transcription was performed after the interviews had been conducted. Utilization of open-ended interview questions constituted the data collection tool for this study. Recorded interview responses were then placed into Atlas.ti.8 and coded utilizing the software and organizational capabilities of the Atlas.ti.8 software. Atlas.ti.8 enables the analyst to engage, through queries and networks, in deeper levels of analysis than is possible by hand (Paulus & Lester, 2016). It is important for raw field notes to be expanded and typed and audio-recordings to be transcribed and corrected (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Therefore, the data was transcribed and placed into the Atlas.ti.8 software which then allowed for further analysis. When transcribing information, it is important to be mindful of the occurrence of objectivity during the transcription process. Due to the heavy reliance on participant responses regarding the questions of their lived experiences, Atlas.ti.8 allowed for fluid adjustment to participant responses and the responses to be analyzed and coded more extensively. Much of the

information gained from the interview will be important (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003). For this research, all interpretations were supported by contextual data. This step was incorporated to ensure that other researchers can understand the way of analyzing the data. If the interpretation is supported by data then it is valid (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). The transcription and analysis portion of this study consisted of dismissing concerns of the researcher and focusing on the participants' concerns. Once this step was complete, it was then the researcher's job to discover the bridge which linked the participants' concerns to the concerns of the researcher within the scope of the EST framework regarding how HB2 effects the participants' lived experiences.

There could have been instances when the participant may have added concerns which do not seem to fit within the scope of the research; nonetheless, the concerns of the participants would have still been included which could guide future research into the phenomenon seeking to be better understood. Due to the desire to better understand the lived experiences of this specific community after the implementation of the particular policy, it was the subjective experiences of this group which remained the focal point of the research. A focal concern of conducting interviews was that during the transcription and analysis of the data, the researcher would experience the phenomenon of "drifting in the sea of data;" that is, to become overwhelmed in the labyrinth and enormity of the data collected (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). To assist with this occurrence, coding with Atlas.ti.8 was used to allow for constant researcher direction for the study.

To assist in the process of better organizing the data was the process of coding. According to the central idea of coding is to move from raw text to research concerns in

small steps (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). This research moved methodically to ensure that there was no immediate attempt to draw connections, but to ensure that the data was accurately analyzed, and valid connections were systematically established. The coding for this research utilized Auerbach and Silverstein's Staircase Approach. This approach looked to begin with the raw text and then progressively move via the following steps: Relevant Text, Repeating Ideas, Themes, Theoretical Constructs, Theoretical Narrative, and Research Concerns.

To assist in coding the following data, Atlas.ti.8 has been designed to help organize and identify themes for data transcription and coding. Therefore, this software was utilized to assist in ensuring that the raw data was thoroughly analyzed which increased the accuracy of adhering to the Staircase Approach as identified by Auerbach and Silverstein. Atlas.ti.8 added an additional layer to discovering the repetitiveness of words, repeating ideas, themes, and research concerns.

Relevant Text

The approach regarding the process of discovering relevant text was the approach suggested by Auerbach and Silverstein (2013). Relevant text was described as raw text which was examined and considered as relating to the research question.

Repeating Ideas

To assist in maneuvering through the data, the repeated ideas were compiled from the relevant text identified earlier in the analysis. During this process, similar words and phrases were the focus of attention. It was important that the repeating words and phrases were used to express similar ideas (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2013). It was worth noting

that repeating ideas may be similar across groups, e.g. lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender individuals. Therefore, this stage of analysis was considered the intergroup occurrence of repeating ideas as well as their applicability across diverse groups.

Themes

Vital to the emergence of themes was repeating ideas that were previously identified. Repeating ideas have something in common which were identified as a theme (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2013).

Theoretical Narrative

Theoretical Narrative was the last step of the transcription and analysis portion of the study identified the theoretical narrative as “the culminating step that bridges the researchers’ concerns with the participants’ subjective experiences” (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2013). This step sought to adhere to the specific language used by the participants. However, the theoretical propositions identified in EST were placed into the Atlas.ti.8 software to accompany the selected responses. This allowed for the theoretical narrative to be driven by participant responses, but stay within the confines of the EST.

Data Reliability and Dependability

To reinforce the dependability of the study, each participant was allowed to review the transcripts and the notes which were gathered by the researcher during the interview. The transcript was emailed to each participant for their review. I also utilized a procedure known as “member checking” to allow each participant the opportunity to access what the participant wanted to convey through their lenses (Creswell, 2007). Member checking consisted of each member having the opportunity to review their own

statements for clarity, accuracy, validity, and internal validity. There may have been a therapeutic benefit to member checking on behalf of the participants as well (Harper & Cole, 2012). Researcher bias and human error can be minimized by using the method of member checking. Therefore, to ensure the highest level of reliability and dependability, member checking was utilized during this study.

Trustworthiness of the Study

The quest for truth and the understanding the lived experiences of the AA LGBT community post-HB2 is what drove this research. Through the implementation of bracketing, I attempted to understand the lived experiences of each participant from their perspectives. Atlas.ti.8 also added to the level of trustworthiness of the study by adding an additional layer of validity and organization to the study. Repeating words, ideas, themes, and narratives were kept within the software. The software allowed for visual representations of connections and repetitions of the ideas and themes.

Ethical Planning of the Research

None of the participants were coerced or compensated for participation in the study. All participants were voluntary and deception was by no means used in this research. Each participant was emailed informed consent fact sheets to reinforce understanding of their rights regarding being a participant. During each phase of the process, participants were treated with the highest degree of dignity, fairness, and respect.

Privacy

Steps were taken to protect the privacy of the participants. Names and occupations were concealed as well other identifying information kept to a minimum via

“data-cleaning,” as was explained below, and by using pseudonyms in the place of names. However, information such as age was important when analyzing the data for this study. All interviews were conducted within a one-on-one setting via the telephone. The researcher performed the interview in the privacy of his home office and the information from the interviews was kept within a code-protected, fireproof safe within the researcher’s home. The definition of confidentiality was explained to each of the participants. The nature of qualitative studies is to be rich with description and therefore, likelihood of deductive disclosure was a concern. To limit this occurrence, the participants knew the information being sought before signing the confidentiality agreement via the researcher thoroughly explaining the information that would be gained and its use. The researcher also alerted the participants to deductive disclosure by explaining the concept and providing a handout of the meaning of deductive disclosure. This ensured that the participant was fully aware of what was to be used for the purposes of the research.

To reinforce the assurance of privacy and confidentiality during the analysis portion of the research, I engaged in “data-cleaning” or removing any identifiable information from any of the transcripts which resulted from the study (Kaiser, 2009). Since I used computer software to assist with analyzing the data, pseudonyms were used instead of the names of the participants upon entry into the software to further protect confidentiality. The find-and-replace software in Microsoft Word was not used due to the threat of algorithms exposing the identity of the participants. Therefore, to minimize this

occurrence, I did not use this feature in Word, but replaced the words with researcher-chosen substitutes.

There are still contextual identifiers which occurred throughout the interview process. Due to the nature of this research being to better understand the lived experiences of individuals, there were certain contextual identifiers which remained, e.g. age and sex (Kaiser, 2009). I modified all non-essential identifiable information such as the number of children participants have and their current occupation. This was done to ensure the privacy of the participants.

Protection of Human Participants

To ensure the responsible and careful protection of each participant, all transcripts and tapes were secured within a fireproof, password-protected safe that remained within my home office for five years. In lieu of using names, I used numbers in conjunction with letters as a way of identifying each participant during the interview process. No research was conducted until the Walden University Internal Review Board approved the study. Each participant had access to the researcher and the committee chair. Each participant reserved the right to terminate their involvement within the research at any time.

Informed Consent Forms

Informed consent forms were emailed and e-signed. Each participant was notified before the interview via email and telephone conference of their rights to stop the interview at any time. Each participant was informed in detail of their role in the study and any questions the participants may have had was answered before their involvement in the study.

Possible Risk of the Study

As with many qualitative inquiries, the participants may have been asked to relive challenging experiences during their interview. Due to the sensitivity surrounding issues of LGBT experiences, the researcher was sure to inform all participants of the confidential nature of the interview as well as gave them resources such as toll-free numbers and websites to helplines to assist with any emotional or psychological hardships which may have occurred from their involvement, e.g. National LGBT talk lines. The participants were also be reminded of their ability to terminate their involvement in the study at any time to minimize any psychological hardships resulting from their involvement in the study.

There were minimum risks present regarding relationship, legal, economic/professional, and physical effects on the participant because of participating within the study. However, the minimum risk was still addressed by ensuring that all information was kept confidential and that all identifying information was substituted to limit the risk of deductive disclosure. The researcher also kept all information within a fireproof, password-protected safe in my home office.

Vulnerable Populations

This study did possess the opportunity to include members of vulnerable populations. This was possible due to the high rates of mental illnesses associated with members of sexual minority populations and the risk of possible retaliation. However, to minimize these risks, I informed the participants during the phone interview of free telephone and online resources, e.g. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT)

National Hotlines, to help them cope with their lived experiences if needed. Participants were also notified of their ability to withdraw consent from the study at any point with no negative consequences. The participant also received an email containing a list of resources to assist in dealing with their hardships if any presented.

Conflicts of Interest

There were no known or foreseen conflicts of interest which could have arisen from conducting this research. I obtained written approval after achieving Walden IRB approval. Researcher bias was controlled by utilizing bracketing which is the process of suspending one's judgement regarding the phenomenon under investigation (Carpenter, 2007). Bracketing assisted in ensuring that the transcription of the data was not influenced by the opinions and foreknowledge of the researcher. The presence of preconceptions and beliefs was minimized to ensure the credibility of the research which was being performed. The data will be kept for 10 years in a code-protected and fireproof safe in the researcher's home office to ensure the safe keeping of the recordings and data.

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter identified the research methods and research design which were used for this study. The rationale for using a qualitative phenomenological study was provided as well as justification for illuminating other approaches for this study. The methodology, instrumentation, and data transcription which were used for this study was also provided. The steps which were taken to protect the participants were also discussed in detail.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the microlevel fragility of the AA LGBT Community in North Carolina post-HB2. The rationale for using a phenomenological approach was to study the experiences of human beings in their humanness while simultaneously being able to observe this particular group of individuals without influencing their perceptions (Cooper et al., 2010; Van Mannen, 1971). The previous chapter provided the rationale for the research design and the research tools that were used. In Chapter 3, I explain the procedure of the study, followed by an explanation of the validity of the study results and issues of trustworthiness. This chapter provides results from the telephone, semi structured, and open-ended interviews that I conducted. The 10 research participant interviews were composed of four AA bisexual females, two bisexual AA men, three AA transgender individuals, and one AA gay male. Data saturation was achieved when the transcripts began to offer no new information. After an in-depth review of the transcripts, each participant was given a transcript of their responses to determine accuracy. I did not develop codes or themes until the information was validated by each participant.

In this chapter, I present an analysis of the data that was coded followed by the proof of trustworthiness of the study. The results of the study were coded and produced emergent themes in answer to the RQ. The chapter concludes with a summary statement.

The process involved collecting data via 10 telephone interviews, which established a compilation of data codes via the use of Atlas ti.8. Atlas ti.8 assisted in

identifying themes, developing codes, assessing the data collected, and generation of conclusions. Each participant's responses were isolated and placed into categories with the data being analyzed to discover themes that were then linked to each other by using named relationships. By meticulously analyzing the data and using Atlas ti.8 software to identify categories and patterns, I was able to identify an apparent link between the conceptual framework and the literature review that can be located in Chapters 1 and 2 of the study. The data indicated that administrative law such as HB2 had a negative impact on the lived experiences of the AA LGBT community. Support networks were shown to be small and fragile even amongst the specific subsections, for example, AA lesbians and transgender populations. This chapter continues the data analysis in relation to the RQ followed by a summary and interpretation of the outcomes.

The central question of the study was:

RQ: How do AA members of the LGBT community who are participating in this study describe the effects that the public policy, the North Carolina General Assembly's HB2, has had on their microlevel experiences in North Carolina's current political and economic climate?

In this chapter I identify the setting for the research study, the demographics of each participant, and the methods used in data collection. I also describe the procedures used for analyzing the developing themes and other data and the methods used to guarantee trustworthiness regarding the results of the study.

Setting

All the interviews were conducted over the telephone so that the natural environment was not disturbed and each participant felt comfortable during the interview. The 10 participants in this study consisted of four AA bisexual females, two bisexual AA men, three AA transgender individuals, and one AA gay male. Their ages varied from 18-30 years of age and of the 10 individuals interviewed, four were parents, and all but two of the individuals had steady employment. To obtain the 10 participants, each participant met me at the public library in response to an announcement that was given via the Millennial Caucus. After speaking with the potential participants, I e-mailed a letter of invitation and consent form to each participant who was interested in the study and who met the screening criteria. Upon receipt of the consent form, only 10 individuals responded positively and met the criteria for the study. Once each participant gave consent, a scheduled telephone conference was coordinated. Once the participant had affirmatively set a date and time for the phone conference, the interviews were conducted; they lasted from 30 minutes to 80 minutes. All the interviews were conducted in the privacy of my office and each participant had arranged to be in a private setting during the duration of their interviews.

Demographics

The participants who responded positively were all contacted by e-mail and phone. Each were thanked for their willingness to participate in the study. I obtained the demographic composition of each participant from the responses of the participant during the interview. During each interview, I asked each participant their age, employment

status, name of position for employment, and familial status/arrangement. Appendix A provides a detailed outline of the questions asked to determine specific demographics. I contacted each participant via e-mail to explain the study, obtain permission, and to schedule an interview. I notified each participant that there was no incentive for participating in the study and each participant based their decisions on their own volition.

The participants comprised individuals who were AA, had lived in the state of North Carolina for at least 1 year, were between the ages of 18 and 30, and had at least 60-75 minutes to conduct a telephone interview in a private location. Of the 10 participants, four were female, three were male, and three were transgender individuals. Each participant met the screening criteria. Based on the screening criteria, each participant had lived in North Carolina for at least 1-year post-HB2, which allowed for lived experiences regarding HB2.

Each participant received a consent form that described the title, purpose, procedures, benefits, confidentiality, and possible risks involved in the study to provide for ethical protection of participants. Each participant was informed of their right to choose whether to participate in the interview and their ability to stop at any time with no negative consequences or impacts. I informed participants of the purpose of the study so they would understand how their information may be used in the future. I also informed participants of their rights to obtain copies of the research, ask questions, and to have their privacy protected.

To successfully ensure confidentiality, aliases were provided to each participant following the guidelines set by the statement of deductive disclosure that can be found in

Appendix C. To check for accuracy, transcribed copies of the interview were e-mailed to the participants to allow them the opportunity to correct the wording of the transcripts before coding. Data was then secured and could only be accessed by me.

Data Collection

I initiated the data collection process after the IRB of Walden University granted research approval. Walden University's approval number for the study was 08-27-18-0245461. I followed Walden University's established research protocols to ensure the validity of the study and compliance with the university's ethical procedures guidelines. I informed by e-mail each participant who was invited to participate in the study of the university's ethical procedures. I followed all Walden University protocols for conducting interviews and questionnaires that involved human subjects, specifically protecting the confidentiality of the participants. All participants were given the screening criteria to determine if they met the criteria for participating in the study exploring the lived experiences of AA LGBT individuals. Once approval was given by Walden University's IRB, each participant was made aware of the informational session that was held at the public library in Durham, North Carolina, regarding interest in the study.

Once I was contacted by interested participants, I replied to potential participants by phone and e-mail. An e-mail was sent to each participant explaining the purpose of the study and the requirements for participation. After each member read the requirements and agreed to participate in the study, a date and time was set to conduct the telephone interview. I was sure to keep a log of the scheduled interview times. The interview

consisted of semistructured and open-ended questions that were intended to assist in answering the main research question that drove the study.

The questions were carefully formulated to allow each participant to share a wide-range of lived experiences and their perceptions of life in a post-HB2 North Carolina. At the beginning of the interview, I introduced myself as the researcher and reminded each participant of their rights and their ability to withdraw from the interview at any time. I thanked each participant for their time and then told each participant of the recording procedures and how the recording would be protected. I also explained to each participant the next steps following the conclusion of the interview including deductive disclosure, the assignment of aliases, transcription of data, the use of Atlas Ti.8, the transmission of data to each individual for their review, and finally, the complete data analysis of the study. Each participant indicated that each step was acceptable, and all interviews were conducted with no problems. All files were easily recorded and there were no technological issues requiring deletions or additions of any kind.

Data collection commenced with telephone interviews that were preceded by each participant signing the consent form. Each interview consisted of me providing the participant the opportunity to ask any question that they had before the interview started. After the participant indicated that no questions remained, the asking of questions by me and the answering of questions by the participant occurred. I used a digital recorder to record each session to ensure that data was accurately retained and that each participant's responses could be revisited to ensure that their lived experiences were captured

accurately. I placed the digital recorder on my desk and put the phone on speaker.

Participant answers and details flowed freely with little prompting from me.

I took notes during each interview and paid close attention to each participant describe their lived experiences. If, at any time, I asked probing questions, they occurred immediately following a primary question. After each interview concluded, I uploaded the files to an encrypted personal computer and each interview was transcribed within two days of the interview completion. I saved the files to a USB drive (jump drive) and locked it in my home vault. I transcribed the data in each recording in full. During the analysis, I took careful account of the emergence of key points during the interviews. The notes that I had compiled presented a list of frequented words, and these served as the primary source of coding.

Table 1

Emerging Themes, Codes Contributing to Themes, and Representative Quotations

Theme	Codes contributing to theme	Quotation from theme
Theme 1: Feelings of loneliness were increased as a result of HB2. The implementation of HB2 served to reinforce negative perceptions of this community and effectively increased feelings of loneliness.	Abandonment; Familial rejection; lack of true friendship; Public stigma; Being misunderstood.	“Being alone is hard enough but being alone and ridiculed by an entire state is a different level of loneliness.” (G1)
Theme 2: HB2 contributed to lower levels of happiness from participants. Perceived discrimination and marginalization as a result of the bill negatively impacted happiness.	Sadness; Anger towards sexuality; Violence; Fear of getting hurt; Being hated; Public opinion	“It’s sickening to me. You can get married, you can use the bathroom, and you can be treated with respect by the government. Shoot, you should be happy, but it makes you happy to see me feel sad because you think we are predators.” (B1)
Theme 3: Feelings and experiences regarding perceived respect were lower as a result of the implementation of HB2.	Disrespected; Bullied over lifestyle; Slurs; Threats; Not seen as human; Isolated.	“We are always getting threatening looks and treated differently. We’re humans just like them, but they don’t respect us enough to give us even that.” (BM2)
Theme 4: Perceptions of increased Sexual Stigma were experienced due to the passage of HB2.	The bill; Predator; Overly sexual; Coping strategy; Sex; Bathroom; Pose a threat to children.	“The bill sucks. When people see me and know I’m transgender, the first question they ask is ‘what bathroom do you use?’ Then comes the really disturbing questions like, ‘do you stand up,’ ‘sit down,’ ‘do you like it,’ or ‘have others seen you?’ If that’s not predatory, what is?” (T3)
Theme 5: Feelings of acceptance have been exponentially lowered as a result of the implementation of HB2.	Fairness; Law, Policy as unfair; Vulnerable; Public opinions; Threat to society	“How can anyone suggest that the policy process is fair? We’re black and gay! Who in the hell will protect us?” (BM2)

Data Analysis

The first step used in data analysis was to review the transcripts to verify that each participant's response was transcribed in a manner which reflected the way they felt.

After reviewing the transcripts, a list of possible descriptive codes was generated which occurred as family, sex, abandonment, discrimination, government, and vulnerable. Due to the importance of understanding this population's lived experiences, it was important to construct descriptive codes. One approach used to understand the social world was to discern its patterns and to construct human meanings that seem to capture life's essences and essentials (Saldana, 2011, p. 89). After the participants verified the transcripts, the transcripts were loaded into Atlas ti.8. For the purposes of this analysis, pattern construction was used to assist in constructing specific categories. Category construction is our best attempt to cluster the most seemingly alike things into the most seemingly appropriate groups (Saldana, 2011). Atlas ti.8 has a text search feature which assisted in searching each document for certain word patterns, word frequency, and information relating to each category. By using this feature, a list of codes was developed which assisted in ultimately developing themes.

The data in Atlas ti.8 were reviewed multiple times and coded using the codes and themes identified by Atlas ti.8. The software featured an auto-coding tool which scanned the text and automatically scanned all documents to find codes to matching text passages. After the codes were established, I defined the context for the software to identify by classifying paragraphs which contained interrelationships between identified codes. This

action was useful in identifying how categories influenced each other and how they also operated concurrently.

Investigating and reviewing the interview questions ensured a rich data collection from the perceptions of AA LGBT individuals in North Carolina post-HB2. Each participant responded to the interview questions (Appendix C) during telephone interviews to provide their lived experiences to the research question. The five themes collected from the participants were as follows: (a) loneliness, (b) happiness, (c) respect, (d) sexual exploitation, and (e) acceptance.

Table 2

Emerging Themes

	Loneliness	Happiness	Respect	Sexual stigma	Acceptance
G1	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative
B1	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative
B2	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative
B3	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative
B4	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative
BM1	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative
BM2	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative
T1	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative
T2	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative
T3	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative	Negative
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Note: G1 = Gay Male, B1 = Bisexual Female 1, B2 = Bisexual Female 2, B3 = Bisexual Female 3, B4 = Bisexual Female 4, BM1 = Bisexual Male 1, BM2 = Bisexual Male 2, T1 = Transgender 1, T2 = Transgender 2, T3 = Transgender 3. Negative = bill had negative effects, Neutral = bill had no effects, Increased = bill had positive effects. Total percent is the overall percentage of each participant's responses reflecting a perception of negative influence of the bill over all six themes.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To ensure that the study was trustworthy, no alterations or changes were made to the credibility or dependability of the confirmability strategies previously discussed in Chapter 3. I ensured that confidentiality on behalf of the participants was enforced at all times. Each participant was also reminded that they had the ability to withdraw from the interview at any time.

To minimize personal bias, the Husserlian method of bracketing and *epoché* were implemented throughout each of the interviews (Meixner, 2014). To further establish

validity, each participant's response was read back to them before the researcher moved on to further questioning. To aid in receiving rich and descriptive responses, each participant was asked if they had any other information they would like to share, even if it was not formally a question posed by the researcher. Participants were notified during the interview that they would receive the findings of the study to check accuracy. Each participant was reassured that the researcher would modify information to appropriately represent their position.

Results

The goal of this study was to better understand the lived experiences of AA LGBT members in North Carolina post-HB2. The research question guiding the study was as follows:

RQ: How do AA members of the LGBT community who are participating in this study describe the effects that the public policy, the North Carolina General Assembly's HB2, has had on their microlevel experiences in North Carolina's current political and economic climate?

The data analysis of the transcribed audio recording was analyzed using Atlas ti.8 software. The analysis developed a list of frequently repeated terms which were revealed in the interview responses of the participants. The data used during analysis consisted of the responses that each participant gave the researcher during the interview. My analysis discovered common themes and connections to results which were presented in the literature review regarding feelings of isolation, abandonment, being misunderstood, and

increased vulnerability. The data analysis and coding identified five themes that consistently emerged in the data.

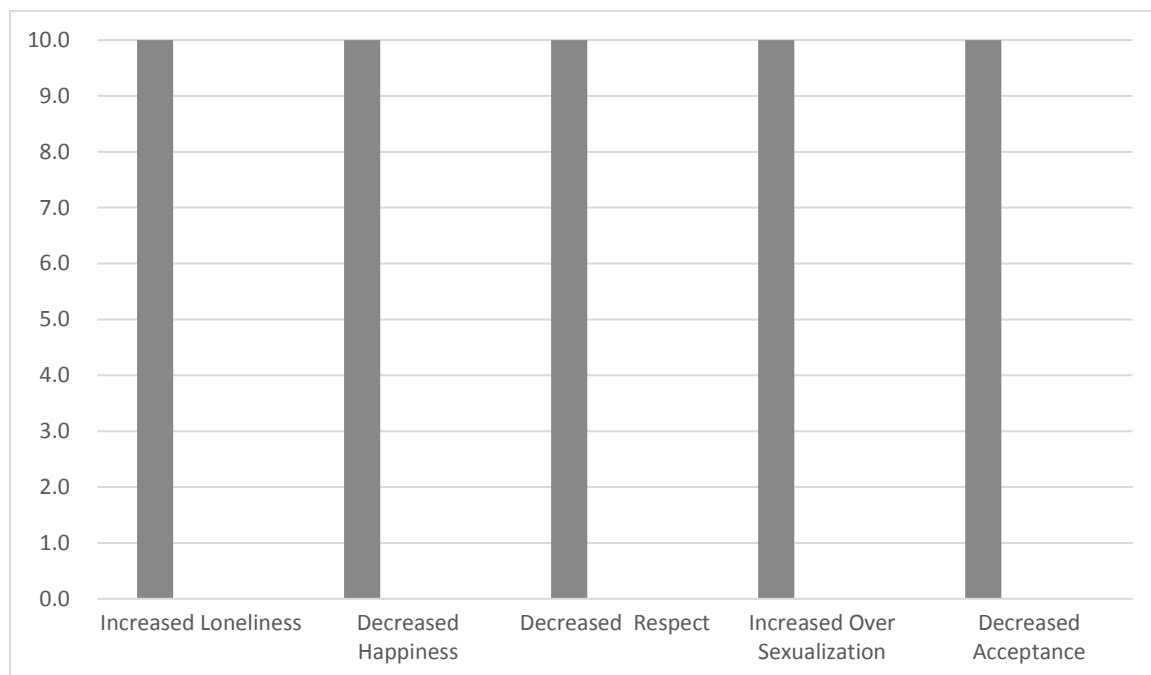


Figure 1. Five key themes that emerged from thematic analysis.

Theme 1: Loneliness

The first theme that was identified by the research participants focused on the intense feeling of loneliness which happened to occur after their sexual orientation was discovered by friends and family members. When asked if HB2 had negative impacts on their family relationships, all (10 of 10) participants identified that the bill did have a negative impact on their relationships with family members. Having emotional support was one of the most important, but often the most unavailable components needed to assist in such a difficult time in their lives. As a result, all 10 of the participants suggested that HB2 has increased the amount of loneliness experienced. Loneliness was perceived

as a rite of passage for 9 of the 10 participants. G1 noted, “Being alone is hard enough but being alone and ridiculed by an entire state is a different level of loneliness.”

To put it another way, social identities via policy embed themselves into the public psyche and conscience (Giroux, 2004; Grady et al., 2012; Hill, 2009) Essentially, government has the ability to influence the interpretation and inception of caricatures of target populations in various ways, even when these ways are very indirect, e.g. policy discussions on public platforms such as television and radio. The lack of friendship and relationships garnered feelings of loneliness and feelings of “otherness.” All participants addressed the importance of picking the “right” friends and identified this process as tedious and complicated which could have possibly added to the likelihood of encountering loneliness. B1 noted,

Most friendships in the gay community are not friendships. Someone always wants something and its mostly sex. Contrary to people’s beliefs, we have standards too and oftentimes we would rather stay to ourselves than be objectified by those within our community. (B1)

The combination of personal preferences of the “correct” gay with the tedium of choosing the right friends could have also increased the occurrence of loneliness in this population. The history of such social policies in America are numerous and have impacted other minority populations. An example of this type of policy was Executive Order 9066 which allowed the incarceration of Japanese Americans. There have also been laws that outlawed interracial marriages, integrated schooling, and public inclusion to limit the inclusion of racial minorities. Laws such as HB2 further isolate marginalized

target groups and reinforce negative stigmas which are likely to further increase the risky behavior and feelings of loneliness within this population. B3 noted,

I'm not asking anybody to bow to me or to be afraid of me; that is what they do.

All I want is to be treated like a person with feelings and not abandoned by my government. I just want to be treated like I'm a member of society, it does get lonely at times.

Emotional support, physical contact, and someone to share life experiences with were perceived as privileges within this community. T2, a transsexual woman, age 19, stated, "you get used to being a freak and being alone. All they see is a person with an appetite for the most perverse sexual acts. This is proven by that damn bill they passed." B2, a bisexual woman who is a 27-year-old mother of one, suggested that labels such as sexual predators and being over-sexualized were attached to their community as a result of the passage of HB2.

Risky behaviors such as drug use and unsafe sexual behavior was more likely to occur when the individual felt lonely (Lemelle Jr. & Battle, 2004; Miller, 2007; Lasala & Frienson, 2012). According to G1, "it's sad because you know how it feels to be alone, bored, and useless...or at least until you find somebody. When drugs are used, they are used by those who haven't found somebody and who are painfully alone." The consensus of the participants was that the likelihood of drug use increased for members of this group due to the increased amount of emotional challenges, fear of being physically abused, and the low self-esteems they have from feeling alone and on their own. B2 noted, "This lifestyle can be a vicious cycle; being alone, misunderstood, stigmatized,

and a nuisance to society makes you want to feel love, even if it is self-induced by destructive ways.”

B1, a bisexual woman, 25 years of age and mother of two, stated that “unlike most of the population, holidays are extremely depressing, and the feelings of loneliness are exacerbated during the holidays because family ties are strained to the degree of non-existence and this reinforces the feeling of being abandoned by those who are closest to you.” This study indicated that as a result of weak familial relationships, many AA’s view religious institutions as a major pillar of social support even though they understand that they will not be fully understood there. G1 stated,

Sometimes we run to the church when there is nowhere else to go. They tell us that they are there to help until they notice that we can’t just cut our “gay” off. At that point, they leave as well or begin the discussion suggesting it’s our fault that we are this way.

All the participants likewise perceived the passage of HB2 as a referendum on their lifestyle. Being subjected to public perceptions and labeled negatively increased feelings of loneliness within the participants.

Theme 2: Happiness

Each participant was asked if HB2 had impacted their experiences and feelings of belonging as a member of the public. “We are human, and we want to be happy, too” were the words of BM1, who is a bisexual man in his mid-20s. Each participant mentioned happiness and each identified hardship when attempting to find this mental state post-HB2. Happiness can be defined as the state of being happy. BM1 provided

some of the deepest descriptions when explaining the quest for happiness as an AA gay man. The noted driving force of being happy was sought by all the participants. Most participants identified happiness as being something that must be found on an individual level because society does not care of their happiness. BM1 noted, “Everyone treats us as monsters or monkeys that everyone hates, but we are human. We want to laugh and find love. We are not trying to ruin your lives, but only live ours and be happy like you.”

All the participants suggested that HB2 did more to hurt their chances at happiness when asked how HB2 impacted the quality of their lives based on the research question. According to B1, “it’s sickening to me. You can get married, you can use the bathroom, and you can be treated with respect by the government. Shoot, you should be happy, but it makes you happy to see me feel sad because you think we are predators.” BM1 also stated, “how can you be happy as a Black man, a queer, a punk, a predator. The thing is nobody want none of them.” Each participant identified that it is hard to be happy being alone and that it took them to find someone within their communities before they discovered happiness. BM2 noted,

If you were happy in the closet, you won’t be when you come out. Most people don’t like people who they think are evil, and the news and the laws have caused so much fear of violence on our behalf, the truth is we are the ones being assaulted and verbally abused.

All the participants sought to find happiness on the microlevel which is with friends and loved ones as they occur in intimate settings. Each bisexual participant shared the same concern to happiness, mentioning that it is difficult to have any friends when

being bisexual because the bisexual person's girlfriend, boyfriend, or significant other will always think they are trying to establish relations outside of the relationship. B4 stated,

It is different if you like one sex or the other and this is because you have another sex that you're not attracted to. When you're bisexual, you find everyone attractive and that causes jealousy in relationships. It's hard to be happy when you always sacrifice friendships for romance.

Each participant expressed a barrier to happiness being a lack of trust in relationships and that lack of trust would isolate each person in the relationship from previous friends when elaborating on the research question. The journey for happiness in the AA LGBT community is peculiar when observing the availability of public spaces and areas of community based on the responses of the participants in this study. BM2 stated, "we have no place to go as Black, gay men. There are gay bars, but they are all White-owned. We cannot even find a decent spot to listen to hip-hop where you don't have to worry about being beaten up." As social beings, community and fellowship seemed important to each participant, but the pursuit of happiness was a task that required due diligence. BM1 noted,

I've learned to not try to be happy. It is better to learn to be okay being okay. I had to learn to be ok with people wanting to hurt me or misunderstanding me without ever letting me tell them of who I am. It's unfair, but I'll be ok.

The feelings of disassociation from society was felt most by the AA gay men. G1 and BM1 stated that being Black men made it hard to deal with outside races, but being

Black, gay men made it hard to cope within their own race as well without fear of being assaulted and hated for being who they are. G1 identified that HB2 introduced a stigma on gay men as well. G1 stated, “not many people can tell the difference between a gay man and a transgender person. This bill has made life hard on us, too.” As a result, the spillover effects from the legislation impacted populations who were not expressly targeted by the legislation based on the participants’ views.

Theme 3: Respect

The third identified theme was the lack of respect. When asked if being AA contributed to the hardships experienced post-HB2, respect appeared as a theme based on the participants’ responses. Respect can be defined as a feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements. Each participant interviewed mentioned the lack of respect being a major issue in their daily lives. In the words of T2, “at least being Black, we are finally recognized as being people, but to be transgender, they don’t even respect us enough to give personhood.” Being perceived as less than human was an experience that was expressed by all participants. BM1 noted, “We’ve been told our entire lives that evil does not deserve respect. As gays, we are perceived as evil and as a result, are not worthy of being respected, but only of being bullied, disrespected and isolated.”

In the words of B2, “It is tough to go in public with your girlfriend and have your children with you. You are forced to act more like sisters than people who are in love because of the loss of respect people will give you in front of your kids.” B2 further suggested that the threatening looks that she receives when out with her girlfriend is

severe enough at times to frighten her children. Not being able to be oneself was a recurring feature in the study. G1 shared, “it is not hard to get a job because you just have to dress like a guy, but the tough part is keeping the job once you can no longer hide your particular gay mannerisms. You are always afraid of being ridiculed, threatened, teased, and being fired.” T3 stated, “you can feel the lack of respect in their skills in every interview; ‘is this a guy or a girl?’ always means more than work history or typing speed. After that, you kind of know that you won’t get the job. It really sucks.” T1 noted,

I wish I knew what it felt like to be normal and to act the way everybody wants me to act. I am alone when I dress like a man because the people who I am around are not knowing the real me. There are times when you have a hard time respecting yourself because you have to be sure to not let their opinions define you.

Each male participant described a reluctance to let coworkers know of their sexual orientations because of the lack of respect their coworkers may have and, as a result, the diminishing likelihood of promotions. “It’s like, I really won’t bother you.” B1 stated, “They treat us like we are all rapists or something. It’s almost like we don’t belong in society.” Previous research has suggested that neoliberalism has hijacked spaces of cultural representation and replaced concepts such as equality and tolerance with free-market principles such as strong private property rights or accumulation by dispossession (Giroux, 2004; Grady et al., 2012; Hill, 2009). T2 noted,

I mean, I understand if you don't want me in your house or in your church, but to kick me out of a bathroom, my God. To want to beat me up, to say I'm an animal? It sounds a hell of a lot like the way Blacks were viewed in early-America.

B3 stated, "I'm not asking anybody to bow to me or to be afraid of me; that is what they do. All I want is to be treated like a person with feelings." T2 also shared the same sentiment with the use of different phrasing. Each participant identified that the social construction of what it means to be LGBT had made their lives more difficult and unpleasant following the passage of HB2. Each member identified that respect was something that people need to have to feel as if they belong and those feelings were limited in their lives. The results of this study suggested that all the participants felt that HB2 had a negative effect of the public's perception of them. B1 noted, "If you don't like me, you decide that for yourself, but don't let the law define who I am."

Previous studies have aligned with the participants' responses regarding respect and the importance of a mutual respect in the development of a human organism (Miller, 2007; Lasala & Frienson, 2012). However, there was a call by the participants for more opportunities to interact with the public to help quell the lack of respect shown. B2 stated, "I think that instead of defining who we are, people should just ask, and we should just tell." When asked whether they have been discriminated against based on the overarching research question, all participants affirmed.

Theme 4: Perceived Oversexualization

The fourth theme emerged regarding oversexualization of the AA LGBT community. Oversexualization can be defined as making someone sexual in character or

quality. All participants were asked what they thought of HB2. Each participant perceived that the bill's function was to have a negative impact on their perceived sexuality. An interesting theme arose from the participants within the study. The association of being perceived as a sexual fetish was shared by all the participants within the study. Being viewed as someone who is an instrument for pleasure rather than an individual composed a large section of the experiences shared by each participant and each felt that HB2 has had a negative impact on their experiences. G1 noted,

We are a huge sexual fetish of many men. The bill made everyone feel that we were wanting to explore sexual fantasies with everyone including children. The bill made us appear hyper-sexual! Everyone wants a shot at the gay, strong Black man. It's like you don't have character; only a sexual service to offer and that bill placed us back in that spotlight once again.

BM2 stated, "I know our history as Black men. We were once used as sexual objects and in the gay community, we have returned to that time period." All the male participants (3 of 10) alluded to the role of "power" regarding their sexuality. To expound on this role within society, all the male participants referred to slavery when describing their sexuality and the experiences they encounter. Even though the bill was characterized as targeting the transgender community, each male participant identified the spillover impact of the bill which directly impacted their lived experiences. BM1 noted, "I don't understand it. Are we just sex machines who don't laugh and cry? What do people really think of us? What did this state think of us?"

The impact of the law in reinforcing negative opinions and characteristics introduced an obstacle for each participant. The ability of substantive policy to drive the narrative and appeal to the innermost biases and stigmas was not lost in the drafting and implementation of HB2 in the state of North Carolina based on the participants' responses to the overarching research question. The ability to be recognized as a normal member of society was a status that each male addressed within the study. BM1 noted,

For the love of heaven, I'm a man that has dreams. I like sports, I have a favorite football team, and, no, I do not want to have sex with every man I see. This dumb law makes it seem like we are all hunters on the prowl and our hunting grounds are bathrooms.

There were 4 bisexual females and 3 transgender females within the study. All 7 females in the study identified the hardships of being a sexual minority as increasing after HB2 was drafted and implemented. Of specific importance was the insight that the female participants provided of the love/hate relationship they felt they were involved in regarding the sexual preferences of society post-HB2. Vivid descriptions were provided by both the transgender female participants as well as the bisexual female participants. T1 noted in her descriptions the following:

I will not say that everyone hates us, to be honest, I have encountered so many individuals who will openly say how disgusting I am, but then when alone, they say that they have always been curious in regard to those experiences (transgender sexual experiences).

The bisexual females, too, had unique experiences to share. B3 noted,

It's hard to be a Black woman because of our sexual exploitation, but it is even worse when you like girls. It is like we are every Black man's dream. Black men love women and they love, love women who like women. I just wish we could be people and that's it.

Each transgender participant addressed the role of misinformation in HB2 and the detrimental impact that it has had on their lived experiences. All transgender participants expressed a high degree of fear when they felt the need to use public restroom areas. Of interest in their descriptions was the increased vulnerability felt by each of the participants post-HB2. Having to fear for physical safety was vividly expressed by T2. T2 noted,

It can be terrifying, especially when you are heading to the restroom and someone's boyfriend or father is outside the restroom. I have oftentimes refused to go to the restroom as I'd rather wait than be beat up or worse. I don't blame anyone for not wanting their loved one in a bathroom with a predator. The sad thing is that we are not predators.

T3, in describing her experiences, felt strongly that the public and especially government officials cared nothing for the truth and facts. The truth, as told by T3, was that most acts of sexual assault are from heterosexual individuals and have nothing to do with transsexual or transgender individuals. Being misunderstood was expressed often and the reluctance of the public to hear the truth was a hardship that increased feelings of marginalization and isolation post-HB2. T1 noted, "What are facts? Facts have been replaced by whatever can reinforce your own shallow beliefs and, to be honest, the stupid

bill showed everyone in North Carolina that bigotry and falsehoods are much more important than inconvenient facts.”

All the participants suggested they have accepted oversexualization as a staple in their lived experiences within North Carolina post-HB2. This reality has increased the levels of isolation experienced from this minority population based on the participants’ responses. Having to adapt and make the best of this new reality was expressed as the only action available to the participants at this moment in North Carolina. Despite the hardships that were experienced, 6 of 10 participants stated that they are hopeful that people will respect their lifestyle choices, take the time to understand their sexuality, and that they are more than willing to sit down and have these important conversations with the public in the state of North Carolina.

Theme 5: Acceptance

The fifth theme was the desire for acceptance. When asked how HB2 impacted their relationships with friends and family and what the bill meant to them, the data within the study indicated that the participants believed gaining acceptance would be very impactful and beneficial to this target population, but the bill made this much harder to do. The participants collectively identified that they felt there was a prevalent obstacle set regarding gaining acceptance and recognition which was posed by the implementation of HB2. A supportive environment was indicative of a higher degree of acceptance. The role of policy on the degree of acceptance amongst target populations has presented a direct correlation (Wagner & Morris, 2018). Participant responses reflected that the labeling involved in the implementation of HB2 has had a detrimental and negative impact on

their avenues of acceptance and assimilation into mainstream culture in North Carolina. All the participants expressed the feeling of being voiceless regarding a lack of “say” in political issues regarding their sexual identities. As surmised by BM1,

It is hard to defend yourself from a policy. It is like we are voiceless and have no choice, so we sit back and take it. How can anyone suggest that the policy process is fair? We’re Black and gay! Being Black means we are a physical threat and now many people look at us as a sexual threat again. We still remember the Chicago 5 and Emmet Till. Who in the hell will protect us?

Six of the 10 participants highlighted that the shared religious associations with the populace in North Carolina served as an obstacle in regard to their acceptance into North Carolina mainstream culture. All participants felt that prevalent Christianity proved a barrier in assimilating and educating their fellow North Carolinians in understanding their lifestyles. Despite the negative experiences, all participants felt they could still turn to religion to gather strength amid their hardships. As surmised by G1, “God is not reserved for one group of individuals; neither race or sexual orientation matters in the sight of God.” G1 continued,

You know, it is scary to think of being abandoned by God; not only has your family abandoned you, but God has also abandoned you and your future is now to be found in Hell. I know that is not God and I think that someday people will understand that and know we are not devils who are obsessed with sex and other criminal sexuality.

Acceptance expanded from personal convictions to social associations for the participants as well. When asked about the current economic climate in North Carolina, 5 of the 10 participants spoke of the role the bill had in making employment much more difficult to find and maintain. Of importance in this regard was the feeling among these participants that employers were afraid of hiring them because of their sexuality. A major component of this was the role of the economic dangers they could pose to an employer. B1 noted, “Think about it, we are the very people that preachers say are sinful, parents tell their children to be afraid of, and employers feel are a walking lawsuit. I don’t think that people are looking forward to accepting us.”

When asked how they viewed HB2 as a policy based on the wording in the research question, the data indicated that all the participants felt that the law was designed to punish them for their sexuality. All participants expressed a belief that the policy further increased the stigma associated with their lifestyles. When it came to the role of acceptance into mainstream culture, each participant had reserved themselves to not be overly optimistic. B2 noted,

You get to a point that you are not looking to be accepted. I’ve believed that people would change their minds so much that I have given up. It hurts to continue to believe people will accept you and they continuously say that you are not worth even listening to.

B3 stated, “I have learned to do what I need to do and just return home. Sadly, I’m not willing to risk the dangers to try explaining much anymore.” Furthermore, 3 participants suggested that they did not believe they should even seek acceptance from

people who were so “close-minded.” This occurrence is likely to add to the feelings of isolation and the adoption of feelings of “otherness” within this vulnerable population which is indicated by the data found in the study, but despite the feelings of victimhood expressed by the participants, there seems to be a building distrust between this particular population in regard to the government. T1 noted, “I don’t really care about being accepted by those people. They are hateful and bigoted, and I would rather not interact with them anyway. I just believe that the majority of these people are misinformed.”

The role of acceptance in society has a pivotal role to play in employment, promotion, and self-esteem (Miller & Stack, 2014). However, none of the participants mentioned any benefits associated with belonging to this AA LGBT community. The negative suggestions that were implied regarding the role of acceptance within the AA LGBT society were based mainly around feelings of belonging and negative belief in government function regarding their lived experiences. As opined by G1,

We don’t contribute anything to the world, we are no good, and we are the scum of the Earth. That can really mess with your head and heart. I have accepted it. The world doesn’t want us here, but we are here, and they must learn to live with that.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the findings and results of the research methods and protocols described in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 presented findings from semi-structured interview questions of a purposive sample of 10 participants who were members of the AA LGBT community. Chapter 4 also presented procedures for the collection and

analyzing of the data compiled from the interviews. The interview data was transcribed and examined using Atlas ti.8 to provide for textural descriptions of each participant response which pertained to the five thematic labels which were (a) loneliness, (b) happiness, (c) respect, (d) perceived oversexualization, and (e) acceptance. Each theme was reviewed within the transcripts and used to develop structural descriptions of how each participant described their lived experiences. The descriptions from the interview transcript allowed for a connected analysis of each individual's lived experience. Each participant spoke extensively regarding the thematic concepts and allowed the researcher the opportunity to better understand the lived experiences of the AA LGBT community. All participants identified that the implementation of HB2 had a negative influence on their lived experiences as they occurred in the state of North Carolina. Each participant expressed a degree of concern regarding the ability of policy to shape public perceptions of them in a negative way. Each participant saw HB2 as a mechanism that expressed a worsening of conditions for sexual minorities. The study also identified that the introduction of a racial minority component into the equation introduced a higher degree of social marginalization.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand the lived experiences of AA LGBT community members in North Carolina post-HB2. Findings from this study identified that the implementation of HB2 had negative impacts on this population at the microlevel. Participants expressed deficiencies in support systems, feelings of belonging, and being respected as a human being. The methods of this study

to ensure quality has also been discussed. Chapter 5 focused in the implications of the findings and further recommendations collected from the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In this qualitative phenomenological study I sought to better understand the lived experiences of the AA LGBT minority community (ages 18-30) in North Carolina post-HB2. I identified the themes from the experiences of 10 study participants that consisted of four AA bisexual females, two AA bisexual men, three AA transgender individuals, and one AA gay male. Each participant had resided in the state of North Carolina for at least a year and provided information regarding their lived experiences post-HB2.

In the previous chapter, I presented and discussed the results of the semistructured interviews that I analyzed thematically using Atlas ti.8 software. In this chapter, I detailed the implications of these findings on the impacts of substantive public policy regarding the lived experiences of target populations, specifically the AA LGBT community in North Carolina post-HB2. The important meanings and descriptions associated with life in North Carolina post-HB2 for members of the AA LGBT community included themes such as loneliness, happiness, and other themes that emerged from each participant's experiences regarding their lived experiences as they were explained and as they related to the research question.

Interpretation of the Findings

I used Atlas ti.8 qualitative software to code and determine which elements emerged as themes from the interview transcripts of the 10 participants in the study. The participants represented a high degree of variation in age, employment, marital status, and sexual orientation. Although there were differences present, I identified central

themes and a clustering of repeated words and contextual information. As T1 stated, “We are all experiencing the same realities and whether we like it or not, we are all that we got.” All the data presented in the study was gathered from the interview transcripts obtained during the interview process.

Theme 1: Loneliness

I designed the overarching research question of the study to better understand the lived experiences of the AA LGBT community post-HB2 in the state of North Carolina. All the participants’ experiences with loneliness led to negative outlooks on participation and being able to freely live as they desired within various ecological systems, but most specifically, as targeted by the research question, the microsystem. Gadsen (2017) identified that government plays a key role in societal interactions of minority communities. Loneliness can occur at various levels within the ecological system, and the data analysis identified that this was true at the microlevel.

As B1 stated, “Unlike most of the population, holidays are extremely depressing and the feelings of loneliness are exacerbated during the holidays because family ties are strained to the degree of nonexistence.” However, if policies were enacted to better allow for minority populations to define themselves outside of the public’s given definitions, public perception and microlevel interactions may reduce the amount and severity of loneliness that exists within binary and tripartite target populations. All of the participants suggested that HB2 had a negative effect on the amount of loneliness they experienced, and it should be noted that each participant described the current levels of loneliness experienced by this population as detrimental. Therefore, all the participants felt much

more likely to be negatively impacted due to the extreme feelings of loneliness present. Each of the participants also connected the issues of race into the conversation of loneliness.

As stated by B3, “its bad enough being Black, but to be Black and gay is the worst.” The issue of loneliness as described by the participants highlighted a tremendous deficit in AA LGBT communal settings, both governmental and private. As referenced by B2, “This lifestyle can be a vicious cycle; being alone, stigmatized, and a nuisance to society makes you want to feel love, even if it is self-induced.” A tremendous and candid description regarding feelings of marginalization and loneliness was given by BM2. “We have no place to go as Black, gay men. There are gay bars, but they are all White-owned. We cannot even find a decent spot to listen to hip-hop.” Of significance in the descriptions given by each participant was the feeling of forced racial adjustment to be able to experience a communal setting. If culture is indeed lost in order to feel accepted, then it is possible that feelings of loneliness may be exacerbated.

Theme 2: Happiness

Each of the participants felt that the implementation of HB2 had a negative impact on their happiness by presenting and reinforcing negative stigmas of their sexual orientations. All participants provided rich descriptions of their subjective feelings of happiness and described happiness as a desired condition for being human. In the words of BM1, “We are human, and we want to be happy, too.” Previous research has identified the importance of belonging in happiness, and this feeling of belonging is scant in the AA LGBT population (Lemelle Jr & Battle, 2004; Miller, 2007; Lasala & Frienson, 2012).

All of the participants felt that a degree of humanness was being lost to the rhetoric and information being spread to the public after the passage of HB2.

If happiness was truly a goal as proposed in the statements provided by each participant in the study, they felt it was of great importance for there to be a feeling of belonging within society. According to participant B1, AA LGBT humanness was under assault due to a misrepresentation of what happiness means to members of this target group. B1 stated, “Everyone treats us as monsters or monkeys, but we are human. We want to laugh and find love. We are not trying to ruin your lives, but only live ours.” The ability to live was described by five of the participants as being happy in the process of surviving. The element of race was mentioned by all participants regarding happiness, but six of the participants cited experiences of being unwanted in public spaces due to being Black and unaccepted in mainstream Black culture for being gay. Each of these six participants felt that marginalization and social isolation was exacerbated by the implementation of HB2. Three participants of the study even felt that their happiness was under assault in order to increase the happiness of someone else who has been afforded the rights and respect that they feel have been revoked for them due to the passage of HB2.

There was a consensus among all participants regarding the goal of policies such as HB2. The purpose of HB2 was defined by the participants as punishment due to their sexuality and did not serve to protect North Carolinians, especially of the AA LGBT community. B2 stated, “In terms of being happy, you have to learn to be okay with being okay. You have to take your happiness where you can get it.” The goal of these policies,

according to the participants, was for there to be no tolerance of anything that breaks from the mainstream public's ideals and morals.

Public policies and substantive legislation have the ability and propensity to shape public social constructions of specific groups and subgroups of people. Previous research has suggested that neoliberalism has hijacked spaces of cultural representation and replaced concepts such as equality and tolerance with free-market principles such as strong private property rights or accumulation by dispossession (Giroux, 2004; Grady et al., 2012; Hill, 2009). Each participant acknowledged the role of marginalization associated with bills such as HB2 and all the male participants acknowledged a deficit in the number of places available for them to commune and be happy. It is vital that public administrators be mindful of the existence and livelihoods not only of minority status populations, but populations of binary and tripartite minority status.

Theme 3: Respect

Maintaining a healthy degree of respect was important to each of the participants. All participants felt that HB2 has had a negative impact on the amount of respect given to the AA LGBT community. Previous studies have established a high degree of violence and discrimination present when respect is absent (Giroux, 2004; Grady et al., 2012; Hill, 2009). When characterizations of individuals reflect negative social connotations such as lacking virtues, moral corruption, or sexual perverseness, the potential for a lack of response toward such a group was indicated in the data gathered in this study.

The history of slavery, mass incarceration, and disenfranchisement are still issues that can be said to be active in the AA psyche. Each participant identified having feelings

of “otherness” in regard to the government and its role in public acceptance of every citizen. This history combined with the negative caricatures introduced by HB2 introduced an additional layer to the combination of public sphere disassociation and lack of a feeling of belonging. This occurrence could further lead to emotional hardships as well by being forced to subdue their affection for reasons of acceptance.

Each participant addressed that the lack of respect was exemplified by the implementation of HB2, and this had negative impacts on the reciprocation of respect for this population. T2 stated, “I mean, I understand if you don’t want me in your house or in your church, but to kick me out of a bathroom, my God.” There was a sentiment among most participants that the bill was not referencing bathrooms, but the sheer lack of identity and personhood given to this population. T3 felt that the implementation of HB2 increased the sexual exploitation of an already vulnerable class of individuals by taking away humanness and introducing crude aggression exemplified by the term “predator.” The use of this particular language has been defined by this community as a “dog whistle” policy to build anger and resentment toward LGBT individuals.

As policymakers, finding policies that do not increase the exploitation of any group is of the most importance. As mentioned previously, there is a history of exploitation, subjugation, and ridicule of vulnerable populations in the United States. Policy formation and implementation is not a simple task and should not be. The rule of law is central to the United States and as a result, policy implementation should be undertaken with the highest degree of seriousness. According to the participants of this

study, there has not been an adequate degree of planning for such a life-altering policy to be implemented.

Theme 4: Oversexualization

All participants confirmed that they had felt a rise in the degree of sexual exploitation and stigma (oversexualization) within their community since the bill. The bill introduced many subjective opinions of the LGBT population that were based on negative caricatures of this community. Of interest regarding the data compiled in this study was that all participants felt that the bill had added to the oversexualization of them as a group due to the bill being specifically aimed at the queer community in North Carolina. It is worth noting that the bill gained national attention as being the “Bathroom Bill,” and while this bill specifically impacted the transgender community, its far-reaching impacts expanded beyond the transgender community. According to BM2, “the bill opened up the conversation and not for the better. I mean, now you can’t be alone with any coworkers or colleagues and not be asked about your sexuality.”

The high prevalence of sexual activity in the AA culture has been researched extensively (Brown, 2013; Wyatt, Williams, & Myers, 2018). Previous research into the role of masculinity for the AA male has yielded four influencing group factors that define Black male culture. According to Spraggins (1999), four groups socialize men into masculinities: peers, family, pop culture, and the military. Of interest was that 2 of the male participants and 1 female participant had completed at least four years of military service. Each male participant spoke of finding alternative ways of mitigating the stigma

associated with their sexuality such as gay men marrying lesbian women to receive the marriage benefits the military provides.

Regarding female participants, their opinion of over-sexualization provided important insights as well. Female participants all acknowledged that they were strongly desired within AA culture as stated in Chapter 4. B3 stated, “it’s hard to be a Black woman because of our sexual exploitation, but it is even worse when you like girls. It is like we are every Black man’s dream. Black men love women and they love, love women who love women. I just wish we could be people and that’s it.” The sexual objectification of Black women in popular AA culture has been reviewed extensively (Johnson, 2016; Philips & Stewart, 2008; Parker, Adams, & Phillips, 2007; Halberstam, 2007). Most female participants did not approve of being only desired for sexual purposes and, as a result, spoke of the role of dehumanization and lacking a close bond with other individuals within the AA LGBT culture and outside of it.

All 3 participants of the study who identified as being members of the transgender community felt that the bill negatively impacted their lived experiences post-HB2. Of importance was the narrative which was applied to the bill. In North Carolina, the bill was geared toward the transgender community. As opined by T1, “people are like ‘we don’t want you in our bathroom’ and ‘you are disgusting’ or ‘a predator.’ What I find interesting is that so many people approach us like they’re sexual predators. We want to go to a movie like you; not to be asked about our sexual histories.” This occurrence introduced a double-standard perceived by the transgender population regarding predatory behavior being used toward them. T2 noted,

You get used to being a freak and sexually exploited. All they see is a person with an appetite for the most perverse sexual acts. This is proven by that damn bill they passed. You can't have an ordinary conversation without being asked about sex.

Last, but not least was T3's eye-opening description. T3 stated,

The bill sucks. When people see me and know I'm transgender, the first question they ask is 'what bathroom do you use?' Then comes the really disturbing questions, 'do you stand up,' 'sit down,' 'do you like it,' and 'have others seen you?' If that's not predatory, what is?

Each of the 3 transgender participants expressed a more intrusive experience when questioned about sexuality than their lesbian, bisexual, and gay counterparts. G1 spoke regarding the hardships that he observed regarding a transgender individual. G1 shared an experience of an occurrence in which he had to support a transgender female who was being attacked in a "straight" night club. As public servants and administrators, it is important to be mindful of the legislation which is being drafted and implemented. Sadly, there are not many avenues for binary and tripartite minority populations to express themselves and to let their laments be heard. A possible solution would be to allow more interaction between policymakers and members of target populations to which certain legislation will apply. The spirit of civil discourse and concern for fellow citizens is a staple in America and this should be true at each federal, state, and local level.

Theme 5: Acceptance

All of the respondents felt that the implementation of HB2 had negative impacts on acceptance into broader society. The role of acceptance in society has been researched expansively (Hays & Lincoln, 2017; Subi & Ghillan, 2012; Swartz, 2015). The role of acceptance often collideded with religiosity per each participant. As stated by BM1, “Our entire lives we have been told that evil does not deserve respect. As gays, we are perceived as evil and as a result, are not worthy of being respected.” A plethora of research has been presented which identifies the importance of religious support within the AA community (Hays & Lincoln, 2017; Coe, Keller, & Walker, 2015). A positive relationship has been established between health and religion (Coe, Keller, & Walker, 2015).

Previous research has indicated that there is an epidemic of mental health issues for minority populations (Heck, Lindquist, Machek, & Cochran, 2014.) The feeling of acceptance was especially important for minority populations but are exponentiated when referring to binary and tripartite minority groups. The data of this study also identified feelings of powerlessness against policies. As stated by T1, “It is hard to defend yourself from a policy. It is like we are voiceless and have no choice but to sit back and take it.” Policy implementations can be particularly cumbersome to underrepresented and minority populations. The transcripts revealed that the feeling of not being accepted in combination with being subjected to cumbersome policies lowers feelings of acceptance.

The role of public policy in garnering feelings of acceptance has been seen and its impact felt. Substantive policies such as integration, civil rights laws, and employment

protections for minorities have done much to foster feelings of acceptance amongst members of minority populations. As a result, public policy makers and administrators could observe the transformational qualities of substantial law and policies to foster an environment of inclusion and acceptance. For these binary and tripartite minority members, the government is at times the only defense available regarding safety, accessibility, and survival.

Implications

The results of this study were significant because they provided phenomenological support of the lived experiences of both binary and tripartite minority communities and allowed for the examination of their lived experiences as a result of substantial public policy implementation. Previous research has identified that policy decisions can have a negative impact on target populations and the resources available to target populations deemed bad (Liu et al., 2016; Chong & Druckman, 2007). This work distinctly supported Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), interactions that occur at the microlevel will impact the ecological transitions of the human organism to other levels of society. Various implications can be derived from Bronfenbrenner's EST that can assist public administrators and policy makers regarding determining the extent of substantive policies into the everyday lives of members of minority communities.

For the purposes of this work, the micro-system was identified as the most intimate unit within the EST. Therefore, the term 'micro-system' was used to identify the environments in which the developing person lives, e.g. family, schools, community

groups, etc. For clarity, it is important to identify that the micro-system is a system in which dyads can be established and influence can be wielded for both the individual person and the person with whom they are interacting. Substantive public policy which influences specific target populations can inadvertently add to the social marginalization of binary and tripartite community members. Legislation such as HB2 can also impact citizens' expectations of respect and acceptance into broader society. It is necessary for a leader to realize that the drafting and implementation of policies will not only shape the public conversation, but also drive public interactions.

This study examined the lived experiences of AA LGBT community members in North Carolina post HB2. The notion was that legislation such as HB2 would negatively impact the lived experiences of individuals within the confines of the bill's target population. In this case, the bill overtly impacted transgender individuals, but the data revealed that this bill had an impact on the entire LGBT community and for the purposes of this study, I examined the AA community due to the already established minority component. As a result, the lived experiences of these individuals within the AA LGBT community reflect a feeling of marginalization and misunderstanding. However, this study focused on the perceived experiences of this community which could possibly be a limitation to the study.

The findings of the study definitively supported the hypothesis that substantive policies such as HB2 will have a negative impact on binary and tripartite minority communities. Policy decisions can have an enormous impact on the microlevel experiences of target populations and as a result, shape the ongoing experiences which

occur within various levels of the human ecological system. The findings from this study could help state policy makers make substantive legislation fair, respectful, and supportive in the inclusion of members of minority communities. It was suggested that public policies have deep intrinsic influence on the lived experiences of target populations.

This study validates the negative impacts of substantive legislation at the microlevel in North Carolina post-HB2. There is vast theoretical literature based on the impact of substantive law on public interpretation of target populations. Bronfenbrenner (1979) hypothesized that the occurrences at the microlevel would influence the human organism as it interacts at various levels of the micro-system. This study supported Bronfenbrenner's hypothesis by seeking to better understand the lived experiences of the human organism at the microlevel. The data identified that public policies do indeed impact individuals at the microlevel which in return influences further matriculation into the other levels.

Implication and Social Change

The participants in this study provided a plethora of experiences as it relates to their lived experiences in North Carolina post-HB2. Despite the different perceptions, AA LGBT community members were able to share their lived experiences in North Carolina post-HB2. The findings of this study are important because they acknowledged the hardships added by substantive public policy on the microlevel experiences of binary and tripartite minority communities. Each citizen, whether minority or not, will be impacted by policy decisions and more specifically substantive public policy which

addresses a specific target population. Various roles in the lifespan of the human organism occur at the microlevel such as home life, religious involvement, public school/higher education, and recreation; these experiences will be present in the transition of the human organism throughout the corresponding levels of the human ecological system.

Implication for Positive Social Change

The implication for positive social change that emerged from this study was of the importance of policy makers to better understand the lived experiences of binary and tripartite minority groups and knowing these lived experiences before drafting and implementing future substantive public policy that can add to the negative social environment of such populations. This research could provide public policymakers a better understanding of the dialogue between state officials and members within target populations to prevent a cumbersome social life which adds to an already heavily laden existence burdened by events such as loneliness, drug use, happiness, respect, sexual exploitation, and respect. The advancing movement would be social change within the state and a better understanding of the lived experiences of arguably the most vulnerable citizens. Members of minority target populations must be heard, and their lived experiences better understood. All of the participants agreed that substantive laws such as HB2 added to the hardships faced by AA LGBT community post-HB2.

Policy makers must be cognizant of the experiences of the minority so to refrain from a tyranny of the majority occurrence. A social contract can be defined as an implicit agreement among the members of a society to cooperate for social benefits. As a result,

all United States citizens regardless of race and sexual affiliation are afforded certain rights and privileges. Holding state funded question-and-answer forums could be a great way to get a better understanding of lived experiences before drafting and implementing public policies which will have negative repercussions on target populations. Minority groups need to feel that they have a place in society and if not, the negative lived experiences are likely to increase and the stress and strain on vulnerable populations will continue to swell.

Recommendations

Determining the impacts of substantive and targeted public policy within other minority communities, e.g. Hispanic and Arabic communities may be areas for future research. An investigation of the research yielded five themes. Data was collected through telephone interviews with AA LGBT individuals from North Carolina. I analyzed the data using notes and audio interviews which were transcribed into text. I analyzed the data using Atlas ti.8 software. During the data collection process, I took extensive notes and recorded each interview which was conducted. Themes which contributed to the literature on the impact of public policy at the microlevel emerged as a result of the interviews.

The results of the study indicated that there is an opportunity for future researchers to seek to better understand the impacts of public policy at various ecological levels such as the mesolevel, exolevel, macrolevel, and chronolevel(s). The interactions between minority communities and local and state governments could assist policy administrators in better understanding the possible spillover effects of such policies. This

work only studied the lived experiences of AA individuals who had access to computers and telephones. I understand that this approach had the possibility of excluding participants who could have provided valuable information. Future research may want to explore avenues which could allow for the inclusion of those individuals with more modest means.

There is a scant amount of research available measuring the impact of public policy on binary and tripartite sexual minority populations. There needs to be a concerted approach within the discipline of public policy and administration to build on the current research to identify ways in assisting targeted communities in better adjusting to the realities introduced by substantive policies. A study involving state legislators participating in structured interviews would allow a better understanding to the processes involved in constructing substantive policies which targets minority populations.

This area of research can aid local, state, and federal governments in ensuring that the pursuit of happiness is not obstructed by policy vehicles. As each American citizen has a stake in the American social contract, so too does the government to afford its citizens with certain rights. More research in this area would allow for the opportunity to better understand the perceptions of marginalized citizens on regarding whether they feel the state is fulfilling its part in the social contract.

Conclusion

I explored the lived experiences of binary and tripartite AA LGBT individuals in North Carolina post-HB2 in North Carolina. The overarching research question for this study was:

RQ: How do AA members of LGBT community who are participating in this study describe the effects that the public policy, the North Carolina General Assembly's HB2, has had on their microlevel experiences in North Carolina's current political and economic climate?

The study examined this research question and found in the theoretical framework that substantive policy geared towards minority populations have a great deal of influence in microlevel experiences. Substantive public policy such as HB2 contributes to the social marginalization and negative experiences of minority populations. It can be concluded that AA LGBT individuals in North Carolina are enduring a variety of hardships and that specific substantive policy has impacted their microlevel experiences. These findings are in line with literature and theory which were discussed in the study.

Based on the research results, there was conclusive evidence that HB2 has impacted microlevel experiences of AA LGBT individuals who resided within the state. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and literature on the socioeconomic conditions within this group provided a solid framework for understanding how public policy relate to the lived experience of minority target populations. This finding is important because it indicates that policy makers must be cognizant of the lived experiences of vulnerable target populations.

The literature review presented in chapter 2 revealed the impact of public policy on microlevel experiences of minority populations and lengthy literature on the overreaching impacts and effects of such policy on target populations. While the participants in this study expressed the hardships introduced into their lived experiences

by HB2, they shared their perceptions that the policy impacts social and economic aspects of their lives. While the use of substantive public policy is important for governance, an attempt at better understanding the lived experiences of target populations could contribute to more empathetic and effective public policies.

In conclusion, the addition and expansion to the body of knowledge on the impact of public policy on minorities is of importance. This study attempted to provide an understanding of AA LGBT lived experiences post-HB2 in the state of North Carolina. This study introduced multiple themes which could be investigated further. The impacts of social policy on the lived experiences of minority communities are focal issues in politics, the employment sector, and social institutions such as schools. It is up to the policymakers and other public officials to ensure that the discipline of public administration is fair, empathetic, and that the policymakers uphold their responsibilities to all citizens despite race, creed, or sexual orientation.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Part 1-

Obtaining Personal Information and Experiences

Interviewees will be asked their name, age, and occupation; however, they will be reminded that the research will operate within the parameters of confidentiality. I will then inquire about the participants' histories and their experiences as they occurred at home, in school, within the community, at the workplace, and within broader society both pre- and post-House Bill 2 (HB2). They will be asked to explain in detail their experiences after the passing of HB2 and its impacts on their sense of isolation or marginalization if any. They will be asked if they were marginalized, discriminated against, or physically and/or emotionally abused during post-HB2 and if so, they will be asked how this impacted their view of themselves and society. Then, they will be asked to explain how the presence of support groups or lack thereof assisted or hindered in their assimilation into their new role in society. Participants will be asked about their experiences when adjusting as a racial and sexual minority into broader society. They will be asked if their experiences among different ecological systems hindered their view of self-worth and/or impacted their perceptions of themselves, their families, and society.

Part 2-

Questions of Microlevel African American Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Experiences

1. How would you describe North Carolina's current political climate towards AA's? Towards LGBT individuals?
2. How would you describe the current economic climate in North Carolina for AA members of the LGBT community?
3. Has the implementation of House Bill 2 impacted your relationship with friends and family? Please describe the experience in as much detail as much as possible.
4. 2. Has the implementation of House Bill 2 impacted your experiences and feelings of belonging as a member of the public? If so, please explain this occurrence in as much detail as possible.
5. Has being African American added any additional hardships to the provisions of House Bill 2 regarding employment, discrimination, and acceptance? If so, please explain in as much detail as possible.
6. How would you describe being African American and a member of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender community in North Carolina after House Bill 2 was passed? Please explain in detail.
7. Are there any hardships specific to African American Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender members because of House Bill 2 regarding family, friends, classmates, and/or coworkers? If so, please explain in detail.
8. What did House Bill 2 mean to you specifically and how did you view the policy and its function?

9. Has this legislation impacted your goals and ambitions at all and if so, please explain in as much detail as possible?

Part 3-

Closure and Gratitude

The participant will be asked if they are emotionally and psychologically well after the interview. The participant will be thanked for participating in the research and all the resources available will be given to the participant. The participant will have the opportunity to ask any questions that they may have and given the option for every participant to stay informed on the progress of the study.

Conclusion

This is end of our interview. I would like to sincerely thank you for your participation in this telephone interview and I will keep you informed on the findings if that would be your request. I have some supplemental handouts which include information on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender resource centers in North Carolina and a handout explaining deductive disclosure. I would like to email you the available resources with your permission.

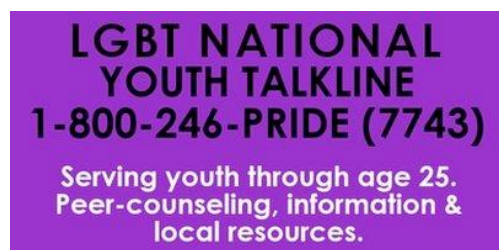
At this point, do you have any questions for me? If not, thank you again for your participation.

Appendix B: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Resource Information

If you need any assistance regarding being a member of the LGBT community, the following resources are freely provided and at your disposal.

1.. <http://www.glbthotline.org/>- This website is a link to the LGBT National Help Center.

2.. Listed below are toll free numbers to LGBT national hotlines.



Appendix C: Statement of Deductive Disclosure

This handout is designed to explain the definition of deductive disclosure. Deductive disclosure can be described as determining a participant's identity based on the known characteristics of the individual such as job placement, address, age, race, and other personal identifying information. However, to limit the likelihood of deductive disclosure in this study, the researcher will be saving all data in a password-protected format as well as ensuring that all printouts are retrieved immediately. Walden University treats confidentiality and privacy seriously and the above precautions will be implemented to protect your rights as a participant.