A Heuristic Self-Inquiry of Racial Effects in GBT Male Partnerships

A Paper

Presented to

The Faculty of the Adler Graduate School

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree of Master of Arts in

Adlerian Counseling and Psychotherapy

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By:

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2014
Abstract
Humankind inhabits much of the Earth, extending into a variety of regions, races, and cultures. This fact alone creates an imperative to attend the needs and struggles for many. However, this inquiry intends to focus on and address the question: What is the experience of “GBT men of color” in romantic partnerships? This study is prefaced by a literature review on GBT men self-identity, relationships, attraction, and racial factors. The raw data of this study includes the researcher’s own created images and written personal reflection. The data is summarized though a creative synthesis in the form of a metaphoric narrative, accompanied by a discussion of the implications, findings, and possible future directions of the research.
# A Heuristic Self-Inquiry of Racial Effects in LGBT Male Partnerships

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The success of this study required the help and support of various individuals.
Without them, the researcher might not have met his objective in doing this study. The researcher wants to give gratitude to the following people for their invaluable help and support:

To my parents, for every day giving me the support and encouragement to pursue my dreams and goals. You have taught me so much, which have made me who I am today, and continue to guide me throughout my life. You have accepted me for who I am, and most of all, given me love.

To my sister and brothers. Without you I am not who I am either. You have helped shape and guide my paths and actions, and provided me with the support that I need to make it through my struggles. As we have grown into adults you have always provided me with love.

To my husband, you are my everlasting hope. You continue to support and care for me though all are winding roads. You have made me better, and are the reason I want to be better. I have enjoyed our journey together and cannot wait the chapters to come. Always and forever, I love you.

To my friends for giving me the support and encouragement in all that I do and providing new experiences to learn from, and at some point, laugh about. You are the shoulders I can lean on and my family away from home.

To the faculty staff at Adler Graduate School, my chair, Craig Balfany, and my reader, Erin Rafferty. You have helped shaped and guided me throughout the years in my own therapeutic practice, and given me the support to continue with the work I do. You have provided ideas, advice, and suggestions, not only in the development of my study, but practice.
And lastly, to the people who helped and contributed ideas and suggestions in the completion of this study. The researcher would like to extend the deepest gratitude.
Keywords

The usage of terminology and keywords are utilized as a generalized understanding of the term as a current societal use, and of my own use of its definition for the purpose of my work.

*LGBT*: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender people.

*Gay*: A self-identified homosexual male.

*Partnership/Relationship*: Gay male, committed couple that involves physical and emotional intimacy.

*Person/People of Color*: Any person with ethnic decent, non-white.

*White*: Any person of Caucasian decent.

*Black*: Any person of African decent, non-white.

*Latino*: Any person of Latin or Hispanic decent, non-white.

*Asian*: Any person of Asian decent, non-white.
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Ben Okri, a Nigerian poet and novelist, had said, “I learned that life will go through changes… It’s what life does (Retrieved from http://www.brainyquote.com).”

My acceptance to the challenge of a heuristic self-inquiry has been more than an insightful journey to discovery and creative growth, but a chance in academic redemption; this being a second and “new beginning” of a graduate level thesis. It is more than quantitative-qualitative, methodic research in the development and awareness of LGBT studies, but a profound, intensely personal story and materialization of myself.

Rationale and Intent of the Inquiry

My research began without a clear beginning, but an accumulation of keywords to start the process towards the review of literature. Through this process I had begun the “first leg” of my theoretical research in the review of racial stigmas, behaviors in sexual intimacy, and a large generalization of LGBT studies. However, due to the generalization and the focus of my original thesis: “LGBT Racial-Based Sexual Stereotypes in Intimate Relationships” had begun a frustrating process in the collection of data and written “body of work.” It is because of the detailed-oriented, specifics of my research that had ultimately, and unfortunately led it to its own downfall, but to the start of change and beginning anew.

Somehow my thesis was not about the research and my need to understand the effects of racial-based sexual stereotypes in gay male relationships. It had become in some form a narcissistic need to understand my own experience of race and relationships. Using a heuristic approach I would be able to give word to my own experience and express the importance of the effects and influence of race in LGBT partnerships.
Humankind inhabits much of the Earth, extending into a variety of regions, races, and cultures. This fact alone creates an imperative to attend the needs and struggles for many. My overall intentions of inquiry are to focus on, address, and answer the following question: What is the experience of “GBT men of color” in romantic partnerships? The importance of this simple question is only a portion in LGBT studies. In question alone we can begin to understand how appearance affects our decision-making, the role and importance of self-esteem and self-worth, and behavioral patterns and/or habits. Are our thoughts of race and racial stereotypes so engraved that they have become societal norms? Research can continue in connecting LGBT people of color to current, focused research areas (i.e. Substance use, suicide, and sexual behavior), but also to progress from these areas into more intimate and specific areas. It is an area of research that should not and cannot be limited, but to be regarded as its own entity in research.

Part of this project will provide a traditional review of work and literature of my predecessors in this area of research; and a post-analysis of my own image-based self-inquiry, allowing for a chance of an empathetic, mutual understanding and/or change in perspective.

The data collected includes a collection of previous and current pieces of personal artwork that captures not only an evolution of work, but are a reflection of my life experiences and self-expression. They are visual, metaphoric narrative of creative process that are accompanied by a discussion of the implications, findings, and future directions of research for this area of study.

About the Author

My own “authorial voice” in thought cannot be clearly defined. As a human and
growing identity, I sometimes adapt to, and at other times I change. However, it has been through the arts that I have found a voice for myself in the visual content that I express; my own niche if you will. As a professional in the field of mental health and my growing experience of therapeutic-based services I have found a focus in the elevation of self-esteem and self-worth. It had been this focus of professional work that led me into the adaption of research method that was congruent with my own ideals and practice, which I found in heuristic methodology; a methodology through the experience of self-inquiry. As a generalization of any self-inquiry can be difficult for some, as it can render a person feeling emotionally vulnerable as it forces a person to be honest with themselves and create a thought-provoking process of discovery and insight. I struggle with the spoken language in my own self-expression, whether it is verbal or written as it became more apparent in my endeavor of a final graduate thesis. It was in the discussion of error that the overwhelming feeling of change became more prominent, and the conclusion that a significant change was needed.

As an artist, I am drawn to metaphorical symbols in the identification and expression of a person. I am drawn to the theories of color and symbols, each being a representation of ones self. In both professional and personal lives, there has been an emergence of relational connections that have influenced my own identity. I continue to hold on to the idea that I am empowered by these relations through empathetic connections that bind us together. In turn they can also feel to be limitations to my growth. It is this constant push-and-pull feeling that leads me to an adjunction of the question of research to my own personal story, “To what extent have my experiences affected the decisions I have chosen?” I begin to believe and enmesh myself through the
heuristic process that will allow answers to this question to emerge. Not only will it be an internal process, but a physical manifestation of it.

I have been a mental health professional for nearly seven years, but the artist had developed when I was a child (Nearly three or four years of age). I found that my clinical education from academic books and educators, even from those who mentored me in practice were only as helpful as what they were, “educators.” I had been taught and learned the basics in the service to mental health, but it was the individual experience of work that led me into my own therapeutic development.

I have been alive for 28 years, an adult much less than that, but a self-identified gay male of color for more than a decade. I was born in Manila, Philippines and was adopted into a White family in a small, rural town in Wisconsin, United States of America. However, I do not define myself as Asian, nor do I truly define myself as Asian American as it has never been a part of my culture. At 15 and 16 years of age I began questioning my sexuality, and at 17 years old I identified as a gay male. In the acceptance of myself, and continuing acceptance of myself I have learned and experienced various aspect of the GBT community and of my ethnic background. I feel it necessary to “come out” to the reader, not to dictate or influence feelings, but to give reasoning and better understanding to the ideals and opinions presented. In doing so, I hope to create an internal dialogue that diminishes prior biases.

I have gained so much from learning and participating in both the therapeutic and artistic process, and to which I can contribute my own self-discovery and self-acceptance. The reflections of these processes not only emphasize their importance, they can be regarded as meaningful investigations of the self. It has been gradual and immediate
changes that have led me to who and where I am now, but even that will continue to
change. In the completion of my first “Art Therapy” course in graduate school, we were
assigned to create a self-portrait with an artist statement. My statement is as follows and
continues to hold true:

“I am…

I am bad. I am good.
I am empty. I am full.
I am hurt. I am loved.
I am sad. I am happy.
I am weak. I am strong.
I am dark. I am colorful.
I am angry. I am joyous.
I am scared. I am brave.
I am stuck. I am moving.
I am greedy. I am giving.
I am mean. I am friendly.
I am unknowing. I am learning.
I am destructive. I am creative.
I am ruled by my emotions.
I am ever changing.
I am me.”

Impact of Ethnicity and Culture

Ethnic and cultural minority groups are increasingly becoming a majority, or
rather, their appearance in mainstream culture has come more prominent and known. The significance of ethnicity and culture, and its effect or influence on society and culture not only been through media and/or social environments, but has influenced individual lives as well in the way and why we interact with each other as friends, co-workers, and potential partners.

“The gay community in particular is as diverse as the USA itself” (Teunis, 2007, p. 264). A continuance of research within the LGBT population/culture can help identify and recognize its own understanding of discrimination (Harper, Jernewall, & Zea, 2004). It becomes the hypothesis of that the physical features and preconceived ideas of a person of color influence the decision-making process in intimate gay male relationships and partnerships. LGBT individuals, and more specifically, gay men of color live within a highly juxtaposed world against societal norms of heterosexualism. They are faced against multiple oppressions within and outside of the LGBT community (Harper, et al., 2004). What does it mean to be a man? Do traditional, cultural values condone homosexuality? With whom do I identify? These and many more questions can and are strongly impacted by the influence within their own culture, as well as, the influence dominant culture within which they live. These combined factors can affect and influence intimate relationships in the LGBT population, but more specifically, in gay male partnerships.

The Role of Preference

Is preference a co-inhabiting factor of physical attraction to another? However, when racial preference is utilized in the decision-making process for intimate partnerships, on the basis of appearance and believed physical attributes, does it cross
into racism? Preference can become a biased opinion toward other individuals, particularly when decisions are based on believed ethnic characteristic and other physical traits. Judgments of physical attributes and attraction can have negative effects on an individual’s self-esteem, self-worth, and confidence. To what extent does ethnicity play in the intimate lives of gay males?

Wilson, et al. (2009) state the following:

Race based sexual stereotypes are understood as inferred beliefs and expectations about the attributes of a sexual experience will take on based on the race of the partner involved in the experience. Their inferred beliefs and expectations are derived from common notions about characteristics of people from the same and different socially constructed racial groups, as well as, from person experiences with persons within and outside the racial group (p. 400).

The findings of conducted research by Kozak, Frankenhauser, and Roberts (2009) claim that not only does body ideal differ as a function of sexual orientation among men, the importance placed on one’s own physical appearance and that of potential sexual partners has been found to be greater among gay men than among heterosexual men.

Participants of Wilson, et al. study showed clear preference for sexual partners of particular groups in general patterns of attraction towards men of different races (Wilson, et al., 2009). Harper, Jernewall, and Zea state in their findings that people of color also may experience discrimination within the predominantly White mainstream GBT community, as they may be objectified and eroticized by White LGBT men and women who are seeking to fulfill an exotic passive fantasy (2004). More than 30% of Black, Latino, and White participants considered Latino men to be desirable, with Black and
White men preferring men of the same racial group. Asian considered White men to be the most desirable, and one-fourth of men in each of the four racial groups reported preferring White men as sexual, intimate partners (Wilson et al., 2009).

A theme emerged from the study conducted by Wilson et al. (2009):

The importance of skin color as a way to distinguish one’s self from other men of the same racial group, and as a factor in determining attractiveness of potential sex partners. Although this finding was most pronounced among Black, Latino, and White men, participants in each of the four racial groups noted that skin color was a major factor involved sexual attraction and partnering behaviors (p. 408).

For some GBT men of color, having a White male partner is also desirable due to beneficial statuses and less discrimination and internalized racism (Ro, Ayala, Paul, & Choi, 2013). However, the opposite was said about Asian and Black men, who were generally considered the lease sexually desirable among the races. Asian men reported men of the same racial group non-desirable, which is opposite of the races who reported that men of their race were most preferred (Wilson, et al., 2009). For some, in order to avoid the feelings of rejection or racial prejudice, LGBT men may disassociate from social setting that may appear unwelcoming (Choi, Han, Paul, & Ayala, 2011). This is attributed to the idea to what others believe to be physically attractive and how they see themselves as attractive; If an individual of the same race finds himself attractive, but believes that another of the same race is not, there may be reason to believe of one’s own self-hate and poor self-esteem (Ro et al., 2013). However, some participants state of having no preference at all. This is because Black is not black or is its roots based in a presumed African origin, nor is Latino rooted from a Mexican origin, but we do notice a
variance in skin color and tone. But it is also a belief that people of ethnicity have a strong connection to their origin. This becomes a major component in the sexual attraction of potential partner. It is all encompassed in part of a multi-cultural society.

**Racial-Based Stigmas**

Wilson et al. (2009) define race-based sexual stereotypes as “inferred beliefs” and expectations about the attributes a sexual experience will take on based on the race of the partner involved in the experience, based on the common notions of characteristics of people of the same and different race. Beliefs can be based on what society has seen as a societal norm, an individual’s personal experience, and can emerge out of individual personal experience, and from an individual’s own self-hate. Race based sexual stereotyping reflects an individual’s own personal, social, and cultural based expectations they have about men within and outside of their own racial group (Wilson et al., 2009).

Racial identity is an important factor in sexual and partnering behavior in general, as it becomes part of a basic belief of how men of another racial group are perceived to be, and the features and attributes they would possess. They become factors in the sexual roles of intimacy. Stereotyped attributes can be both negative and positive in desirability and sexual attraction. A general understanding of this idea can be summed up into the idea that men of the same racial background have similar feelings and experiences due to the believed perceptions of racial characteristics. A basic summary of sexual characteristics is as followed: 1) A Black man involved with another Black man sexually to be more “rhythmic, hot, and aggressive;” 2) A Latino involved with another Latino are characterized in the same manner, but to be more passionate; and 3) Asians involved with another Asian sexually to be “mechanical” and “reserved.” In congruence to what racial
groups had thought about intimate relations within their own racial group, the same ideas and thoughts are true to what racial groups attribute to each other (Wilson, et al., 2009).

According to Wilson et al. (2009), Physical attributes of physique, circumcision, and phallus size of other ethnic groups become believed stereotypes. The “inferred beliefs” of ethnic physical attributes become metaphoric and symbolic. Skin color alone can take on a metaphoric relationship with the sexual desire, that is, the expectations of a larger phallus size can become metaphoric for a presumed hyper-sexual experience (Teunis, 2004). The stereotyping of physical features are associated and expressed within and outside of the same racial groups, and become part of an assumption of sexual roles of intimacy.

**Role Expectations**

Believed racial stigmas of characteristics and physical attributes can also contribute to the “roles” an individual plays during sexual intimacy in its relationship to Wilson, et al., (2009) findings of believed sexual and physical characteristics. The use of roles can be described as the sexual position that a man takes on during sexual intimacy. These roles are generally defined as: (1.) A “top,” the individual who will “giving or inserting;” (2.) A “bottom,” the individual who will be “receiving or receptive;” and (3.) “Versatile,” an individual who is both a “top and bottom” as previously defined. Gay male relationships change the traditional roles and expectations in relationships and marriage (Sanchez, Greenber, Liu, & Vilain, 2009) in that gender roles can have an emasculation or de-emasculation effect of self-esteem.

Gender expectations are the beliefs in the social role that gay men take-on in sexually activity and relationships (Masculine versus feminine). The ideas are contributed
to the comparing and contrasting beliefs and thoughts within-and between-racial groups: (1.) Blacks are perceived to be more masculine and dominant; (2.) Asians are perceived to show more feminine-like qualities, and to be more submissive sexually; No ideations were reported about the Latino or White population, but were in agreement to the attributes of gender expectations towards Black and Asian gay men (Wilson et al., 2009).

The beliefs of ethnic, physical attributes and racial, persona and/or gender expectations contribute to the assumed sexual roles gay men play in intimacy and sexual pleasure. This suggests the comparing and contrasting of thoughts among racial groups within-and between-themselves: (1.) Black men are viewed as primarily being a “top,” supported by the ideas of being more dominant, aggressive, and having larger penises; (2.) Because of their smaller structure and frame, the assumed sexual characteristics of Asian men are submissive and passive, and smaller penises are thought to be “bottoms;” (3.) White men are suggested that their role in intimacy varies based on the race of their sexual partner, where they were “bottoms” for Black and Latino men, and “tops” when their sexual partner was Asian (Wilson et al., 2009).

Wilson et al.’s (2009) finding suggests beliefs towards gay men of color have inherent characteristics and/or personalities that influence a desire towards another and how we perceive others. These beliefs and ideas can become internalized conflicts for an individual that can be based from a heterosexual idea of a man’s role in a relationship. It can become a question in self-identity and the role a man believes he should take on in a relationship.
Strengths, Limitations, and Progressing Research

Forming Solidity

In part, as it may be in bias of the feelings and opinion of the researcher/author, is that the previous research conducted by Wilson et al., 2009, Choi et al., 2011, and Ro et al., 2013 is that of no strengths, but only suggest and support the notion of racial-stereotyping among gay men in social/relational contexts. Their work demonstrates valid, collective data, and results in the impact of race in gay male partnerships. Conclusions can be made that gives support to an assessment of risky sexual behavior in gay men based on race, as well as, and can contribute to other unhealthy behaviors and activities. Findings have and can continue to aid towards a progression of research in gay male behavioral studies, but have done so at a limited extent.

The Limits of Research

Multi-Cultural Limits

The world is host to many racial group and cultures can be broken down into smaller cultures and sub-categories of people that can have a direct affect in the findings of research. However, the collected data by Wilson et al., 2009, Choi et al. 2011, and Ro et al. 2013, is contributed mostly through a White racial component within-and-between the different racial groups. Reasoning for this can be based on the idea of the dominant gay-White population (Harper et al., 2004). Currently, the White population is still not considered the minority, but is the standard by which members of other racial groups are judged; and can be linked to a lack within-group and between-group race-based sexual stereotypes tied to white partnering (Wilson et al., 2009). Some authors have suggested that racism in the White LGBT community may lead many ethnic/racial minority
individuals to distance themselves from participating in gay-related social activities (Rosaria, Schrishaw, & Hunger, 2004). To what extent of social activities this affects is unknown, but could possible contribute to the lack of racial differences and indicators in gay male research.

Physical appearance and attraction can play an important role in the research of sexual behavior, it is important to view the sub-cultures themselves. The gay male community consists of more than just gay men, but categories of men by appearance, such as: Muscle groups, leather groups, “bears (“Larger”/Heavier, hairy features),” “twinks (Younger and smooth features),” “punks/gothic,” etc.; Each having their own distinct type of presumed, stereotyped personalities and characteristics.

**Homosexuality by Geographic Culture**

“LGBT identity has very different meanings in different racial or ethnic groups, accepted or tolerated in some and considered an abomination or even impossibility in others (Connolly, 2004, p. 8).” The research of Wilson, 2004, et al., Choi, 2011, et al., and Ro, 2013, et al., may only compensate data for a specific region of the world’s GBT community. Geographical perspective alone is significant in the views and acceptance of homosexuality. The findings of Elizur and Mintzer in LGBT youth and families, “unlike most minority groups where family members share the same minority status, these children grow up with family members who frequently do not buffer their gay/lesbian kin against social oppression and in some cases even the child’s main oppressors (2003).” Consequently, as gay and lesbian children mature they often remain significant secrets and have feelings of alienation with their families of origin.
Ripples in Time

Age can contribute to how people think or behave; varying by which generation they were born into (Connolly, 2004). Research generalizes the GBT population as a whole and has not taken into consideration the ages of gay men. Age is affected by stereotypes within the gay male community when it is viewed in attraction and relationships. With youth “coming out” earlier than their predecessors and society more accepting of homosexuality, there has been a transition in which people of the LGBT community are more open about their sexual orientation. There can be negative societal reactions to sexual orientation or gender nonconformity, but also can experience racial prejudice, limited economic resources, and limited acceptance within their own cultural community (Harper et al., 2004). The societal reactions have their own unique stressors associated with race, gender, sexual identity, and age status in GBT adults; stressors related to alienation from racial identity within the GBT community, stigmatization of minority sexual identity within racial minority communities, and stressors related to sexual prejudice that affects all LGBT persons (Kertzner, Meyer, Frost, & Stirratt, 2009). However, gay men of all ages can struggle with how they identify themselves after self-identifying as gay or bi-sexual, but can also be a continuation thereafter. Self-created stressors to what they believe on how they should act, appear, and developing their own understanding of what it means to be gay.

Evolving Research

Previous research is beginning to touch the surface of gay male studies. Wilson et al. (2004) have identified physical and sexual stigmas based on race, but does not give further information that racial stigmas impact gay male relationships. As the White
population continues to be the standard (Wilson, et al., 2004) of gay male studies, researchers will continue to limit their understanding of the gay male population as racial individual and as a whole. Future research can be conducted to explore the specifics of race and/or by geographic location, and combine the collected data. In doing so, the findings or data may be able to report on the decision-making process of gay males and the effects racial stereotyping has on mental health. Culture and experiences are factors in an individuals’ identity, they influence the values and morals of an individual. Each person’s cultural experiences, development, and relationship history form their identity, and influence their values and morals.

**Adlerian Conceptualization I**

I am a believer and practitioner with the ideas and the concepts of Alfred Adler’s individual psychology. The concepts are interchangeable within each other and support the collected data in a way that gives my own interpretation to the thoughts and behaviors of gay men. The Heuristic approach provides an understanding to a cohesiveness of Moustaka’s model and Adlerian theory, but is limited that traditional, qualitative studies can provide. I venture on and apply these core concepts to the suggestive data as followed:

**Inferiority**

Feelings of inferiority are experienced as personal deficiencies as opposed to the universal sense of incompleteness. “As such they may come to be felt as so overwhelming that they undermine the courage to move forward with life, to meet and overcome obstacles, and to develop oneself and make a contribution to the community” (Griffith, & Powers, 2007, p. 59).
Relative to the research is the feeling inferiority of an ethnic minority. It is in its very definition of feeling inadequate and incomplete that discourages a person to overcome and develop oneself. The compilation of minority statuses (ethnicity and sexual orientation) develop into overwhelming factors that become difficult to overcome in terms of attractiveness to others. In the terms, minority statuses are what Wilson et al. (2009) found to be believed racial stigmas (physical and personality attributes) among racial groups. These factors contribute to the lack of movement and the inability to move forward in a person’s life.

The feeling of inferiority is a predecessor as it can setup the inner-workings of the self.

**Mistaken Beliefs**

Mistaken goals are (a) attention (annoying or disruptive behavior that says, “I may not be much, but I will not be ignored;” (b) power (angry, insistent, often in progression from the efforts of others to stop the attention-getting antics); (c) revenge (bitter, hurtful words and actions, often in response to the harsh punishments of retaliatory power, and expressing the unhappy conviction of a child who believes he is not loved or it not lovable); (d) the display of inadequacy (reflecting a despair of doing anything that will be successful or appreciated) (Griffith & Powers, 2007, p. 69).

Feelings of inferiority correlate well with concepts of mistaken beliefs. More specifically to revenge and the display of inadequacy. Incorporating Harper, Jernewall, & Zea’s suggestion of negative social reaction because of racial prejudice (2004) is the idea of the inability to love or be loved, as well as, the feeling of inadequacy.
Individual minorities take on the task of seeking attention. This strive for attention is a compensation for the feelings of inferiority, and to be acknowledged at the very least to their own existence. It also can play in part to the normative, standard roles of masculinity one plays in a partnership (Wheldon & Pathak, 2010), as the provider (Connolly, 2004), and during intimacy (Elizur & Mintzer, 2003).

**Self-Esteem/Concept**

Self-esteem is a confidence and satisfaction in oneself, synonymous with self-respect; self-concept is the mental image one has of oneself (Griffith & Powers, 2007, p. 91). A personal estimate of oneself (self-concept) as worthwhile and valuable translates into self-esteem (Griffith & Powers, 2007, p. 91).

An individual’s self-worth is a proceeding factor in how he sees himself, and in turn, his functionality with others. It set apart by either a feeling of inferiority or superiority.

**Superiority**

Superiority is the error of supposing that his or her task is to attain a position of superiority over another. This movement invites the antagonism of others, creates a disturbance in the life of the community, and contributes to his or her further defeat. “The discouraged person may express the superiority striving in postures of self-elevation, depreciation of others, and self-aggrandizement, counter the immense feelings of inferiority with a pattern of compensatory pretenses to superiority” (Griffith & Powers, 2007, p. 99).

Superiority is by which all concepts of mistaken beliefs take part in. It is the need to feel empowered oneself and over others, and the compensation of inadequacy. It can
pretense the stigmatization of ethnic minorities, and difficulties to the structural layout in a partnerships (Bettinger, 2004). We are able to utilize the findings of Wheldon, and Pathak (2010) roles of masculinity to the need of feeling superior. This becomes an idea to take a more dominant, i.e. masculine role within a relationship as a provider and protector.

**Adlerian Conceptualization II**

By utilizing the concepts of inferiority, mistaken beliefs, self-concept, and superiority provide a beginning to comprehending the beliefs and ideas of and towards gay male ethnic minorities. It begins in the idea of the self and how it influences a person’s beliefs or mistaken beliefs, and needs in intimate relationships. This collaborates with the strength of an individual’s self-esteem and self-concept of himself. By understanding the self and feeling confident in that belief can begin to break down the barriers in the mistaken beliefs a person has or that is socially environmental by nature. These concepts also contribute to a gay male of color’s feeling of being inferior to others in a white-dominant culture and having to overcome barriers to feeling superior, or at least equal.

**Methodology and Heuristic Process**

**Methodology**

Choosing a methodology was not only a process, but a challenge, as well. Research encompasses an immense of array of philosophies, intentions, and activities; and focuses on a particular subject matter for the purpose of discovery and education. The intention of this research focused the methodology which was chosen. However, the initial approach to this research was limited in its success.
This researcher originally had wanted qualitative data that would be supported by quantitative measures. Being a part of the GBT community and as researcher had become problematic in finding willing participants in research of gay male partnerships. Upon meeting and discussing the implications of the research with the project “Chair and Co-Chair,” it became apparent that a new approach to the research with a different model would be required. What we had also discovered was an emerging dimension of self-inquiry, as it became apparent that I had become a participant in my own research.

The term “heuristic” is a derivative of the Greek word “heuriskein,” which translates “to discover” (Moustakas, 1990). Heuristic research is “a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of an experience… The self of the researcher is present throughout the process” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9). This fit between the ideas and implications of a heuristic approach and my own intentions of research resonated with myself and became my chosen model.

The decision to utilize this methodology was met with some resistance due to never hearing of a heuristic methodology and the idea of “starting over.” Yet, this author found a new inspiration and desire to complete my work and have it reach its potential. What I had found was not that the conventional methods of research did not fit my research, I came to the realization that it did not fit myself. I feel that I am drawn to more unconventional methods and ideas, as well as, choosing to both view and create in my own perspective of experiences.

Validity

The heuristic process is undefined as the researcher acts as the guide towards the intent of educational value. The intent is not to prove a theory or idea, and for some, the
validity is difficult to accept. Because it is based only from the human experience, it cannot be scientifically proved, but help confirm the truths of my internal processes.

“Does the ultimate depiction of the experience derive from one’s own rigorous, exhaustive self-searching… present comprehensively, vividly, and accurately the meanings and essences of the experience? This judgment is made by the primary researcher, who is the only person in the investigation who has undergone the heuristic inquiry from the beginning” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 32).

Heuristic Process

Moustakas (1990) stated, “The heuristic process requires a return to self, a recognition of self-awareness, and a value of one’s own experience (p. 13).” As the researcher and sole participant in the heuristic self-study helped give a personal voice in the exploration to the question: “What is the experience of “GBT men of color” in romantic partnerships?”

Throughout this process I continue to hold reservations in answering this question, as I do not want to speak for the community as a whole. However, in its development emerges thoughtful and emotional content that supports the importance of this inquiry.

The methodology of a Heuristic approach adheres to six phases of methodology outlined by Moustakas (1990):

1.) Initial Engagement: The researcher formulates a question from engagement with a topic of deep personal significance or interest.

2.) Immersion: The process of becoming one with the question or study topic – All aspects of the researcher’s life are addressed within the context of the question.
3.) Incubation: Removal of oneself from the intense involvement of the immersion phase in order to provide room for unconscious understanding.

4.) Illumination: New meaning is discovered or old understandings corrected or modified.

5.) Explication: The researcher’s understanding is sharpened through concentrated attention.

6.) Creative Synthesis: The culmination of the process, in which themes are discerned and connections made; the researcher is open to receiving a better understanding of the question though intuition and tacit knowing.

**Intuition and Processes**

The initial response to the process of creating a visual experience within the research was concern. As a full-time employed working therapist and spouse, when would I find the time to not only write, but to create? I was provided with reassurance of push with the completion will only further my career, and in turn, allow better support in my personal life.

I began formulating a plan on how the process would be implemented and it was within that context of though process that I began realizing how much of the creative work has already taken placed. As I began thinking about the Heuristic process and the work to be done it all began part of my “whole experience.”

At one point to the heuristic process I began to struggle articulate my thoughts and experiences in the incubation and illumination stages. It was at this point that I had needed to create something new to bring the section “to life” through a visualization piece. By using art therapeutic techniques I was able to develop an idea and provide my
own insight to a mental block that prevented me from continuing my experience and process. Eventually, becoming a part of the creative documentary of my experience.

Writing was an experience to the process. I noted my thoughts and feelings as I formulated thoughts-to-words and how they can be inter-woven to the Adlerian ideas and concepts. With the utilization of a creative documentary I was able to record the experience of growth in my art and the shifts that had been occurring.

Social Implementation

Another aspect of this research project is to produce an event that shares the experience of the project with the community; to which mine would be an art showing. Again, I became concerned about the time to do this and acquiring a venue to do this. However, I quickly began formulating the idea of how I reach others with my art and why I create art.

With the advancement in technology and the use of social networks, it can be viewed that almost anyone can be a photographer and/or share their art to a vast amount of people globally. In the continuation of using unconventional methods that is the Heuristic model, I knew that whenever I show images of the process in my paintings to completion is a continuous “art show.” With this I am able to reach a larger number of people to see my work and receive comments on different pieces. However, to justify this as the social aspect of the project I knew would not be enough and I thought of how my art has embraced the LGBT community already.

For the past three years during Minneapolis’ Pride, I enter into a juried art exhibition, and for the past three years I have been accepted into the show. I continue to do this every year as to feel that I am able to give something the LGBT community, but
to also represent myself as an artist. I believe this to be a part of the experience (and of growth) that I live daily not only as an artist, but a minority.

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1 The names of those who had posted a comment, posted an image, or liked an image have been removed for confidentiality purposes.

- Image description: Facebook image post from the Minneapolis Pride Exhibition 2013 with “Best in Show” award at Aloft Hotel, Minneapolis, MN.
- Likes: 9
- Unknown number of views.
Image 3, Posted July 25, 2013, Minneapolis Pride Art Exhibition 2013, Retrieved from Facebook.com - Seen(as)ART.

- Image description: Facebook image post of the Minneapolis Pride Exhibition 2013 painting ("Anonymous").
- Likes: 2
- Unknown number of views.

- Image description: Facebook image post of “Ambiguity” painting.
- Likes: 0
- Unknown number of views.

- Image description: Facebook image post from the Minneapolis Pride Exhibition 2014 with painting (“The Treatchery of Words”).
- Likes: 36
- Comments:
  - “Cool!”
- Unknown number of views.
Image description: Facebook image post of painting (“James”).

Likes: 2

Comments:
  - “Someone doing this freehand very talented! There is a little Wizard of Oz lollipop guild about it too.”

Unknown number of views.

- Image description: Facebook image post of drawing (“Forever”).
- Likes: 11
- Unknown number of views.
• Image description: Facebook image post of drawing (“Forever”).

• Likes: 4

• Comments:
  o “This is the coolest thing ever!!!! What would he charge to do one of me and my wife… He will be famous one day.
  o “…loved it. It gave her chills, he is awesome.”
  o “You are amazing!! I love it!”

• Unknown number of views.
Personal Experiences of Moustaka’s Stages

Initial Engagement

“Within each researcher exists a topic, theme, problem, or question that represents a critical interest and area of search. The task of the initial engagement is to discover an intense interest, a passionate concern that calls out to the researcher, one that holds important social meanings and personal, compelling implications (Moustakas, 1990, p. 27).”

My initial engagement with the topic has been, in some form, always with me. Being of both ethnic minority status and of the LGBT community there has always been a connection to the social aspects due to my own self-identifications. However, it was not until starting graduate school did I become to realize my true interests in minority status populations, more specifically with the LGBT community. It was in doing class projects and papers did I realize the lack of LGBT related studies and found that I began focusing much of what I was wanting to educate myself more on was related to gay male studies.

My connection to the area of research is so inherent to me that it does not fully feel as if I was truly engaged throughout the process, and relate it to the limits of any written response to the engagement process.

Immersion

“Once the question is discovered and its terms defined and clarified, the researcher lives the question in waking, sleeping, and even dream states. The immersion process enables the researcher to come to be on intimate terms with the question – to live it and grow in knowledge and understanding of it (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28).” Moustakas clearly defines my immersion with the research, “to live it.” My experiences in the
contexts of social relationships and partnerships became a catalyst to further gay male studies. This is not only to have a better understanding for social behaviors, but a better acceptance of the social behaviors.

I find in the time of immersion difficult for me to explain as it is to a something unknown or new. In order for myself to provide an effective commentary about my immersion process to the inquiry is by speaking of my own life story and speaking within the moment. In doing so, my experiences will create the emotional impact that the immersion process intends. In turn, this also creates the state of being as one with the question without the influence of “living the inquiry.”

Growing up as an ethnic minority in a small, rural, farming community in Wisconsin, United States has its own implications, but to add that I was never able to fully be myself because of sexual orientation had held me back in who I wanted to be and what I thought I could be. It was not until graduating and going to college in Green Bay, Wisconsin, that I was able to really meet the LGBT community. However, I was not prepared for what that would all eventually imply. I continued to feel that I needed to be accepted by new and different standards. This was also a time where I began to explore and accept my ethnic minority status of being Filipino, but it almost seem is the time I also lost any direction of my life and who I was. It was just another continuation of conforming to others and what I felt were the expectations. I think I began to believe and live in only a portion of what the LGBT community was.

Upon graduating from college, I continued my education in Minneapolis, MN to pursue a degree in Marriage and Family Therapy and Art Therapy. This choice was not only to better myself and grow as an individual, but was part of idea of survivability.
College was a time for me to do something that I wanted to do, graduate school was something that I needed to do to make a financial income to survive, but in time, this choice would become something I lived, and loved to do. This would begin a new chapter to life and to new experiences. But again, conforming to new people to feel accepted. However, bigger city also meant more people that I felt I needed to impress. It was not until I moved to Minneapolis that I felt the most indication that my ethnicity really mattered for a relationship. It was then that I discovered how much people thought who I was based on my ethnic background. I sometimes feel that it was the very nature of being smaller framed that people thought I was easier to talk down to or feel that I would be easier to push around. The truth at the time is that I probably was. I felt the need to accept my role within the minority as a smaller minority. This was not limited social relationships, but partnerships, as well. But maybe it is just who I am. Being in many social service-related fields comes with the inherent idea that one likes to help others.

I cannot give detail to a specific point in my life when the feelings of acceptance and inferiority started to disperse, but it did. At some point I had decided that the labels that I was being given would not define me, and that I was giving myself. It is a moment in life when you just realize that you need to be you.

In doing so I found more clarity to myself and met my husband.

**Incubation**

“Incubation is the process in which the researcher retreats from the intense concentrated focus on the question. Although the researcher is moving on a totally different path, detached from involvement with the question… On another level, expansion of the knowledge is taking place (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28).”
My incubation phase was and is as transparent as my immersion phase. Due to my own deep connection to the inquiry, I find that I move in-and-out of both the immersion and incubation phases. At best this can be explained that this is just a part of my life. That it becomes natural for me to have it be an unnoticeable or unconscious thoughts and/or feelings.

The incubation phase allows the researcher time for a clearer understanding of the question. This phase proved to be a challenge itself in allowing myself to be removed from the previous intense, emotional phase. It took more conscious thought to be able to remove myself from question than it did any other part of the project. By removing myself I allowed a less bias interpretation of data conducted by Wilson, et al. (2004) and a clearer sense of direction.

“Illustrate” was created during the previous mention time of my mental block. It allowed me to make better connection and distinction between my thoughts and the ideas.
that needed to be represented. The idea of incubation is to remove oneself from the inquiry. By creating an abstracted piece with no clear imagery, but based solely on color, shape, and the layering of levels allowed me to represent the incubation phase. It is in this work that I was able to remove myself from specific thoughts and details and to freely let go. To not have to think and worry about what I was doing or needed to do. This too, allowed for an easy transition into the illumination phase.

Illumination

“The process of illumination is one that occurs naturally when the researcher is open and receptive to tacit knowledge and intuition. The illumination as such is a breakthrough into conscious awareness of qualities and a clustering of qualities into themes inherent in the question” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 29).

With the reemergence of what is the experience of gay men of color in romantic relationships, I found myself more in question to the understanding of values in gay male relationships. With the question laid out before me I was able to reconnect to it. The literature that I was absorbing had grown into empathy for others, than a distrust and frustration for people. I had modified my own feelings and understandings of what I was reading and any previous biases I had before. Academically, I saw clearer connections to the Adlerian concepts and was able to integrate them to the research findings by Wilson, et al., 2004, Choi, et al., 2011, and Ro, et al., 2013.

It was in this phase that I found a greater understanding of Moustakas (1990) stages of heuristic inquiry. It connected to my belief that the human thought process resemble Moustakas stages on a daily basis in what they do professionally and personally. A person’s engagement in their work and relationships are a part of an
ongoing process in which they move within the stages, and allow new meaning to themselves and understanding to their own questions.

“Illustrate” enhances this process by allowing the art to begin to speak where words are difficult to use. Much of how I live, create art, and provide therapy is based on a metaphorical use of a quote by Scott Adams. “Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistake, art is knowing which ones to keep (Retrieved from http://www.brainyquotes.com).” In this stage of illumination and creating art, I allowed myself to come back to the question and notice more specific and details to the inquiry; as I did with the painting. I began to take notice of interesting parts and was able to highlight them to be more pronounced. I allowed myself to make decisions that would enhance and better the image, but ultimately, create a final piece.

**Explication**

“The purpose of the explication phase is to fully examine what has awakened in consciousness, in order to understand its various layers and meaning” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 31).

Sela-Smith (2002) describes Moustakas (1990) process in the following manner: “The heuristic researcher continues the focusing, indwelling, self-searching, and self-disclosure… To recognize meanings that are unique and distinctive to an experience… The entire process of explication requires that researchers attend to their own awareness, feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and judgments” (p. 68).

As I continue to follow Moustakas stages (1990) I come to my own revelations of how the stages operate together for the purpose of myself to the research. The previous stages of immersion, incubation, and illumination, and now explication, are so inter-
woven with each other and to myself that they blend together in their own intentions. However, this does not aptly explain my process of explication. In part to the creative synthesis and review to the body of work will give better explanation of explication and self-revelation.

**Creative Synthesis**

“Once the researcher has mastered knowledge of the material that illuminates and explicates the question, the researcher is challenged to put the components and core themes into a creative synthesis. This usually takes the form a narrative depiction utilizing verbatim material and examples, but it may be expressed [in other] creative forms” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 31-32).

The intention of the final stage of “creative synthesis” in Moustakas (1990) stages is to share my heuristic experience. They can only bare witness to my story that is unique to their own interpretation and experience. The researcher is allowed creative expression of his or her thought that supports of the literature (Moustakas, 1990).

What is the experience of “GBT men of color” in romantic partnerships? Utilizing a heuristic approach to this inquiry had become an insightful biography of my own experiences to this question. The methodology of the heuristic approach is similar to the decision making process in life, or life itself. The process of “coming out” can be life changing as a person can begin to form a new identity in an unfamiliar social environment. The addition to forming intimate partnerships with another, this process can begin again. It becomes a process in which a person evaluates himself, potential partners, the individual’s role in a relationship, and the behaviors within the relationship itself.
The process of dating is much like the heuristic process as well. The initial engagement with another acts as the interest, and thereafter, the personal significance to him. A person becomes involved with another and begin a continuing dialogue that address the morals and values of each individual (i.e. Immersion phase) to come to a better understanding of each other, and to the question of compatibility. The phases of incubation, illumination, and explication are experienced within the initial dating phase and thereafter, as well. Questions and complications can appear that relate to the compatibility of the two individuals or to the relationship. The formulation of the relationship and/or understanding of each other transitions into the final phase of synthesis. This process is highly marked at the initial engagement and immersion. They are the points of the initial attraction and interest to another, and where a person begins to question and think at an unconscious level of thinking to the attraction.

The dating experience correlates with the initial question in a therapeutic way of providing insight to one's own self. However, as I have repeatedly stated, this approach is not limited to gay men of color. It allows for self-reflection and a meaningful understanding for an individual. The Adlerian concepts of self-concept and mistaken beliefs become barriers to individual growth, and the feelings of inferiority and the need to be superior. Utilizing traditional and art therapy techniques a person can allow for the removal of himself from these thoughts to understand his barriers and formulate new forms of thinking and beliefs.

Creative exploration resembles the methodology of the heuristic approach in its own self. At its core is the initial engagement to create and to explore through the use of different mediums and artistic techniques. Art requires a focus and involvement to the art
making experience/process. Artists can become enmeshed in their work, but have the need and ability to either disassociate or remove themselves from their work. And then again, return to the process with a new understanding of what currently exists, and to what it will become.

Prior to beginning the creative synthesis phase I had begun processing the journey I continue to follow. The pivotal moments and growth are landmarks of change and are metaphoric in my art. Each profound in their existence and share in what has seemed as a never-ending process. My work shows the transformation that I have made in my life and is reflective of the self-inquiry I embarked on. Pursuing in a self-inquisitive methodology has been a risk in opening an arena of readers to view my life and thoughts, and a vulnerability that could potentially cause more harm than the educative purposes.
“Anonymous”

Reflection of “Anonymous”

“Anonymous” is self-portrait to reflect my feelings years ago. At that time was the feeling of being unknown, and not knowing myself. I was being absorbed into a culture and a life that I had not really known. I was not my own entity, but just another face in the crowd.
“Ambiguity”

There had been a progression in my involvement in my academics and in my art. This was a good start focusing on parts that would be both simple in abstraction and detailed to the specifics. I was beginning to understand myself, and the direction I was headed in my life. It was the beginning to what I believe to be my niche’ in the “art world.” It was the joy of painting and using color in a profound way that would emote a facade of happiness onto an image that portrayed a desire to belong.
“The Treachery of Words”

Reflection of “The Treachery of Words”

“The Destruction Words” was submitted into the 2014 Minneapolis Pride Art Exhibition; its theme was “Free to Be.” I struggled with the concept by that it allowed a relatively free expression of the theme. In my process I was able to interject myself into a parody of Rene Magritte’s, “The Treachery of Images.” The text translates into “This is not free.” It correlates with Magritte’s idea that images, and in my case, words are merely a description and cannot capture its “true essence.” I hope to capture the aesthetic value of the original piece by keeping “as-true” as I could in its representation. The idea alone was a push to take notice of the details and specifics of the original painting in order to effectively mimic it, but was also the beginning of a transformation to my art.
"James"

Reflection of “James”

“James” is the year’s collection of emotions into one painting. I had begun this painting a year into my partnership with James. It was a project that required a focus to every aspect of the painting from start to finish; from the image chosen to the process and style. I incorporated so much of myself into the piece, just as much as James is a part of me. The painting consists of small brushstrokes to give the appearance of realistic qualities, but was part of the process to reflect the idea of “all the small things creating a greater whole.”
“Forever”

Reflection of “Forever”

“Forever” is another representation of my life with James. Forever is part of saying we have each other, “Always and Forever.” The piece consists of writing forever over-and-over again to complete the image. It is part of the progression in my work to photorealistic qualities and the enhancement of my abilities. But it is also reflects the idea of being and feeling whole.
Creative Summary

“Art is an inexplicable and very private affair (Robbins & Sibley, 1976, p. 14).”

Art has provided a bridge to connect conscious levels of information and physiological changes in the body (Malchiodi, C.). The images selected fill the emotional gaps that are difficult to feel without a metaphorical representation. They show the experience of the self-reflective process and the changes that have occurred.

In choosing what pieces are most reflective of the Heuristic process and connect to the research was difficult in approach. What I found were “iconic” pieces that I felt have been significant in my growth as a person and as an artist. Each piece contributes to the context of the research of the experience that I have felt in LGBT community.

There is a pattern in the development and progression of my work. Titles alone become more distinguished, with greater themes of identity and support. A greater sense of strength and pride are depicted in the formation of photorealistic qualities to the images. However, it is not without vulnerability in a clearer representation of an image and thought. In review of myself I am now able to have a different perspective of myself. What once was the feeling the need to present a façade and barrier to others has been replaced with an openness and willingness to be myself.

Conclusions

Summary of Methodology

I began this project to educate others of the importance of the racial indicators that influence the behaviors in gay men. What I found was the accumulation of words that gave insight to gay male behavior, but could not support my thesis. By turning to the Heuristic Model I was able to investigate my experiences in adapt them to a generalized
experience of gay men of color.

In order for the pertaining literature to be supportive was connecting the usefulness of its data to an experience that one may have. It provided a foundation of support in the developing inquiry to address the question: What is the experience of “LGBT men of color” in romantic partnerships? This process of internal search allowed for a growth in maturing and a greater meaning to the experience. This too, resulted in a greater authenticity of myself.

**A Challenging Experience**

What becomes apparent though the Heuristic model is a quality experience that supports a question. However, this is not without challenge.

An experience cannot be measured quantitatively. It supports and holds the belief that experience occurs. The experience is limited to individual experience to an entire population. Those who participate in a Heuristic approach are also obligated to a fear of vulnerability to the academic community. The experience must have enough weight to provide validity.

Despite the challenges, I continue to believe that a Heuristic self-inquiry provides a sufficient amount of truth and value to the academic community. It has provided personal growth and a broader sense to myself and to the environment to which I live in.

**Concluding Commentary**

This has been an incredible personal journey for me to share on both a personal and academic level. It explores the experience that correlates with the literature and demonstrates the impact it has on a social level of behavior.

There is great synergy to the creative process and the experience that translates
into my own work in the field of mental health and populations of interest. Throughout the entire thesis experience I have noticed a shift to a higher level of thought and in therapeutic abilities. My tone and demeanor have become more direct and confident in what I do and say. By submitting myself to relive my past experiences allowed me to understand the choices I have made to be who I am now. It became a deeply, involved, personal piece of work that I became both writer and subject. In my own work as therapist is a focus on the creation of a self-identity and building self-esteem. They are my own personal goals I have for myself, but goals I have for the clients I work with. I found this work to be the building blocks for all continual therapeutic work with any individual. By being able to identify our believed limitations, and the goals we hope to achieve, we can process, progress, and begin to heal and grow. I found that I had created an immediate opinion of what was being expressed without knowing any other factors. This process helped change that response. I have learned to actively listen without bias or judgment through understanding of research that was conducted of racial stigmas. It has also led me to be more open and interested to more diverse populations and their own personal stories. I become truly engaged and interested in their lives and well-being, and develop a professional relationship that will greatly benefit and aid in their own goals. Alfred Adler believed in a key component of “movement” in life that helped create positive change. If the only constant in life is change, then Adler was right.

I am conflicted with my personal thoughts and ideas of the GBT community and how I should be professionally. I recognize and understand what Wilson, et al.’s data suggest about believed racial stigmas, but am also bound to my own beliefs due to my own personal experience and what I am witness to within the community. To be able to
recognize my feelings allows me to be aware of my personal boundaries that can inhibit effective work. My experiences will not be the same as another, and to generalize them as such only dishonors the progressive work the LGBT community has made towards equality. It is possible that my work with the LGBT community may not take a dominant role therapeutically, but as a leader and voice within the community for change.

I will admit that I have deferred some information from my experience in that it can be empathized through the works provided. I feel this is largely in part to not influence the reader’s own experience, but is also in part of my own design. I want to be able to push the boundaries of others and challenge their perspectives by means of an unconscious force. But it is also in which I have begun my progression in my art – The need to view a piece closer, a “read between the lines” methodology of reading and viewing. My strength is not in the details of over-coming the emotional struggles of an experience, but where that progression has led me.
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