Heterosexual Parents Who Move Toward Acceptance of Their Gay Son

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Abstract
Rejection of gay men by heterosexual parents is a frequent occurrence. Rhoades et al. (2018) found 49% of a sample of 657 sexual minority children had experienced parental rejection due to their LGBTQ+ identity. However, the current body of literature does not discuss those heterosexual parents who initially reject their sexual minority children and then return to a place of acceptance. Within the framework of attachment theory, this dissertation used a basic qualitative approach, influenced by Grounded Theory methods, to investigate the experience of heterosexual parents who move toward acceptance of their gay son. Fifteen, white, heterosexual parents, ranging from ages 51-70, from across the country, were interviewed. Results show that heterosexual parents of gay sons were able to move toward acceptance of their son by engaging in a process of self-work. Specific stages of acceptance that parents moved through were identified as well as the experiences, qualities, and beliefs that encouraged these parents to accept their gay son. The results of this study provide increased awareness of the barriers and catalysts that parents encounter as they move toward acceptance. The key themes discovered in this study grant clinicians the ability to identify the stage of acceptance that the heterosexual parent is in, as well as the current tasks that the parent must complete within that stage in order to enhance their level of acceptance.

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