

**RACISM IN THE GAY COMMUNITY AND HOMOPHOBIA IN THE BLACK
COMMUNITY: NEGOTIATING THE GAY BLACK MALE EXPERIENCE**

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ABSTRACT

This research posed the question “How does racism in the gay community and homophobia in the Black community restrict gay Black male’s life chances and life opportunities?” Previous research has uncovered racist attitudes within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community as well as homophobic attitudes within the Black community. Because of conflicting social identifiers (Is it possible for one to be both homosexual and Black?) and the invisibility of a gay Black voice, it is imperative to deconstruct the relationship between gay Black men and the communities they are a part of. I utilized qualitative in-depth interviewing techniques interviewing 15 Black men aged 18 and older who identified themselves as homosexual. The questions revolved around three primary questions designed to center the researcher...How do gay Black men describe their lives, How do gay Black men describe what their lives ought to be, and What obstacles do gay Black men see effecting their opportunity to live the lives they feel they ought to be living.

The gay Black male research participants disclosed that because of Black stereotypes, gay stereotypes, acceptance with stipulations in the gay community and the black community, racism in the gay community, homophobia in the Black community, and perceptions of blackness and masculinity’s affect on gay Black men...gay Black men live their lives with various restrictions. In other words, gay Black men do not appear to be living their lives the way they feel they ought to be living it. This work is important because a majority of the participants stated they wished to live restriction free lives. They are not able to fully be themselves in their daily lives and often have to assimilate to be accepted.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the brave and intelligent gay Black men who shared their personal life stories with me with hopes of empowering our community. Thank you! This thesis is also dedicated to all those who face racism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination. May you never stop fighting for equality!

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In 1980 at the Democratic National Convention held in New York City Melvin Boozer, candidate for the Democratic nomination for Vice President of the United States, spoke of the struggles oppressed communities face in America. In particular he highlighted the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) community as well as the Black community. In his address Boozer stated,

“Would you ask me how I’d dare to compare the civil rights struggle with the struggle for lesbian and gay rights? I can compare, and I do compare them. I know what it means to be called a nigger. I know what it means to be called a faggot. And I can sum up the difference in one word: none. Bigotry is bigotry. I have been booed before. Discrimination is discrimination. It hurts just as much. It dishonors our way of life just as much, and it betrays a common lack of understanding, fairness, and compassion” (<http://www.glaa.org/archive/1980/boozerconventionspeech.shtml>).

Now, almost thirty years after this address, discrimination still persists against the GLBT and Black communities. The question still remains however...what about the discrimination against those who fall within both the GLBT and Black communities and how has that discrimination affected their life chances?

Racism continues to be a problem within the GLBT community. I remember going to my first pride celebration in Washington D.C. and walking around wondering where all the Black people were. I found it strange that so few gay Black men would participate in the pride celebration as D.C. is known for having a high population of gay Black men. I was later informed that D.C.’s “Black Gay Pride” was typically held a week or two before D.C.’s “Capital Pride” celebration. I remember immediately questioning why there were two separate pride celebrations. Is the gay community really this racially divided?

From a large survey of Black GLBT individuals, half reported problems dealing with racism from other White GLBT individuals (Battle et al. 2002, p. 44). From the same survey respondents who had negative experiences with White LGBT people at GLBT community events, in White GLBT organizations, and in bars and clubs were more likely to agree that the racism of Whites was a problem for Black GLBT people when dealing with White GLBT communities (Battle et al. 2002, p 44). Because of this White racism within the GLBT

community it appears that Blacks have less involvement in the GLBT community (Lewis and Rogers 2002; Stokes, Vanable, and McKirnan 1996). Speaking from my personal experience as an out Black gay man, I have encountered many instances of racist attitudes within the White GLBT community. When I initially came out of the closet I attended GLBT meetings for support and found that no one understood the struggle of being both gay and Black. I found that their struggles were not similar to mine and I looked elsewhere for others like me.

Black gay men not only face racism within the gay community but also face homophobia within the Black community. When I came out of the closet I lost the majority of my Black male friends. This rejection, because of my sexuality, caused me to isolate myself further from the Black community. Whenever I was in predominately Black settings I felt I had to conceal my homosexuality for fear of being unwanted or rejected. Blacks who identify as gay rely more on their racial community for acceptance than Whites who identify as gay (Cohen 1999, Icard 1986). AIDS research has found that Black gay men are more likely than White gay men to think their friends disapprove of homosexuality, engage in sex with women, and tend to identify themselves as heterosexual (Stokes et al. 1996; Stokes and Peterson 1998; U.S. Centers for Disease Control [CDC] 2000). AIDS research also has shown that gay Black males who perceive homophobia in the Black community tend to disclose their sexual orientation, tend to engage in riskier sexual behavior, and tend to have low self-esteem issues (Peterson et al. 1992; Stokes and Peterson 1998). It has also been found that Blacks disapprove of homosexual behavior and homosexual culture more strongly than Whites (Hudson and Ricketts 1980; Lewis 2003; Schneider and Lewis 1984; Tiemeyer 1993). These are all reasons homophobia needs to be confronted within the Black community as it renders gay Blacks invisible with no support from either community they claim membership to.

Black gay male experiences are different than White gay male experiences as they deal with not only the oppression of being gay but also the oppression of being Black in American society. Gay Black men do not deal with these oppressions individually but face them holistically. Blacks who identify as gay face more disapproval from their families and straight friends than do similar Whites (Lewis 2003). Lewis also states that because of the link between perceptions of homophobia in the Black community and lower self-esteem and riskier sexual behavior among Black men who have sex with other men, this disapproval places even greater obstacles to self-acceptance and safe sexual behaviors in the paths of Black youths than White

youths with same-sex attractions (75). As a gay Black man I often felt isolated between two communities that do not want me or that do not even care to recognize that I am there. The isolation I experienced coming out almost lead me to suicide and I suffered greatly from depression. Even with getting help from the college counselors I felt that I had no where to fit in and I felt that I had no comfort zone to retreat to. If the issues of racism in the gay community and homophobia in the Black community are not confronted and dealt with, these oppressions will continue and gay Black men will never be able to live their lives to their full potential.

This research has three primary purposes: to give voice to gay Black men (i.e. center their perspective). Centering the gay Black male perspective means being well-grounded in the history, culture, and understanding of gay Black men (Kershaw 2003); to identify obstacles gay Black men see as restricting their life chances and opportunities; and to suggest methods of praxis to deconstruct the obstacles gay Black men identify as restricting their life chances and opportunities with hopes of empowering the gay Black community through research using the Scholar Activist approach. I utilized qualitative in-depth interviewing techniques to interview 15 Black men aged 18 and older who identified themselves as homosexual. The questions revolved around the three primary questions from the Scholar Activist approach designed to center the research...How do gay Black men describe their lives, How do gay Black men describe what their lives ought to be, and What obstacles do gay Black men see effecting their opportunity to live the lives they feel they ought to be living (Kershaw 2003). Ultimately my research asked...how does racism in the gay community and homophobia in the Black community restrict gay Black male's life chances and life experiences?

In Chapter two I review the literature on the gay Black male experience, Chapter three reveals the methods used to conduct and analyze the results, Chapter four is an overview of how the research participants describe their current lives, Chapter five is an overview of how the research participants feel their lives ought to be, Chapter six identifies the obstacles gay Black men describe as restricting their life chances and life experiences, and Chapter seven concludes the research discussing the results of the research questions, identifies the themes prevalent throughout the research, and discusses the extent to which racism in the gay community and homophobia in the Black community impact gay Black male life chances and life experiences.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The overarching research question for this thesis is “whether racism in the gay community and homophobia in the Black community restrict gay Black men’s ability to live their lives to their full potential?” The relationship between gay Black men and their respective communities has received greater attention in various academic disciplines today. Previous research has disclosed racist attitudes within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community as well as homophobic attitudes within the Black community. Lack of support structures, difficulties with self-acceptance, and religious fears have also plagued the gay Black male community. Because of conflicting social identifiers (Is it possible for one to be both homosexual and Black?) and the invisibility of a gay Black voice, it is imperative to deconstruct the relationship between gay Black men and the communities they are a part of.

Negotiating Perceptions of Blackness and Homosexuality

So what does it mean to be both homosexual and Black in America? Many researchers have acknowledged the difficulty gay Black men face negotiating being gay and being Black. American society is dominated by a heterosexual culture that has made it extremely difficult for homosexuals to live the lives they feel they ought to be living. Pepper Schwartz and Virginia Rutter, authors of The Gender of Sexuality: Race, Class, and Gender, state “Despite the norm of true love currently accepted in our culture, personal choice and indiscriminate sexuality have often been construed across cultures and across history as socially disruptive” (453). Because of this prevalent heteronormativity, homophobia exists largely in American culture.

However, gay Black males also face the difficulties of racial discrimination. The racial discrimination battle for Blacks is not only fought externally but internally as well. Pioneering sociologist and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois has discussed in his writings the struggle Blacks face in understanding themselves in regards to where they live in what he defined as “double consciousness.” Gay Black men also have a sense of double consciousness as they negotiate not only being Black but also being homosexual and male. Cornel West addresses internalized racism in Black sexuality stating, “This demythologizing of Black sexuality is crucial for Black America because much of Black self-hatred and self-contempt has to do with the refusal of many Black Americans to love their own Black bodies – especial their Black

noses, hips, lips, and hair” (457). Gay Black men thus struggle not only between two cultural groups (Gay community and the Black community), but also struggle with their understanding of what it means to be masculine and an American citizen.

The multi-consciousness dilemma gay Black men face has been made prevalent by many researchers. Research has disclosed that gay Black men are often forced to choose between the gay community and the Black community. Johnson (1982) has conducted the most exhaustive research on gay Black men regarding the ways in which they justify their group affiliation to either the gay community or Black community. Johnson’s study sampled approximately 60 gay Black men to see which social location they viewed as most central to their life. His research wielded two groups of gay Blacks. “Black-identified” gays are defined as gay Black men who self identified more with the Black community and “gay-identified” Blacks defined as gay Black men who self identified more with the gay community. Johnson’s study use of binary categories does not categorize those gay Black males that did not fall directly into one or the other. The study also does not take into account the fluidity of identifying with multiple identities over time making it appear that once we self-identify with any group or community it is permanent.

Other researchers have also researched this aspect of the gay Black male community (1996; Loiacano, 1989; Peterson, 1992). Gregory Conerly, author of “Are You Black First or Are You Queer?” takes their research further explicating the harm gay Black men endure when choosing one community over the other. I agree with Conerly’s research in which he states, “The goal, then, is to have a multiplicity of nonoppressive black lesbian identities that takes into account the diversity among us” (21). This thesis centers the gay Black male perspective, which gives voices to an array of difference within the gay Black community.

The Relationship between the Gay and Black Communities

The relationship between the gay community and Black community has been one of association and disassociation. The gay community throughout history has likened their struggle to that of Blacks in America. The Black community has had little interaction with the gay community and has attempted to distance itself from being compared to the gay community. Keith Boykin, author of One More River to Cross, often speaks to the dissensions between the Gay community and the Black community. His entire text analyzes both the gay community and Black community’s relationship to each other and gay Black men. Boykin’s writings also

focus on gay Black men and seek to disrupt false assumptions about gay Black men. I strongly agree with Boykin's analysis of the interconnections of race, class, gender, and sexuality involving gay Black men. Boykin's strongest point of analysis involves his ability to address feelings of alienation in the gay community and Black community, a problem that we both understand needs to be addressed. In the third chapter of Boykin's book, he discusses being Black and gay in America. Instead of trying to negotiate between homophobia and racism, Boykin likens the two oppressions and asks his readers to see beyond stereotypes. Perhaps Boykin's strongest quote lies in Chapter two when he quotes Melvin Boozer's address to the 1980 Democratic National Convention, "I know what it feels like to be called a 'nigger' and I know what it feels like to be called 'faggot' and I can sum up the difference in one word: none."

Racism within the Gay Community

The majority of researchers focusing on white racism in the gay community agree with Boykin's writings. Boykin states, "The dirty little secret about the homosexual population is that white gay people are just as racist as white straight people" (234). To be "gay" has taken on a white face as well as white experiences. Boykin continues stating, "To be white and homosexual and not to challenge or question the absence of Black lesbians and gays in the culture is itself an element of racism" (235). The area of white racism requires greater attention. Today there are more organizations (predominately organizations of color) being created that address the problems of racism in the gay community. While some degree of research exists regarding white racism, there is a far greater amount of research focused on Black homophobia. Both racism in the gay community and homophobia in the Black community require the same attention given if we are to ever truly work on ways to bring both communities together.

Racism in Queer Communities: What can White People Do? discusses the racism that exists within the LGBT community. Their primary goal is to educate other Whites about White privilege so that racist attitudes can be erased within the LGBT community (Lanzerotti, Mayer, Ormiston, Podwoski: 2002). They also seek to be inclusive to other minorities, not just Blacks, in their fight for racial justice. While it is important to end racism within the gay community, this article does not take into consideration the gay Black male perspective and how racism in the LGBT communities have colluded with homophobia in the Black community to harm the gay

Black community. Gay Black men, because of racism in the LGBT community, face alienation and struggle in attempting to seek support structures that speak to their perspective.

Homophobia within the Black Community

Also, a great amount of research has been directed toward homophobia in the Black community. Authors such as bell hooks, Keith Boykin, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Eric Brandt, Rudolph P. Byrd, Barbara Smith, Cheryl Clarke, and others have all discussed homophobia within the Black community. In Dangerous Liaisons: Blacks, Gays, and the Struggle for Equality, Eric Brandt pieces together several impressive researchers and writers works on race and homosexuality. “Though the two communities have very different histories, as minorities in America both groups face some similar challenges. It has always seemed to me that these two groups have much to learn from each other, even to gain from working together.” What Brandt hopes to achieve is a dialogue between the Black community and the gay community, which I agree is necessary to bridge the dissention that already exists. Brandt’s work is essential to consider because dialogue has the ability to bridge misconceptions between the two oppressed groups. Brandt’s work solely seeks to create dialogue, but I would argue that dialogue does nothing if those groups still have misconceptions about their own identities. If dialogue is passed between the two oppressed groups that reinforce negative stereotypes about the other, then there can be no progress.

Barbara Smith, a Black lesbian writer, also speaks to the divide between the Black community and the gay community. Her book, The Truth that Never Hurts, dedicates a chapter specifically to this issue. Smith’s approach however is different than Brandt’s because Smith focuses on the specific identities of being Black and being gay. Smith states, “The underlying assumption is that I should prioritize one of my identities because one of them is actually more important than the rest or that I must arbitrarily choose one of them over the others for the sake of acceptance in one particular community.” This is an issue gay Black men face as they have “loyalties” to each of their respective communities. This also echoes Boykin’s sentiments in his writings about ranking oppressions or placing race above sexuality or vice versa. Smith acknowledges the double consciousness that many gay Black men face in choosing between the gay community and the Black community.

Bell hooks' opinion on Black homophobia correlates with that of Barbara Smith's. In bell Hook's book, Talking Back, she makes note of the blatant homophobia in the Black community. "To strengthen the solidarity between black folks irrespective of our sexual preferences, allegiance must be discussed" (Hooks: 124). Hooks is one of the primary academics leading the charge to give a voice to all homosexuals who are minorities. Hooks shares other author's sentiments in that she too feels that gay Blacks face alienation and isolation from the gay community and the Black community. "Often black gay folk feel extremely isolated because there are tensions in their relationships with the larger, predominately white gay community created by racism, and tensions within black communities around issues of homophobia" (Hooks: 125). By making the issue known and prevalent, Hooks hopes to create an area within the Black community for gay Black men to belong. Cheryl Clarke's article "The Failure to Transform" which falls within Eric Brandt's collected pieces places responsibility on both homosexual Blacks and heterosexual Blacks to empower the relationship between the gay and Black communities. This is not to assume that ending homophobia in the Black community will solve all problems that exist between the gay Black community and the Black community. The authors simply see the embrace of these communities as a step in the right direction for all.

Gay Black men and Issues of Masculinity and Homosexuality

In Traps: African American Men on Gender and Sexuality, Rudolph P. Byrd and Beverly Guy-Sheftall piece together several articles concerning race, sexuality, and masculinity regarding Black men. The title reminds the readers the point the editors hope to get at in the text that Black men, in particular gay Black men are trapped amongst conflicting identities and communities. This idea of being trapped is central because in essence that is how many Black men feel regarding those taboo subjects (sexuality and race). The authors state in their text that they wish to chart the progressive engagement of African American men on the crucial and diverse issues of homophobia. Although the authors agree with both Boykin and Smith they differentiate themselves by placing a great deal of the responsibility to bridge the gap between the gay community and Black community on Black men.

There are some who do not feel that it is possible to be both gay and Black. Molefi Kete Asante, writer of the text Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change does not see homosexuality as a characteristic of Blackness. Asante defines Afrocentricity as such...

“Afrocentricity is a mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values, and perspectives predominate. In regards to theory, it is the placing of African people in the center of any analysis of African phenomena. Thus, it is possible for any one to master the discipline of seeking the location of Africans in a given phenomenon. In terms of action and behavior, it is a devotion to the idea that what is in the best interest of African consciousness is at the heart of ethical behavior. Finally, Afrocentricity seeks to enshrine the idea that blackness itself is a trope of ethics. Thus, to be black is to be against all forms of oppression, racism, classism, homophobia, patriarchy, child abuse, pedophilia, and white racial domination” (2)

Given this definition of Afrocentricity, it appears that Asante is strongly against homophobia as he states to be Afrocentric is to be against all forms of oppression. However, Asante states, “An Afrocentric perspective recognizes its existence, but homosexuality cannot be condoned or accepted as good for the national development of a strong people” (73). This seems to contradict his earlier statement about being Afrocentric and against all forms of oppression. Asante defends himself stating that he does not view the homosexual lifestyle as a way of life for Black people and does not condone violence against homosexuality. This stance Asante takes only further divides the gay and Black communities. Asante in essence forces gay Black men to choose their Blackness over their sexuality or they cannot be Afrocentric. I assert that gay Black men can embrace both their race and sexuality and still be Afrocentric in their beliefs.

The majority of authors and researchers agree that there is much to be learned regarding the relationship between the gay community and the Black community. There is also a consensus that bridging the gap between the two communities can empower both communities equally. Gay Black men suffer because of racism in the gay community and homophobia in the Black community. The oppressions that are reinforced in each community do not exist because of one group’s intolerance.

Homosexuality and Religion (The Black Church)

The understanding of homosexuality within the realm of religion is also important to consider because religion has been a primary aspect of Black liberation for centuries. Homosexuality remains a major taboo in religious talk which has prompted many researchers to analyze why homophobic attitudes exist. In Delroy Constantine-Simms text, The Greatest

Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities, the question is asked whether or not homosexuality is the greatest taboo? Constantine-Simms, E. Patrick Johnson, and Horace Griffin all provide articles that analyze the relationship between homosexuality and religion (specifically the Black church). All authors agree that the bible has been co-opted by the religious right placing a greater emphasis on separation rather than integration. The authors all compare the homophobia that revolves around religion to the racism and sexism that still today clouds religion. Constantine-Simms states, “With the interpretive grid provided by a critique of domination, we are able to filter out the sexism, patriarchalism, violence, and homophobia that are very much a part of the Bible, thus liberating it to reveal to us in fresh ways the in breaking, in our time, of God’s domination-free order” (87). Both Johnson and Griffin support Constantine-Simm’s assertion that if we attack all forms of oppression that remain present in the Bible, perhaps we can then move toward a more equal and just society. Griffin differentiates stating that the relationship between the Black church and whether or not they support homosexuality is irrelevant. Griffin states that the greater issue lies with whether or not the Black community will practice justice toward all fellow Christians. Griffin believes that homosexuality is part of human sexuality just as Blacks are a member of the human race.

“Chip Murray, pastor of the First AME Church in Los Angeles, points to church and society’s perception of a heterosexual orientation as “normal” as a cause of homophobia (Jabir).” Johair Osaze Jabir, author of “A Whosoever Church: Welcoming Lesbians and Gay Men into African American Congregations,” writes a telling article citing religion and normativity as reasons for homophobia in American culture. The article makes valid the importance of religion in the Black community. Religion has been a steadfast in Black society since they had the right to organize in a church. “The Christian Right, however, has increasingly challenged the LGB (Lesbian, gay, bisexual) movement’s claim to “the moral legacy of the black civil rights movement,” arguing that gays seek “special rights” that should be restricted to legitimate minorities and targeting Blacks for many of their arguments (Jabir).” That last quote shows the moral normative base of the Christian right challenging Blacks to not allow gays to ride on the coattails of their movement. The article cites religion as a reason for homophobia, but fails to recognize the dominant culture (White culture) inciting conflict between the two minority groups at question. This article is important because religion is the basis of many of our cultural norms

in society today. The author fails to state this point and connect the obvious dissention between homosexuality, religion, and African Americans in the church.

There are those who do not view homosexuality as something that should be supported by the church. In Keith Boykin's book One More River to Cross, he speaks of several ministers he's interviewed regarding homosexuality and religion. The majority of reverends interviewed agreed that homosexuality is a sin often quoting the Bible to reinforce their opinion. Boykin highlights one reverend in particular who has targeted the gay community as sinners. Boykin cites the Reverend James Sykes as one of best known opponents of homosexuality in the Black church. Boykin quotes Sykes defending a Klu Klux Klan meeting, "If I like pork chops and the Klan likes pork chops, nobody has nothing to say. But because the Klan agrees that homosexuality is wrong, and I agree that homosexuality is wrong, then all the sudden I'm sleeping with the Klan" (127-128). This attitude toward homosexuality is appalling considering Sykes is the pastor of a four hundred plus member church. Boykin, along with several other scholars, assert that the language of religion has been co-opted by right wing moralists who want nothing more than to eradicate homosexuality from the church.

Media Perceptions and Public Perceptions of Black Homosexuality

Images of Black homosexuality have been predominately negative in popular culture today. Across the board all individuals who have researched this topic agree that gay Black men are represented negatively in popular culture. Gay Black men have been portrayed as void of masculinity, hyper-sexual, sassy, and flamboyant. Marlon T. Riggs, author of Black Macho Revisited: Reflections of a Snap! Queen, discusses his anger towards the straight men of the Black community. Riggs states that he expected the obstacles in life from the White community because of his race, but never expected obstacles from his own brothers regarding his sexuality. Riggs believes that they should understand what it is like to be oppressed, and therefore should reject any notion of oppression since they have to face a form of it everyday as well. Riggs cites several Black men who have done nothing but participate in the degradation of the gay Black male. His best example lies in a comedy show that used to air entitled In Living Color, in which two straight Black men portrayed gay Black men to review movies from a "man's point of view." Riggs also brings the discussion up again regarding the 'trap' of being gay and Black. "I am a Negro Faggot, if I believe what movies, TV, and rap music say of me. Because of my

sexuality, I cannot be Black. A strong, proud, “Afrocentric” Black man is resolutely heterosexual, not even bisexual.”

Various video productions have been produced that attempt to acknowledge the difficulties of being both gay and Black. Films such as Paris is Burning and Tongues Untied intimately deconstruct the experience of the gay Black male. These are not the only two films in existence that analyze the gay Black community; however, I do feel they best represent the gay Black community and their struggle. Tongues Untied is directed and produced by Marlon Riggs. The film addresses the struggle gay Black men face silenced and torn between both the gay and Black communities. Riggs video encapsulates the pain, fear, and hatred gay Black men deal with negotiating their identities within a community that does not recognize their race and a community that rejects their sexuality. The film presents a positive message for gay Black men to love not only themselves but their Black brethren. Tongues Untied presents the best visual representation of what it means to be Black and gay in America.

Paris is Burning depicts gay Black males self-affirmation in Harlem during a time when homosexuality was even less accepted than it is today. This videos’ strongest point is made when the gay Black men who are interviewed tell their stories. One young Black male stated, “I remember my father telling me...you have three strikes against you in this world...every Black man has two. That they are Black and they are male...but if you are Black and Male and Gay you are gonna have a hard fucking time...and if you are gonna do this, you are gonna have to be stronger than you ever imagined.”

The video also presents the desire and need for support structures for gay Black men. The film displays “Drag Balls” where gay Black men or anyone could come to be who they wanted to be. The Balls typically had contests in which members of the surrounding community could come to perform whatever gender, class, race, or sexuality they desired. “In a ballroom, you can be anything you want,” stated by Dorian Corey who is a featured drag queen in the film. The Drag Balls served as a “home” for gay Black men who felt they could not fit into their community. Each Drag Ball was put on by what the individuals in the film term “houses.” Within each “house” was a “house-mother” who looked after everyone who wanted to be apart of their clique. Pepper Labeija is a “drag mother” of her own house...the house of Labeija. Labeija mentions that he is like a mom to his family and many young gay Black men come to him for a sense of

family that they do not receive anywhere else. The lack of support structures for gay Black men has been a problem and still remains a problem today.

Current media is attempting to break this mold as “Noah’s Arc,” “The D.L. Chronicles,” and other gay Black male themed media present an array of gay Black personality types. While some of those negative stereotypes that have been reinforced by popular media still exist, these new forms are seeking to deconstruct those past stereotypes and show the world that there is no monolithic image of gay Black men.

Black Homosexuality and Black Studies/Africana Studies: Silent Voices

Black homosexuality has begun to dig a niche in the Black studies/Africana studies discipline. Several books have been produced that illuminate the growing body of literature that discusses Black homosexuality. Black Queer Studies is an anthology edited by Patrick Johnson and Mae Henderson which has been written to create a space for the Black queer voice. They state, “Black Queer Studies serves as a critical intervention in the discourses of Black studies and Queer studies” (1). The volume is divided into four parts: “Disciplinary Tensions: Black Studies/Queer Studies” (explores the manners in which Black studies has eluded homosexuality and Queer Studies has eluded race); “Representing the ‘Race’: Blackness, Queers, and the Politics of Visibility” (explores the ways in which Black queer body signifies within the American imaginary); “How to Teach the Unspeakable: Race, Queer Studies, and Pedagogy” (engages the issue of how integrating the study of sexuality into the classroom complicates a space that is already fraught with erotic tensions and negotiations of power; and lastly “Black Queer Fiction: Who is ‘Reading’ Us?” (Looks at the past and present literature involving the gay Black community. The issues are also prevalent in the text Critical Essays: Gay and Lesbian Writers of Color.

Siobhan Somerville’s text, Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture, seeks to uncover the ways in which the “creation” of homosexuality identities has colluded with the creation of racial distinctions overtime throughout American history within American culture. Furthermore it views both race and sexuality as interconnecting, blending aspects of both critical race theory and queer theory. Somerville also relays to the reader ways in which historical processes of restricting racial and sexual progress have been uniquely similar since their inception. The interconnections of race and sexuality

throughout history have served as a means of producing an “other” and also have restricted Black’s because of their race and homosexual’s because of their sexuality. Likewise it has restricted Blacks because of their sexuality and homosexuals because of their race. As Somerville states, “This book has attempted to demonstrate a range of approaches for understanding the ways in which representations of supposed differences between “Black” and “white” and “heterosexual” and “homosexual” bodies summoned and shaped one another in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American culture (166).” Somerville’s text fits nicely within Black Queer Theory and Black Queer Studies. It is evident that this author has only scratched the surface of the relationship between blackness and homosexuality; however, she provides hope for the field of Black Queer Theory. Although the subject of the interconnections of race and sexuality are not new, as Black feminist have preached the importance of the interconnections of race, class, gender and sexuality, Somerville still manages to present the relationship in a fresh inventive light that reminds us of importance of historical oppressions and how they affect our futures.

Although research has been done to attempt to understand the community of gay Black men, their voice still remains silent. If we search within literature that speaks primarily to Black males, a reoccurring theme becomes visible. Gay Black men are repeatedly left out of a good portion of literature that is intended to empower ALL Black men. Anderson Franklin’s From Brotherhood to Manhood, Richard Majors and Janet Billson’s Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America, and Don Belton’s Speak my Name are all examples of literature that is intended to uplift Black males. However, they all avoid the discussion of gay Black men and their place within their community. These books all speak to the silence of Black men in academia, the media, and society as a whole but fail to realize their own function in silencing a minority within their own community. All the texts do speak to significant issues within the Black community that affects Black males such as the importance of developing a positive self-image, erasing racial stereotypes, and respecting Black women. Again the question remains whether or not gay Black men have a place within the Black community?

Robert F. Reid-Pharr’s book, Black Gay Man Essays discusses the Million Man March and the invisibility of gay Black men. Pharr cites several critiques of the supposed march for equality and empowerment of Black men, primarily with the message that was being relayed. Pharr states that the Million Man March only reinforced binary understanding of sexuality and

race and often reinvented many of the stereotypes created from the 1965 Moynihan report making Black men out to be the problem with Black families and that Black families are inferior because the majority of them are matriarchal. Black gay men were then faced with a dilemma...Should they participate in an openly misogynistic and homophobic event because of their Blackness? Black men in American are thus forced into a binary choice of sexuality and masculinity.

Reid-Pharr states, "Black Gay Man Essays is both a celebration of Black gay male identity and a critique of the structures that allow for the production of that identity" (18). Reid-Pharr believes that we as people should transcend beyond identity markers and makes note of the obvious denial of gay Black men's existence in the Black community. Discussing the Million Man March, Reid-Pharr discusses the role gay Black men played in being a part of this celebration of Black masculinity. Reid-Pharr states that gay Black men are not really Black, "For, if the definition of blackness hinges on heterosexuality, then either blackness and homosexuality are incommensurable (and black gays are not really black) or the notion of blackness is untenable, as witnessed by the undeniable existence of large numbers of black gay men" (167). Here we see a voice attempting to be heard that is calling out to the Black community to confront its homophobia and recognize the gay Black voice.

Attitudes toward Homosexuality and their effect on Gay Black Men Living Openly

White and Black attitudes toward homosexuality have directly affected gay Black men to a greater degree than gay White men. Previous studies have yielded an array of mixed results. Levitt and Klassen (1974) found in their research that whites significantly maintain more negative attitudes toward homosexuality than Blacks. Years later Hudson and Ricketts (1980) and Schneider and Lewis (1984) found the opposite. The most common results regarding Blacks and whites and their attitudes toward homosexuality displayed that Blacks were more likely to support anti-discrimination laws but Whites were typically more accepting of the homosexual lifestyle.

Gregory Lewis (2003) conducted research that measures Black-white differences in attitudes toward homosexuality and gay rights. His article uses responses from almost seven thousand Blacks and forty-three thousand whites in 31 surveys conducted since 1973 to give more definitive answers on Black-white attitudinal differences and their demographic roots.

Lewis's findings correlate with the research of the past displaying Blacks as "11 percentage points more likely than whites to condemn homosexual relations as "always wrong" and 14 percentage points more likely to see them warranting "God's punishment" in the form of AIDS, but no more like to favor criminalizing gay sex" (63). Lewis also found that while Blacks attitudes regarding homosexuality were predominantly negative; Blacks are 10 percentage points more likely than whites to support laws prohibiting antigay job discrimination. The article Lewis presents focuses on AIDS; while at the same time makes prevalent some of the issues I wish to discuss with my research.

Difference in attitudes matter because as Lewis states, "First, Black lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals (LGBs) may rely on same-race heterosexuals for acceptance even more than white LGBs do (Icard 1986)" (61). Those same researchers who concluded that Blacks attracted to their own gender often experience more pressure than whites to hide their homosexual behavior, have children, or marry (Icard 1986). This fear of "coming out" represents a problem within the gay Black community and they become trapped which prevents them from living the lives they feel they ought to be living. Keith Boykin makes a valid point in text *One More River to Cross* stating that members of both communities are identified by assumptions that connect their status with some sort of unflattering behavior. Boykin wants readers to realize that the manner in which both the gay community and Black community are stereotyped are one in the same just with different unflattering behaviors.

Perceptions of Homosexuality leading to Risky, Dangerous, and Rash Behaviors

Studies have also been conducted which look at the Black gay community and riskier sexual behavior leading to AIDS. Previous research has shown a link between riskier sexual behavior and beliefs regarding homosexuality in the Black community (Peterson et al. 1992; Stokes and Peterson 1998). Because of this link this creates an added barrier for Black gays when compared to white gays. Previous research has also shown that gay Blacks do not seek refuge primarily within the LGBT community and tend to be less involved than gay whites (Stokes et al. 1996). In fact, as Lewis points out in his study, gay Blacks experience racism in interactions with white gays (Battle et al. 2002). Attitudinal differences are important to understand as we attempt to uncover those obstacles gay Black men view as restricting their life chances.

Conclusion

This literature review explicates the difficulties gay Black males face in negotiating oppressed cultural groups (Gay community and the Black Community) while also attempting to live the lives they feel they ought to be living. The majority of research found involving the gay Black male has all shown that racism is prevalent in the LGBT community and that homophobia is prevalent in the Black community. Because of the racism in gay community, gay Black men have not had the same support structures as gay white men. Gay has become equated with being both white and gay and as a result the gay Black perspective has become silenced. Some researchers see religion as the catalyst for the Black community rejecting homosexuals while others believe that it's a complicated mix of several types of oppressions. It has become necessary to repair the relationship between the gay and Black communities. Keith Boykin made a strong argument regarding the relationship between both communities stating that both must see that while they are different they do have one distinct commonality...they are oppressed.

Homophobia in the Black community and negative images in popular culture continue to complicate the gay Black male's ability to live their lives to their full potential. Studies have shown that because of the negative relationship between homosexuality and the Black community, gay Black men have lower-self esteem and engage in riskier sexual behaviors. The majority of survey studies done on the gay Black male community has been quantitative in nature and has had a focus of attempting to understand why the AIDS rate is high in the gay Black community. This thesis goes beyond that, locating obstacles that restrict gay Black male life opportunities. Gay Black men are trapped between conflicting communities that do not wish to claim them. Because of this trap it has become very necessary for there to be a centered Black perspective and voice.

In Chapter three I explain the methods, approaches, paradigms, and research processes used within this thesis research.

Chapter 3

Methodology

As previously stated, the underlying question this thesis seeks to answer is to what extent do both racism in the gay community and homophobia in the Black community negatively impact gay Black male's life opportunities. Three primary sub questions guided this thesis in attempting to answer that underlying question:

- 1.) How do gay Black men describe their lives?
 - a) Tell me a little about yourself (i.e. Age, religion, relationship status, educational background, sexuality disclosure, organizations, occupation, and information about past and current neighborhoods).
- 2.) How do gay Black men describe what their lives ought to be?
 - a) If this were a perfect world...how would you want your life to be or if you could change anything about the world to make your life easier, what would you change?
- 3.) What obstacles do gay Black men see affecting their opportunity to live the lives they feel they ought to be living?
 - a) What has been your general experience within the gay community (predominantly gay company that's primarily non-Black)?
 - b) How would you describe the gay community?
 - c) What type of gay people do you surround yourself by if any?
 - d) Do you think that whites are welcoming of Blacks within the gay community?
 - e) Have whites been welcoming of you within the gay community?
 - f) Do you feel there is racism within the gay community or what do you think that people claim that racism exists within the gay community?
 - g) Have you experienced racism within the gay community?
 - i) If so can you give me a few examples or stories of how you have experienced racism within the gay community?
 - ii) If not, why do you feel you have never experienced racism within the gay community or have any of your friends experienced racism within the gay community?

h) Have those experiences affected your ability to live the life you feel you should be living (have they held you back in any way)?

iii) What aspects of those experiences (racism in the gay community) held you back or affected your ability to live the life you feel you should be living?

i) How did you manage to cope/survive within the gay community as a gay Black man (i.e. What means of support did you utilize as a gay Black man in the gay community and how did that support system shape your experience as a gay Black man)?

j) What has been your general experience within the Black community (predominantly heterosexual Blacks)?

k) How would you describe the Black community?

l) What type of Black people do you surround yourself by if any?

m) Do you think that Blacks are welcoming of gays within the Black community?

n) Have Blacks been welcoming of you within the Black community?

o) Do you feel there is homophobia within the Black community or what do you think that people claim that homophobia exists within the Black community?

p) Have you experienced homophobia within the Black community?

i) If so can you give me a few examples or stories of how you have experienced homophobia within the Black community?

ii) If not, why do you feel you have never experienced homophobia within the Black community or have any of your friends experienced homophobia within the Black community?

q) Have those experiences affected your ability to live the life you feel you should be living (have they held you back in any way)?

iii) What aspects of those experiences (homophobia in the Black community) held you back or affected your ability to live the life you feel you should be living?

r) How did you manage to cope/survive within the Black community as a gay Black man (i.e. What means of support did you utilize as a gay Black man in the Black community and how did that support system shape your experience as a gay Black man)?

Qualitative Research

How does racism in the gay community and homophobia in the Black community restrict gay Black ability to live their lives to their full potential? Denzin and Lincoln state,

“qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative researcher involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (4-5).

Current academia fails to identify a gay Black male experience as well as a gay Black male voice. Qualitative research gives a voice to a community that has been microscopically observed through their broader communities...the Black community and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LBGT) community and allows them to explain their lives with their lived experiences. To achieve this I employed the Scholar Activism approach.

The Scholar-Activist, Critical, and Interpretive Approaches

The Scholar Activist approach has three primary criteria: The first criterion is that the research must be centered on the subject. This is achieved by asking questions about the participants life experiences that directly focus on their how see their lives, how they feel their lives ought to be, and what obstacles they see as restrictive preventing them from living the lives they feel they should be living. Terry Kershaw, the architect of the scholar activist approach states, “The second major criteria that serves as a guide in the development of Black Studies theory and research is critical analysis” (33). This criterion problematizes the obstacles identified by gay Black men to see if they are in fact real; Kershaw continues stating, “The third criteria is that the research and theory must be empowering” (33). Ultimately this research will seek to empower the gay Black male community by seeing what tasks have been utilized to tackle those obstacles and if those tasks been successful. The final criterion allows me as the

researcher to act as an agent for social change by helping gay Black men to create solutions to attempt to solve those obstacles gay Black men see as restrictive in regards to their life potential.

The Scholar Activist approach has elements of both interpretive and critical approaches to research. This approach operates under the interpretive paradigms belief that there are multiple realities and not just one social reality. This is understood through the process of centering gay Black men. Not every gay Black man will have or share the same experiences. As Bailey states, “research undertaken with an interpretive paradigm in mind focuses on social relationship, as well as the mechanism and process through which members in a setting navigate and create their social worlds” (80). Another similarity between the Scholar Activist approach and the interpretive paradigm is its epistemological beliefs. Bailey states, “adherents of an interpretive paradigm believe that what researchers learn from the participants depends, in part, on their own status characteristics, values, and behaviors” (80). Again the Scholar Activist approach seeks to center the research participant so I made a strong effort to learn as much about the research participant as possible so that they could present their lived experiences as true to form as possible. Being a member of the community I am studying gave me a great advantage here. The three questions that the Scholar Activist approach asks served as over-arching questions to center me in the world of gay Black men. Sub-questions, listed above, were used to further flesh out answers to the three over-arching questions.

The methodology of the Scholar Activist approach is again similar to the interpretive paradigm in that it requires interactions with and observations of participants in a setting (Bailey, 2007). The ethics of the Scholar Activist approach mirror that of the interpretive paradigm as well.

The Scholar Activist research approach is critical in that it seeks to ultimately empower the research subject by producing knowledge to deconstruct the obstacles the research subject sees as ultimately restricting their life chances. This is spelled out in the third criterion of the Scholar Activist approach mentioned earlier. Bailey states that the critical paradigm “often seeks to empower the people in a setting and to work toward meaningful social change” (83). The Scholar Activist approach’s primary purpose is to create social change therefore, it definitely has critical elements to it as well. I feel that this approach can best represent gay Black male struggle and achieve a possible solution to deconstruct those obstacles gay Black men see as restricting their life opportunities/life chances.

Participants, Instruments, and Anonymity

I utilized in-depth qualitative semi-structured interviews with 15 Black men who identify themselves as gay aged 18 and older. The interviews took place in an area that was accommodating to the participants and lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour. Additional time was given if necessary. The interview questions were framed around the three primary questions. I also asked each participant details of their environments growing up and how those environments shaped their world views.

I had an informed consent form that discussed the nature of the research and asked the participants if recording our conversation was acceptable. I also asked the participants permission to record written notes throughout the conversation. I transcribed the interviews to avoid the potential of lost data (i.e. tape recording failures, participant emergencies, etc.). The informed consent form also discussed any potential benefits (potential to empower the gay Black male community, bring both the gay and Black communities together, help deconstruct obstacles gay Black men identify as restricting their life opportunities, etc.) or harms (emotional stress from discussing issues that may have potentially affected their mental state at some point and time, etc.) that could result from them participating within this research.

To ensure confidentiality of each participant, I assigned them participant numbers. I was the sole researcher on this project. I informed the participants that I would be the only one to hear the tapes or view the written notes from our interviews.

Validity, Coding, and Analysis

Recruitment of participants was voluntary. I advertised my research through college GLBT listservs and I attended GLBT support groups/meetings and requested participants upon getting to know the group and/or organization. The interactions with the GLBT groups included: adequate information about the study; simple language; contact information; description of study procedures and location; and information that let potential participants know that it was in fact a study.

To ensure validity I gave each participant the opportunity to read the research/interview when finished as well as offered any edits to ensure that their experience was being represented truthfully.

In analyzing the data, I took special care in searching for reoccurring themes within the transcription of the interviews as well as within my written notes through the process of open coding. Open coding was necessary as it helps bring themes to the surface from deep inside the data (Neuman, 443). Beginning with the first interview I combed over the data and located themes and assigned them codes. I also took special care to code those themes that did not agree with what my research was ultimately looking to unearth. These experiences are valuable in understanding the breadth of the research.

The obstacles that could be empirically verified were identified and problematized as something to be solved and were used to affirm the groups understandings (Kershaw, 35). As researcher I then critically examined those empirical obstacles with aspirations of deconstructing them, therefore empowering the gay Black male community. In doing so, the analysis is presented in the form of narratives to retain the richness and authenticity of the original data source (the research participants' personal experiences).

Role of the Researcher

Because of the nature of the approach...I took into consideration who I was as a researcher and who I am as a gay identified Black man. Therefore within the analysis of the interviews I also included my own personal life experiences alongside the research participant's life experiences. Throughout the interview process I took special care not to discuss my personal experiences as it could have lead the interviewee to say particular statements I wanted them to say. I shared my experiences with them after the research if they asked to keep their experience as pure and sincere as possible.

In the following chapters, four through six, I present the results from the research questions asked to the participants. The chapters specifically center the gay Black male experience. In chapter four I describe how the gay Black male research participants described their lives.

CHAPTER 4

HOW DO GAY BLACK MEN DESCRIBE THEIR LIVES?

Below are brief biographical sketches of all the research participants. They are numbered from one to 15. For the remainder of the paper, they will be referred to by their research participant number (i.e. research participant one will be referred to as RP1, research participant two will be referred to as RP2, and so forth). These sketches identify how the research participants describe their current lives.

Brief Biographical Sketches of the Research Participants

Research Participant One (RP1): RP1 is a single 29 year old college educated principle coordinator who manages calendars and works on projects for treasury and capital markets. He aspires to one day be a trader or an analyst. He was raised Baptist but considers himself more spiritual than religious. RP1 currently resides in a predominantly white neighborhood that he feels has welcomed him and does not judge him on the basis of his skin color. He currently feels comfortable in his current living environment.

RP1 was raised in the country by his aunts and mother. He did not have an adult male figure throughout his childhood. RP1's neighborhood consisted of family members that all lived within miles of one another. RP1 went to predominantly white learning institutions his entire life. His educational background is in Sociology and Black Studies and he feels he is very conscious of the social world around him, especially when it comes to issues involving race. RP1 feels his large size and skin color are beneficial and detrimental to him. As a "large" Black man he has, what he has termed, an "intimidation factor" that has protected him from racial discrimination. He also feels it has caused others to judge him before getting to know him.

RP1 has known he was gay since he was younger. He considers himself open about his sexuality and has been living openly since 1997. RP1 currently has a strong relationship with his mother.

Research Participant Two (RP2): RP2 is a 32 year old bartender at a gay club geared toward Black men. He has limited community college education. While attending he was seeking a degree in Education with a Minor in Coaching. He is recently separated from his partner but still sharing living accommodations with him. RP2 does not affiliate with any particular religion. However, he considers himself to be a believer in God. RP2 is currently a

member of the National Gay Basketball Association (the NGBA is a national gay basketball league, which organizes tournaments and competitions throughout the year) and a GLBT basketball and social group that is organized in a major metropolitan city. RP2 is unhappy in his current living environment and is seeking to move when he has the resources to do so.

RP2 was the child of parents who were in the Air Force so he traveled a great deal when he was younger. He grew up in a predominantly white environment. RP2 states that he has never really lived anywhere mostly Black until recently. RP2's current neighborhood is mostly Latin and Black with very few whites.

RP2 has known he was gay since he was eight or nine. RP2 considers himself open regarding his sexuality. He states, "What I do is, if someone asks me if I'm gay...I'll say yeah, why are you asking me?" He also discloses that one would not know he was gay by appearance alone. He continues, "No, I am not flamboyant or what not, but I am okay with being gay." RP2's family knows about his homosexuality.

Research Participant Three (RP3): RP3 is a single 43 year old college educated engineer in a major metropolitan city. His educational background is in electrical engineering and computer engineering. RP3 was raised Catholic. He is a member of Alpha Phi Alpha (Black Fraternity) and Prince Halls Masonry. He is financially stable and takes care of his mother who lives in a separate state. He has five brothers and six sisters. RP3 currently lives in a predominantly Black neighborhood that is currently being gentrified. The neighborhood is a mixture of gay and straight individuals.

RP3 grew up in the sixties and experienced racial integration throughout his early childhood education. He is from a predominantly Black rural neighborhood in the South. RP3 acknowledged difficulties growing up during this time because of racial integration. He states, "When we desegregated, they bused us to the Southside and they bused members of my family to the Northside for certain grades. In sixth grade there were gang fights...white against Black. So I had to pick sides. Of course I couldn't pick the Black side because I was on a bus with White boys."

RP3 considers himself open regarding his sexuality. All of his friends are aware that he is gay. He has not officially told his family about his sexuality but assumes they all know. RP3 is happy with the goals he has achieved in his lifetime.

Research Participant Four (RP4): RP4 is a single 27 year old college educated visual specialist for a clothing outlet in a major metropolitan city. RP4 was raised Christian and considers himself to be a spiritual individual. He currently lives in a middle class diverse neighborhood outside the city where he works. He considers himself to be an active member of the gay community attending events such as gay pride...a celebration of sexual identity expression.

RP4 originally grew up in a very diverse neighborhood until his parents socioeconomic position improved. RP4 then moved into a suburban area where there were not many minorities present. RP4 considers himself open regarding his sexuality. His family, friends, and coworkers all know about his sexuality. RP4 has been open regarding his sexuality since his sophomore years in college. He stated, "I wasn't like tapping people on their shoulder saying, "Hey I'm gay." I just stopped pretending to not be (gay)."

Research Participant Five (RP5): RP5 is a partnered 29 year old college educated educator currently working on his license for clinical counseling. RP5 originally grew up Baptist until a family member founded a Pentecostal church, which then became the family church. RP5 was raised with strict religious views. He was raised to view the homosexual lifestyle as immoral and that its' punishment is hell. RP5's family is from Jamaica. RP5 considers Jamaican culture anti-homosexual. RP5 is a member of a GLBT basketball organization in a major metropolitan city. He currently lives in a diverse neighborhood outside of a major metropolitan city.

Despite RP5's cultural upbringing and familial views toward homosexuality, RP5 is open regarding his sexuality. He states, "I have never really officially come out of the closet but I have become more accepting with the lifestyle and with who I am." RP5 mentions that he does not go around telling people he is homosexual and shares that information on a need-to-know basis. Some members of his family as well as some of his friends are aware of his sexuality.

Research Participant Six (RP6): RP6 is a single college educated contracting officer for the government. He currently lives in a predominantly white neighborhood. RP6 is currently a participant in a GLBT basketball organization in a major metropolitan city. RP6 grew up in the south. He was raised Baptist but has not found a church in the city he lives in since moving. He considers himself open regarding his sexuality and both his family and friends know that he is gay. He is extremely happy with his life and his current occupation.

Research Participant Seven (RP7): RP7 is a single 28 year old college educated regulatory communications specialist in a major metropolitan city. RP7 considers himself to be spiritual. RP7 is a member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, but is no longer active. RP7 was raised in a diverse neighborhood that included many interracial couples. RP7 currently lives in a very integrated neighborhood inside a major metropolitan city. His neighborhood is more African than African American.

RP7 considers himself open regarding his sexuality. His family and friends all know about his sexuality. He has been open regarding his sexuality for the last eight to nine years.

Research Participant Eight (RP8): RP8 is a single 44 year old college educated healing artist. He specializes in Yoga, Aromatherapy, and a multitude of other talents. He does not consider himself associated with any particular religion. He was raised Christian and is currently an interfaith seminary student studying the inter-faith path. He is part of several organizations and communities. He is involved in the leather community, the inter-faith community, and one of the largest Black AIDS organizations in the nation.

RP8 is open regarding his sexuality. He states, "I never really looked at myself as being in or out of the closet so I really cant say I go around telling people that I'm gay or that I have relationships with other men, but I don't say that I'm not gay. So if it ever really comes up I'm pretty open with the information. I don't volunteer the information if I don't feel like it's a need to." His family, coworkers, and friends know about his sexuality. He is very happy with the life that he has lead.

Research Participant Nine (RP9): RP9 is a single 26 year old college educated film and arts major. He is currently unemployed. He is currently trying to pursue a career in filmmaking in the filmmaking industry. He does not consider himself religious. He did attend a Christian Academy in his youth. He currently lives in rural predominantly Black neighborhood.

RP9 grew up in a working lower class neighborhood. He attended a mixture of diverse and predominantly White institutions. RP9 attended one institution that had uneasy racial relations and endured racial discrimination in the form of name calling from passing vehicles. He considers himself open regarding his sexuality. His family and friends both know about his sexuality.

Research Participant Ten (RP10): RP10 is a single 33 year old college educated professional. He currently works as a consultant in a major metropolitan city. He states that he has a relationship with God and he prays. He currently lives in a major metropolitan city.

RP10 was raised by, what he describes, a Christian fundamentalist family. He stated that he was raised without any color consciousness. He also says that Blacks made fun of him when he was younger for speaking proper and making good grades. White folks saw him as an exceptional Black student. He was kicked out of his household as a child because of his sexuality. He considers himself open regarding his sexuality and has been open since he was 16 years old when he was kicked out. RP10 moved out after disclosing and engaged in dangerous activities. He stated, "So...umm...after I came out I was a street hustler and I had a full time job...stole out the cash register there too!" RP10's process of disclosing his sexuality and accepting who he was almost lead him to suicide. Eventually, he picked himself up, got his GED, attended community college, and eventually graduated with a college degree.

Research Participant Eleven (RP11): RP11 is a 26 year old college educated assistant property manager for a high rise residential building outside of a major metropolitan city. He considers himself Christian and currently attends services. He is also currently involved in a relationship with another gay Black man. He currently lives in a predominantly Black neighborhood in a major metropolitan city.

RP11 grew up in a mixture of predominantly Black neighborhoods and suburban diverse neighborhoods. When he was younger, RP11 was teased heavily for being effeminate and was constantly called gay by his fellow students. RP11 stated that the name calling stopped once he got into high school. RP11 considers himself open regarding his sexuality. His friends, family, and coworkers know about his sexuality. He has been open with his sexuality for the past 10 years.

Research Participant Twelve (RP12): RP12 is a single 41 year old ex-military veteran with some college education. He considers himself Baptist but does not go to services because he just moved into a major metropolitan city. His current neighborhood is diverse consisting of both Blacks and whites. RP12 grew up in a predominantly white community but lived in a predominantly Black neighborhood as a child. He has a past history of drug abuse and was in a relationship with another gay Black male for approximately 10 years. RP12's was honorably discharged from the military after his sexuality was discovered. Despite being discharged, he

feels his military experience was the best experience of his life. He considers himself open regarding his sexuality and has known he was gay since he was 15. RP12 is also HIV positive. His family and friends know about his sexuality.

Research Participant Thirteen (RP13): RP13 is a single 32 year old college educated special education educator outside of a major metropolitan city. He considers himself Baptist. He does not regularly attend services. He is a member a gay organization that creates a safe space for men interested in dating interracially. He is also a member of a gay naturist group and a gay volunteering organization. He currently lives in a predominantly Black neighborhood with another gay Black male who is African.

RP13 considers himself open regarding his sexuality. When asked about the disclosure of his sexuality, RP13 stated, “Not for work, and not with family...but in other respects...if someone else who’s gay asks me if I’m gay...you know, yeah. Do I participate in gay social events and activities...yes I do. So one wouldn’t be closeted and do that.” His friends know about sexuality. His coworkers and family do not appear to be aware of his sexuality.

Research Participant Fourteen (RP14): RP14 is a single 38 year old college educated marketing communications professional. He does not consider himself religious. He currently lives in a co-op in a major metropolitan city. His neighborhood is predominantly Black. RP14 is a member several professional organizations and a gay Black organization that offers HIV services to the gay Black community.

RP14 was a popular student. He went to school in a major metropolitan city. The school and neighborhood was predominantly comprised of middle class Black individuals. RP14 considers himself to be open regarding his sexuality. His friends and family are aware of his sexuality. He does not feel the need to disclose his sexuality to his coworkers. RP14 comes from a Jamaican family and was immediately rejected upon disclosing his sexuality. He has had a contentious relationship throughout his childhood and much of his adulthood with his family. He has since reconciled with his family.

Research Participant Fifteen (RP15): RP15 is a single 32 year old college educated waiter for a gay restaurant in a major metropolitan city. He was raised Episcopalian and Methodist. He currently lives in a diverse neighborhood in a major metropolitan city. He feels very comfortable in his skin and is happy with his life.

RP15 identifies as Black although his mother is White. He was brought up in a mixture of both upper and middle class environments. He went to private schools and public schools. RP15 considers himself to be open regarding his sexuality. Coming out was easy for RP15. He states, “I told everyone my junior year on Easter vacation one by one...I took them for a little walk. I had a very unique experience. It’s a little easier when your parents have money.” He currently has a strong relationship with his White mother and a non-existent relationship with his Black father. His friends, family, and coworkers are aware of his sexuality.

Overall the 15 participants ranged in age (25 – 44). Seven participants were in their twenties. All of the participants were college educated and were raised with religious backgrounds. Two of the participants took college classes although they did not graduate. Two of the participants were of Jamaican descent and one of the participants was interracial. The participant that was interracial identified himself as African-American. All of the participants lived on the outskirts of or within a major metropolitan city. Two of the participants were in relationships at the time of their interview. Two participants also identified they had HIV. Lastly, all of the participants stated that they lived their lives openly and had disclosed their sexuality to their family and close friends.

In Chapter five, I continue to flesh out the data results from the research participant interviews.

CHAPTER 5
HOW DO GAY BLACK MEN DESCRIBE
WHAT THEIR LIVES OUGHT TO BE?

When I presented the question to the research participants I asked them to present their answer two-fold. I asked first, “How would you describe what you feel your life should be, or in other words, if this were a perfect world...how would you want your life to be?” I then asked, before they gave their reply to the initial question, “What would you change about the world to make your life easier?” Two major responses emerged: gay Black men who were happy with the way their life currently is and gay Black men who desired to live their lives without restriction or fear. Of the 15 research participants, five participants felt that their lives were the way they should be, seven desired to live their lives without racial and/or sexual discrimination, and three desired material improvements (i.e. a partner, an ideal job, etc.).

Gay Black Men Happy with their Life the way it is

The participants that were happy with their lives gave a variety of responses. RP6 gave the simplest response stating, “My life has really been great.” Another participant felt that his life is as it should be and saw the obstacles he has been faced with as instances that have made him stronger.

“As hard as it is for me to get where I’m trying to go and how tough the world makes it for me to do so. I wouldn’t change the world because I feel the obstacles would make me stronger.” (RP9)

Three participants stated that they had no regrets and felt that they are living the lives they should be living.

“I like simplicity. I can really say that I’m living my ideal life. I can really say that I’m doing what I want to do and I’ve done most of the things I’ve wanted to do so my life for the most part is good.” (RP8)

“I don’t think I have any regrets about life now. I’ve accomplished what I’ve wanted to accomplish. I’ve got a college degree, a good job, a house. Of course everybody’s

looking for the perfect relationship, but it's not a mandatory in my life to be happy.”
(RP3)

“I don't play the lottery and I don't gamble. And I make it a point not to regret anything. When I wake up in the morning and look in the mirror...ultimately, I like what I see. I'm very comfortable and things could be better but it's just fine. I don't know what better is, you know. I pay my bills; I have money to play with. It's not like I can jump on a plane and go to Italy. I wouldn't change anything. I have the simplest life of anyone I know.”
(RP15)

The Desire to Live Without Restrictions and Without Fears

Seven participants, when asked the research question, stressed a desire to live without restrictions or fears regarding their race and sexuality in their everyday lives. Overwhelmingly, the participants in this category desired a life in which everyone got along. RP14's response best summarizes the participants in this category's responses. RP14 stated, “When I want to change the world it's not about making my life easier. It's making other people being able to live better with one another.” RP1 acknowledged that he felt a need to protect himself and expressed a desire to not be judged or pressured because of his race or sexuality.

“I kind of feel like I'm kind of living where I do not feel pressured by my color or my sexuality. But then again, to be realistic, you constantly have to put yourself in that state. I guess because you feel a need to protect yourself constantly which, is umm, not a good thing. But then again, it's like, what creature does not want to protect itself. So like, I would say that I'd want to live like I currently am. Like, why am I being judged for my color?” (RP1)

RP1 continued stating,

“I think my sexuality is a part of me, but I'm not run by it. My race is what people see. I would not like to be bound by that.” (RP1)

RP5 and RP7 expressed similar sentiments in how they felt their lives should be. Both desired lives in which they did not have to be on guard in certain settings.

“A perfect world to me would be, especially regarding my family, for people to be more open minded about gay relationships. I feel like anyone in a gay relationship, they have to kind of live this secret. Not all gay relationships but most. You could be open, but there are certain settings where you have to hold back and show restraint. In a perfect world I think that we could just be us. We could go out to eat and sit down and not have to take our rings off. We could go to a jewelry store and not get weird looks. Just feeling accepted across the board.” (RP5)

“Not having to go into environments on guard. I feel like a lot of times when I go into an environment where there are a lot of heterosexual people, even if they are cool, that I’m in like attack dog mode. I’m waiting for someone to say something to me offensive or out of pocket. And I don’t like that; I don’t like having to go into situations feeling like I am going to have to defend myself. You know...against a remark that’s inappropriate or a question that’s inappropriate.” (RP7)

RP11, RP12, and RP13 all expressed desires to live in spaces where discrimination based on racism and sexism were obsolete.

“My ideal life, pretty much, would probably be less racial tension. Even in an all Black neighborhood...and coming from the Midwest as well, those issues we had to deal with in the Midwest. It’s obvious, it’s blatant, and it’s something you cannot escape no matter where you go.” (RP11)

When asked about changing the world to make his life easier, RP12 stated,

“How we judge people based on skin color; not just skin color but anything. How the world just judges people on insignificant things that have no bearing on what type of person you are on the inside. And that’s sex too.” (RP12)

RP12 fleshed out his answer saying,

“It would just be nice to live in a nice area with someone I care deeply about, that I’m committed to, and I don’t have to worry about us harming people or people harming us.” (RP12)

RP13’s answer was similar.

“It’s like when I went to Canada with my friends for vacation. How you cross that border line and people don’t care whether you are gay, straight, or whatever.” (RP13)

RP13 continued stating,

“Where in the U.S. it’s like being gay has its negative connotations. You have to kind of watch yourself and how you project yourself when you are sort of feeling open and talking about yourself. The internal versus external homophobia...all that good stuff. How people will perceive you. I wish I were in a place like pass the borders of Canada where I can be, live free, to be me to any group of people and any type of respect. You know, there’s respect for me being me instead of just tear down that you see in the heterosexual community.” (RP13)

Three participants (RP2, RP4, and RP10) all desired material improvements in their lives.

“If I had a perfect live I would have a house. I would have two or three cars, a nice bank account, and a nice husband.” (RP2)

RP2 added the desire to be heterosexual citing religious reasoning. He stated,

“If I had a choice I would be straight with a family and a wife and all those things I said previously.” (RP2)

“I think that we were put on this world for a purpose and I believe that purpose was to procreate and have children. I don’t question if being gay is wrong because if there is a God, and if that is what his plan was, then we are breaking his plan and he is not going to be happy about that.” (RP2)

Both RP4 and RP10 desired partners and thriving careers doing things that they loved.

“Being happy and successful...having a relationship, or a man, or whatever. First and foremost, I’d want to be doing what I really love as far as work is concerned.” (RP4)

“My ideal life is one in which I’m partnered. Umm, in which I have a fully thriving artistic career and I’m still managing, whenever possible either through my professional work or my artistic work, being engaged in some kind of giving back to young people or the community as a whole.” (RP10)

Overall, five participants stated that they were happy with their current lives, seven participants desired lives without racial or sexual forms of discrimination, and three participants desired material improvements (i.e. a nice house, a nice car, money, etc.). Those participants who stated that they were happy with their current lives simply acknowledged that they had no regrets and that their experiences have made them stronger individuals. The seven participants who desired lives without racial or sexual discrimination did not wish to be defined by their race or their sexuality. They desired lives in which they did not have to constantly be on guard in various settings because of how someone may perceive their race or sexuality. They all desired lives in which racial and sexual differences were obsolete. Lastly, the three participants who desired material improvements also desired relationships. One of the participants who desired material improvements also desired to be heterosexual citing religion and God’s plan of procreation as his reasons. With seven of the 15 participants desiring lives without racial or sexual discrimination, it is apparent that both racism and homophobia have impacts on their lives.

In the next Chapter, I disclose the last of the results from the research participant interviews. Several themes emerged in the interview results that correlate to the themes discussed within the literature review.

CHAPTER 6

WHAT DO GAY BLACK MEN SEE AS OBSTACLES AFFECTING THEIR OPPORTUNITY TO LIVE THE LIVES THEY OUGHT TO BE LIVING? BLACK GAY MEN AND THE GAY COMMUNITY

The final overarching question asked to the participants was what do you see as obstacles affecting your opportunity to live the lives you ought to be living?

When asked, in general, what obstacles restricts their opportunities to live the lives they feel they should be living, the majority of the participants cited misconceptions of homosexuality and the stereotypes that come along with being a gay man (RP5, RP10, RP13, RP14). Responses regarding misconceptions of homosexuality and the stereotypes that come along with being a gay man are as follows:

“I would say when I first began to experiment and be involved in the gay community...it was a lot of negativity. I think I went into this whole thing with the misperception of what it was to be gay. Again I assumed that gay guys were flaming and twirling...and I totally did not want to be that person. Then meeting people and finding my boyfriend; it was nice. It totally did not go the way I wanted it to originally. Meeting him changed my perspective because I assumed that all gay men wanted sex.” (RP5)

“When you grow up Black and gay and extremely effeminate as a child you are constantly receiving messages of what you can't be and what you cant do and who you aren't. I've just spent a great deal of time un-learning those lessons giving yourself permission to be great; giving yourself permission to do...umm...that your voice is valid, that your work is valid...that your contribution is significant and then to be able to realize your fullest potential. You have to constantly give yourself permission to do that because everything says that you're not supposed to.” (RP10)

“I would say restrictions would be people's understanding of what gay is and perceptions of the community and tolerance. I think those are the obstacles that...some of it's on my

part and some of its on, more of a big part on those who impose those ideas as being bad.” (RP13)

“I think there is a barrier, like I said before, in terms of how people see gay men. And I think that would be a huge obstacle because that does limit your networking abilities in a broader sense. If you were in an occupation where you kind of thrived off of that community then it’s great; but, I’m not necessarily in an occupation that does that. It would be great but right now it’s an obstacle where you are constantly calculating how much information you tell people about yourself and when and/or how.” (RP14)

In a similar answer, RP7 and RP8 both stated that because of perceptions society has of homosexuals, they felt they could not live their lives openly and freely. They state,

“Just the level of comfort I would like to have that I don’t have a lot of times in certain situations. Even here there are times where I’ll go to one of a luncheon and I just feel like people are talking shit. And its not that I really care because I don’t, but I just feel like at this stage; I’m almost thirty, I’m kind of tired of dealing with that.” (RP7)

“I don’t know if whether ‘obstacles’ is a word that I would use. I do battle mentally whether I should be more out and more open. I think its important for men, especially men of color to present themselves to the world because that’s the only way the world is going to change and that’s the only way the world is going to know what I means to be a man who loves and haves sex with other men. I think that we have an idea of what that is through entertainment, through Hollywood, and stuff like that. And pretty much what we’ve gotten so far is from a White perspective and from a more effeminate perspective. So I think it’s important that men of color show up in the world and show that we are like everyone else. We have the same needs and same concerns. And, we pretty much want the same things out of life.” (RP8)

Two participants gave responses regarding social identifiers other than their sexuality. They stated,

“I’m Black. Honestly, within the gay communities that I’ve been involved in, it’s, I’m Black (laughter). It’s not necessarily who I’m attracted to or taste wise; however, regardless of the situation I’ve always been seen as my color first (my race first) before being gay.” (RP1)

RP1 continued citing how he uses his race to his advantage,

“Like if I feel that I’m threatened (like I don’t want to mess with anybody), if I feel like I’m being threatened because of my sexuality. The gayness goes away and I will focus on every aspect of that negative stereotype that comes with being a black man to defend myself (it will come out) and I will be the most intimidating creature on the planet knowing good and damn well that unless I have to defend my life I’m not going to do anything (laughter) but I will use it to my advantage. And I also feel that, if that’s what society is going to give you (while I’m not an extremist) there’s nothing wrong with using that if it’s to protect yourself.” (RP1)

RP12 simply stated,

“Being Black (laughter)...I came from Los Angeles and color has a lot to do with it there unfortunately. Being Black holds you back, being gay holds you back, being HIV positive; I hold myself back because I can’t do something. I don’t have the endurance like other people. Age holds you back.” (RP2)

The other participants cited the following as obstacles that restrict their opportunity to live the lives they feel they should be living: three participants stated themselves (RP4, RP11, RP15); one participant identified financial barriers (RP9); and three participants stated that there were no obstacles restricting their opportunities to live their lives the way they feel they should be living them (RP2, RP3, and RP6).

When asked what their experiences have been like within the gay community only RP2 stated that his experience has been negative. He states,

“I’m going to have to say mostly negative just because my experiences have not been good. I have not connected with the right person.” (RP2)

Nine participants stated that their experiences have been positive or mostly positive (RP1, RP3, RP4, RP8, RP9, RP12, RP13, RP14, RP15), two participants stated that their experiences have been mixed, but mostly positive (RP5, RP6), and three participants stated that their experiences have been evenly mixed (RP7, RP10, RP11). RP4, while identifying his experience as positive, discussed a problem he has faced within the gay community.

“As far as dating wise goes and relationships, there are certain types of discrimination you will face depending on the type of guy you like or are into.” (RP4)

He continues,

“I wonder if this guy won’t go out with me because I’m brown.” (RP4)

RP14 discussed how the gay community is inviting in his response stating,

“It depends on how you defined the gay community. I think generally speaking, the gay community as whole, every community has issues, and every family has issues. But generally speaking I do think it’s welcoming. Now is it totally inviting...not always...but welcoming. There are times when I’ve been out at conferences or whatever and I’ll walk by a guy and he may be White and I know that he’s gay and he knows that I’m gay. And no one else knows that we’re gay. And then there’s that connection that’s there.” (RP14)

When asked to describe the gay community, six participants described it as being diverse and multifaceted (RP1, RP4, RP5, RP6, RP13, RP14). Two participants described the community as being dependent on who you interact with (RP2, RP11). RP11 discussed how he has felt excluded from the white gay community stating,

“I pretty much always surrounded myself around Black individuals because I’ve always felt more comfortable around Black gays than white gays. Black gays, they kind of; even though there are some issues you have to deal with. Well I pretty much have been able to be myself around Black gays. With white gays...I am myself but there’s always an issues. You are always either pushed away from conversations or felt like you are an outsider around White gays. Or they make you feel like you are not as good as them, they are better. (RP11)

Two participants stated that the gay community was no different than any other societal community (RP7, RP9). One participant described the gay community as a microcosm of society (RP8). Another described it as complex, different, and a community in which you have to protect and lookout for yourself (RP3). RP10 described it as a community in an identity crisis. RP12 described it as intense. Lastly, RP15 described it as a community that’s forbidden and one that heterosexuals wish they could emulate.

When asked the follow-up question of the racial make-up of the community five participants described the gay racial make-up of the gay community as segregated (RP2, RP4, RP7, RP10, RP12). RP2 spoke of the segregation in the gay community and his desire to date interracially stating,

“It’s very very racially segregated. I don’t know why but there are a lot of White men that are interested in Black men but they won’t approach Black men because they are scared for reasons. The only reason I think is because they don’t want people to say anything about them liking out of their race. Now there are White men that don’t care. But I’ve always experienced that a majority of those White men may have been raised around Black people. So they are very comfortable with that. An educated White person that may be gay and may be interested in Black men may have a more difficult time from a White person that was raised around Black people. And that’s been my experience. The type of White men I’m attracted to, are the educated people and they don’t normally approach Black people. And we have segregated Black Pride, White pride whatever. We have segregated clubs.” (RP2)

RP7 spoke on the racial make-up of the gay community and segregation within the gay community as well stating,

“Very segregated. And it may depend on where you are in the country...but here it’s very segregated. Its like the White guys hang out here and the Black guys hang out here. If you go to a club, the Black guys are upstairs and the White guys are downstairs. If there is any kind of interaction on an intimate level...a lot of the times I feel that it is just a sexual conquest. Whether it’s a Black guy who wants to say he had a White guy or a White guy trying to fulfill the fantasy of being with somebody Black. I just don’t feel like it’s a very respectful relationship a lot of the time.” (RP7)

Four participants described the community as racially diverse (RP6, RP8, RP9, RP14). Two participants described the community as predominantly white or viewed by society as predominantly white (RP1, RP15). RP1 stated,

“I’ve never seen, until recently; recent years in which I’m seeing diversity within the gay community and that’s only because it’s a forced acknowledgement, not a willingness and the picture that people get of the gay community is that there is nothing else but the white male and its White dominated still. I feel that the community itself is welcoming but then it’s kind of like, welcoming at one point and you want to stay away at another.” (RP1)

RP1 continued his answer clearing up what he meant by ‘staying away.’

“You have to deal with the same kind of oppressive moments, the same kind of forcing yourself to fit into it. It’s just like being within the greater society as a minority (just another type). I can understand why a lot of culturally diverse people coming into this larger community are like afraid almost to join it because it’s like I don’t want to add another tally to my list. Then you get to the point where you feel like you have to blend the two. Like being Black and gay or Asian and gay. And what is more overpowering than dealing with the prejudices and stigmas of one group over another.” (RP1)

“And then you are also seen as a figure head. Where ever you stand. You are a figure head of being a Black male in white society. You are a figure head of being a Black male in the gay community. It’s like you speak for that group or for what you represent. You are known as gay so you have to speak for gays in larger society. Then it’s like you are black and gay so which comes first...do you speak to one of those identities first. It’s a lot of pressure to take sometimes. I think it takes a strong person to do both.” (RP1)

Two participants described the community as racially equal although they both felt that people perceive it to be predominantly white because more whites are open regarding their sexuality (RP3, RP5). RP5 stated,

“I think that there are a large majority of Black males, probably even more that are gay than White, but the only difference is you have the down low (DL) crew in the Black lifestyle. I mean you have it in the White lifestyle too but its more professionals, lawyers, doctors, married with kids, etc. that are DL so to speak. It’s probably as many white as black. I don’t know about Asians because I don’t have many Asian friends. I think the Hispanic community is similar to the Black community because its very hush hush in their community too.” (RP5)

RP14 spoke on the same subject and focused on the gay community as a whole stating,

“The gay community, in my opinion by in-large, are in the closet. There are so many people that are out there that who for whatever reasons, professional reasons, are not going to be out and about. They don’t feel comfortable going to gay establishments because of stereotypes that are in place about those places.” (RP14)

One participant stated that the racial make-up of the gay community was dependent on locality (i.e. cities more diverse and suburbs more white) (RP13). Lastly, one participant stated that he does not have much interaction with white gays and felt that his opinion has been colored by that fact (RP11).

When asked what type of gay people they surround themselves by, 13 participants stated that they surround themselves around positive, goal-oriented, similar individuals (RP1, RP2, RP3, RP4, RP5, RP6, RP8, RP10, RP11, RP12, RP13, RP14, RP15). Those same participants stated that they surround themselves around a racially diverse group of people. Two participants stated that the majority of their gay friends are similar and Black (RP7, RP9).

When asked whether or not whites are welcoming of Blacks within the gay community, three of the participants said yes (RP2, RP5, RP6) and four said no (RP1, RP3, RP7, RP12). RP1 stated,

“Again I have to touch on the fact that it’s like a blending of the two. One side of me wants to say no, I don’t see it at all. And then another side of me (speaking from my own experience) is yes. I guess it’s like the benefits that I can bring to the group...meaning that I can be the black friend. One on side it seems like this is my club and you are not welcome regardless. You know what, I’m just going to say no (laughter). I don’t think so and I’m not saying this because there are not good people out there. In a general sense though; no. Mainly for Black people because that’s my own experience...but I’d also say that they are just not welcome to any group. There are those select few that are open and honest...but coming into the gay community where it is supposed to be open and welcoming...you just don’t get that unless you are white. You will get that full heartedly without questionable doubt if you are white, but if you are any other ethnicity you have to prove yourself. You have to prove your merit or worth and frankly I’m getting tired of it.” (RP1)

Five participants stated that it depended on a variety of factors. RP4 and RP8 both stated that it depends on the scene that the Black individual is in with the white individual. RP10 stated that it depends on how much emphasis the Black individual places on their race. He states,

“They are welcoming depending on the level of emphasis you place on race. If you place no emphasis on your race or your culture...outside of superficial things such as Kwanza or whatever, umm, then, if you place that emphasis then you are seen as defensive. You are seen as sensitive. If you are sending out social cues that you are not willing to date or

have sex with White men you will find that you have less of a space within their world. But, you know, I'm a hard liner on this one. I believe that in general whites with capital, because not all whites have capital, whites with capital, if you are not fucking them, entertaining them, or cheap labor; they don't have no use for you." (RP10)

RP11 and RP14 said they are welcoming if the Black individual is willing to assimilate. RP11 and RP14 stated,

"No. If you are not willing to adapt to their standards then no. There are some White gay males that are welcoming to some Black people, but for the most part, the majority of the white gay men I've found they are not that welcoming." (RP11)

"I think generally speaking in a white community, there is an idea that what should bring the world together is acceptance of everybody and I think that the strategy for acceptance is everyone kind of be all alike. And if you're different or of a different point of view there might be a sense of rejection." (RP14)

RP15 said yes if they have affections toward Blacks. He stated,

It just depends. If they are attracted to Black men...that's a big plus. I don't know, I guess I have heard people think that I have an attitude. A lot of people say you know, snow queen. And it's all about who you know, in this town. (RP15)

When asked what a snow queen was, RP15 replied, "It's a man who dates white men or hangs out with white men." RP9 and RP13 both stated that they do not put themselves in spaces where whites could be unwelcome to them.

When asked if whites were welcoming of them within the gay community, four participants simply stated yes (RP5, RP8, RP10, RP15). Two participants said yes because they felt they had similar socioeconomic backgrounds as the people they've interacted with within the gay community (RP4, RP14).

“I would say so. I don’t know. I think it’s because I have similar life experiences, educational level, and a similar upbringing. Like I said earlier you gravitate towards those who have similar traits to you.” (RP4)

Two participants stated that it depends on where you venture within the community (RP7, RP13) while three other participants stated that they do not go to places within the gay community where they would feel unwelcome (RP6, RP9, RP11). RP7 added,

“When they are it’s the thing of, well you are a nice black guy. Like I’m some kind of anomaly. When I have interacted with White guys and I’m like, what does that mean? And then it’s like, you want to prod it out. Like okay, what’s been your experience with Black men to say to me you are a nice Black guy? So I don’t know what people expect when they meet someone who’s Black but I find that to be offensive personally.” (RP7)

RP11 discussed past problems stating,

“Just different things in the office. I was always the last person to know about things when they happened. I was always the outsider. And sometimes I didn’t even know about certain changes that were made within the office I was the last to know so when I did do something that we were doing before. This is an example. Friday before we’ll leave they’ll change something. Monday when I come in I won’t know about this change and I will still be presenting this change to everyone. And instead of them sending me an email, I won’t be included on mass emails for things. Different clients that we’d have to come in and out of the office, I wasn’t included. For new clients, when new clients did come aboard I was not introduced to them. Umm, if I did get introduced to them I was walking in on them.” (RP11)

Several of the participants stated that they felt welcomed but with certain stipulations. RP1 felt he was welcomed but also felt that he had to prove himself worthy of hanging out in the gay community.

“I would say yes because I’ve had to earn my worth. For me, they identify with me being Black first. For me, the being gay is secondary. And its like you are gay, okay so what; but you are Black and this is the more intriguing portion. They know what gay is because they can identify with gay. But they cannot identify with Black and its like, ‘let’s see how well you can do...let’s hang out.’” (RP1)

RP2 felt welcomed but only as a friend (nothing beyond friendship). RP3 felt welcomed around whites that had affections toward Black individuals.

“No I don’t think so. I was in this discussion with someone because I obviously like White guys. I find that a lot of white guys that like black guy s but won’t date Black guys. I find that’s a problem. I’ve been with a lot of guys that who like me sexually and are attracted to me intellectually but would never date me based upon my race. I think that’s a problem and I’m not sure exactly why they do that I’m sure it’s just geared. They are more comfortable in that setting. It’s a lot harder to maintain a bi-racial relationship.” (RP3)

Only one participant definitively stated no, citing that he often felt excluded when in the gay community (RP12). He stated,

“No. I just feel like I have not received, overall, I just feel very excluded in many of the activities and organizations that are predominantly White. And there are many in LA and I have tried to be a part of them and I have gotten the feeling that, ‘you know what, you don’t have a place here buddy.’ Well, it’s just, it’s a very sort of catty cold shoulder. I don’t know how to put it in words because its not really about words its about actions, you know, when people don’t really receive you very well and it doesn’t feel warm or genuine or inclusive. Now there are people that have welcomed me in but the majority is very standoffish, and they will sort of wait and check you out. They are very guarded.” (RP12)

When asked if racism was prevalent within the gay community, 14 of the 15 participants answered yes. Participant RP5 was the only individual who did not believe that racism was prevalent within the gay community. When asked the question he stated,

“No, but let me explain this. I don’t think its racism that exists within the gay community. I think back to my first year in college and I walked into the cafeteria and I thought, “Where are the Black people?” I think we do that instinctively to ourselves. I do not think it’s on purpose, it’s our comfort. I remember having my tray and praying that there was a table of Black people there. I walked in and sure enough I walked over to the table full of Black people. We were all sitting there being thankful we were all there. I think we do it to ourselves even within the gay community. If you go to a function where there is a mixed crowd. I also think it has something to do with the persons up bringing. If you grew up where the Whites did there thing and the Blacks did their thing you have a tendency to stay in that frame of mind. You don’t purposefully say I don’t want to hang with them, it’s just a comfort. So if the hip hop is upstairs, I’m going upstairs. I don’t think it’s necessarily racism but I think we just instinctively do it to ourselves. We separate ourselves to coexist.” (RP5)

RP13 and RP14 added that they felt that racism was in all facets of society, not just the gay community. RP13 adds,

“You know, you see it online. I prefer White male only, White male prefer white male or Black male prefer black male. So yes it exists, it pervades through anything.” (RP13)

RP4 added that he felt that the racism was not blatant and typically behind Blacks backs.

“I do. I think it’s a little bit under the surface, it’s not as blatant. I do to some extent. Like on dating websites where they say, I’m not into Black guys or stuff like that. You are not going to see that so much from a black person.” (RP4)

RP3 discussed not only racism from whites, but also racism from Blacks.

“A lot of times, people may not want to hang out with certain types of black people whether it’s because they are feminine or they are always broke or something about them that you don’t like. And so, you might say, “well I don’t hang out with him because he’s thuggish or ghetto.” That doesn’t mean that he is not a good person and if you took the time to know him you might know who he is, but just because of the visual display you see you are gonna already have an attitude for anything that he is gonna say to you and have a preconceived notion of who he is.” (RP3)

When asked if they had experienced racism within the gay community, one participant simply stated yes (RP12). Three participants stated that they have not experienced racism within the gay community (RP5, RP8, RP11). RP11 added that while he has not experienced racism, his friends have experienced it within the gay community. Seven participants stated that they have experienced racism in the form of relationships or being perceived as sexual (RP1, RP2, RP3, RP4, RP10, RP13, RP14). RP1, RP2, and RP10 all shared instances where they experienced racism sexually.

“There was a relationship I tried to pursue. It was the pivotal moment for me. There was a point I was pursuing a relationship with someone and the only hindrance, as I was told, the only reason we are not dating is because of my color. And because of instances that he had in his past that affected that. Like where he grew up his social dynamic with Black people in his past. And I asked if he could get past that and see the person that I am and he said no. I was devastated. It was an all time low moment. This was also, for me, around the same time I was learning to let my guard down. I was also learning about my own race and involving my own self in my own culture, involving myself in both sides of being Black and gay. I was basically like ‘this is one moment where there is a definite gap that will not be fixed because of race’ not because of being gay or us getting to know one another but because of being Black.’ Race was involved in such a detrimental moment in his life that he just could not get past it. I was kind of crushed. At that point I was pretty much done.” (RP1)

“Like I said, I am attracted to positive educated type people. Whenever I find that white person that I’m interested in, it’s almost like they can say or they can be friends but they can’t hang out, they can’t call me, it’s weird. It’s very weird. But then when I see them out at a bar and I say hi they are like, “Oh hi, how are you.” But then when I give them my phone number they will not call. It’s like they can’t cross that boundary. They may even be interested but something’s stopping them.” (RP2)

“Overwhelmingly my racist experiences have happened when I’ve allowed myself to date white folks, which hasn’t happened in a long time. Like 14 years now. But when I did allow myself to date white guys, I had experiences of them putting their arm next to mine and saying ‘ebony and ivory that’s they way it’s supposed to be’ and calling my job asking if they can speak to the chocolate boy. You know, just really, distasteful experiences.” (RP10)

Two participants stated that they have experienced racism in the gay community in the form of remarks, racist comments, and racist actions (RP7, RP15). Two participants stated that they have not experienced racism within the gay community because they have very little interaction with the gay community (RP6, RP9).

When asked if any experiences of racism within the gay community had affected their ability to live the lives they feel they should be living, of those participants that said they had experienced racism only RP2 and RP10 said yes. The other 13 participants all stated that racism within the gay community has not affected their abilities to live the lives they feel they should be living. RP2 and RP10 stated,

“Yes to a certain degree. Because I desire to meet one of these White educated men. And I’m not saying just White educated men, but an educated male. But most of the time what I’m attracted to is a White educated male and it interrupts because if I don’t find it and if I don’t think that I can break that racial barrier then I don’t think I can be happy. And I don’t want to settle.” (RP2)

“They’ve made me more cautious. And that cautiousness may have cost me opportunities. Because I’m always trying to figure out what the angle is and I’m always on guard. And I sure that comes across to some degree. And I know that in terms of access to privilege...to not capitalize on a White gay social network, a professional network is short sighted. It just is; there is a whole network of wealth and opportunity there that if you willing to do the work and if you are willing to sometimes swallow your feelings, then those opportunities are there.” (RP10)

RP14 gave a very unique answer to the question stating,

“No. Because I don’t think that the gay community has any power. That’s what it boils down to. I think racism only matters to me when the person who’s being racist has power to do harm and I don’t think, generally speaking, they have power to do harm in a political way or an economic way. I think that everyone has the power to harm people physically, but I also have the ability to protect myself. But its different when it comes to economics and policies so therefore, because they are not a power elite in this country, to me, their racism is irrelevant.” (RP14)

When asked how they have survived within the gay community as a gay Black man, overwhelmingly all of the participants stated that it’s been a mixture of self-confidence, support systems (i.e. family, friends, various organizations, etc.), and God. Some response included:

“I was my own support system. I did not develop any external sources or support groups until recent years. Where now I have a diverse group of friends that I actually can relate to and they can tell where I’m coming from. It has taken me some time to develop friends where I can talk to them openly about these types of issues.” (RP1)

“I think I have a strong base of friends. I have a lot of friends but I also have core friends and people that I can always talk to. I like to set the bar, not to sound conceited. I will pull one of my friends aside, that is Black, and tell them...you need to step away from that. I’m like for real, just chill out, whatever. do what you need to do take a deep breath.

I look out for some of my other Black friends more closely than I do for my other friends.” (RP4)

“I have a strong support system. Not relying solely on the gay community to provide my support made it easier to navigate my way through.” (RP7)

“I have always been fortunate to have good friends along the way. I’ve always been fortunate a lot of my good friends that are heterosexual and that I grew up with and that I have history with that I was able to come out to them very early when I made the decision I was going to be out. I’ve always had affirming and positive experiences from that. I think that the most important part for me is when I discovered, when I admitted to myself that I am attracted to other men, and then I was able to say to my mother and my sister. It was accepting and affirming so I never [pause], home always felt safe. I never felt judged. So no matter what happened in the world I always knew I was loved by family and friends and I always knew that nothing could happen to me that I could not overcome especially because I had faith and I had physical support of family and friends. So I never thought that anything could happen to me.” (RP8)

“God (laughter). A lot of God...Oh I love God. My faith my faith my faith. I have been enormously blessed. I have a very large strong supportive friendship network that has done everything from get me jobs to paying for semesters of college. Just keeping my Black ass alive. A very strong surrogate family and Black gay network.” (RP10)

“You develop strong connections. Connections with people who are stronger in areas you are not. That’s the key. You have to align yourself with people who know how to navigate in areas that you don’t or cant or whatever. That’s the only way to survive and maintain. Otherwise you get caught up.” (RP12)

BLACK GAY MEN AND THE BLACK COMMUNITY

When asked what their experiences have been like within the Black community, the participants gave the following responses: five participants stated that their experiences have

been negative and that they had problems with the Black community (RP2, RP3, RP7, RP13, RP15); four participants stated that their experiences have been positive (RP1, RP5, RP8, RP14); three participants stated that they had little to no interaction with the Black community (RP4, RP9, RP12); two participants stated that their experiences were negative when they were younger but were more positive now that they are adults (RP6, RP11); and one participant stated that their experiences were positive once the Black individual got to know them (RP10).

RP1 elaborated on his experiences in the Black community as a gay man stating,

“Black people are afraid of gay people because they do not understand it and they do not understand why. They are taught not to understand why to block it out. Black people are terrified of gay. It’s like the biggest disease on the planet. I think this because the Black stereotype of a gay man is a weak girlish figure. Within the black community the man is supposed to be that primary source giver because we were taught that. That continues to this day because this is a male dominated culture. And, while the true support is our women, but they associate anything being gay with something that’s weak and you flush out the weak. Black man is all about power and dominance and who is in control.” (RP1)

He added,

“I feel somewhat lucky about that. Being my size, shape, and how I look does not come across as looking gay or weak. I’m not saying that gay equals weak, but I have been accepted. I come across as the good proper Black male, and I am accepted for that. I’m not hiding that I’m gay. In the Black community it’s easy to hide being gay when it’s never brought up. I’ve noticed the under-cover brother syndrome and it is easy to hide being gay in the Black community if you don’t bring it up and it’s never brought up. It’s not a topic that is brought up at least in my own personal experiences.” (RP1)

RP11 spoke to having problems in the Black community in his youth versus today stating,

“In my younger years, no they were not welcoming at all. I was consistently called a punk or a faggot or a sissy throughout elementary school. It was very difficult because at

that point when you are at such a young age and you are probably questionable about your sexuality. Or you don't even have to be. If someone calls you something for so long and its different people that are saying it, some adults at different times too, its starts to make you question yourself like, "am I a gay, am I a punk, am I a fag or something like that?" Even if you never even thought about sleeping with a man but I mean if different people consistently call you that you begin to question yourself and that happened pretty much all of my childhood." (RP11)

RP7 and RP15 spoke about their negative experiences stating,

"Well, I will say that I feel like I've never been treated more disrespectfully as a gay Black man then by other Black men who are straight. And some Black women too. It doesn't happen all the time but there is definitely a hostility. I think that people in this era of the Down Low there is definitely some tension. And I don't always feel welcome. And a lot of the times I will go out of my way to avoid large groups of Black people." (RP7)

"If I see a group of Black men walking I will cross the street. I don't know, I don't like it. But that's just who I am. I just don't want to deal with it. Giving up a cigarette, fear of being mugged. Yes, I am that person." (RP15)

When asked how they would describe the Black community, the participants gave the following responses: six participants stated that the community was diverse and multifaceted (RP4, RP5, RP8, RP12, RP13, RP14); two participants stated that it was no different than the white community (RP3, RP6); three participants stated that the Black community was welcoming, accepting, and forgiving yet closed minded and uneducated at the same time (RP7, RP9, RP11); one participant stated that it was a powerhouse and a force to be reckoned with (RP1); one participant stated that its at its crisis point (RP10); one participant stated that the Black community was positive although he has major issues with gay Black men within the community (RP2); and one participant stated that the Black community is full of negatives and stereotypes (RP15). Comments about the Black community include:

“When you are in, it’s all about keeping it together and supporting everyone that’s there. If we have the means to take care of our own, we are going to do that.” (RP1)

“From my perspective, it’s the same for most people that when you interact with Black people you automatically assume the bad before you assume the good unless you have some kind of visual to negate that.” (RP3)

“I think we are a welcoming people in most cases, but we can also be a close minded people in some cases too. And sometimes it takes Black people some time to warm up to some things in some situations.” (RP7)

“I think it’s a very easy going community. A very accepting community. In some cases it’s a very uneducated community and what they do not know; there might be some animosity towards what they don’t know. They might react often harshly to things that they don’t know because they feel threatened by it or they might feel they might do something towards them.” (RP9)

When asked what type of Black people they surround themselves by, seven participants stated that they surround themselves with positive, non-complacent, professional Blacks (RP2, RP3, RP5, RP6, RP7, RP10, RP12, RP14). RP2 added that he hangs out with mostly heterosexual Blacks. Four participants stated that they do not have much interaction with the Black community (RP1, RP4, RP13, RP15). RP8 stated he hung out with Afro-centric Blacks, RP9 stated that he hung out with Blacks that did not perpetuate Black stereotypes, and RP11 stated that he hangs out with a diverse group of Black friends.

When asked if they thought Blacks were welcoming of gays within the Black community, the participants gave the following responses: 11 participants stated that they did not feel that Blacks were not welcoming (RP1, RP3, RP4, RP5, RP6, RP8, RP9, RP10, RP11, RP13, RP15); three participants stated that they felt Blacks were welcoming only with conditions (RP7, RP12, RP14); and one participant simply stated that he felt Blacks were welcoming of gays within the Black community (RP2).

Participants who did not feel that Blacks were welcoming answered the question as follows:

“No, just giving you my first impression thoughts; no. Because from what I gather from the Black community it’s just not spoken of. It’s the unknown subject and Black people do not like the unknown. (Laughter) I think that as a community we feel that we have enough to deal with and then adding that to the equation is just too much. It’s the unknown and it’s like “I don’t feel like figuring this out now when I still need to figure out why this White man down the street is still looking at me with dirty looks.” (RP1)

“I don’t think they are very welcoming to gay people at all. I think that’s why gay people stay in the closet or don’t exhibit their personalities outside. But once they are in the club they let go.” (RP3)

“There is a deeper religious seed I think sometimes that maybe is used to say “oh that’s not right and that’s against God.” I think that a lot of the times in the Black community if the education level is not there. It’s about who’s more macho, who can prove they are a bigger man, and who is the manliest. If someone is gay and coming off more feminine there’s the thought that oh he is not man enough or something is wrong with him. So I feel like that is an underlying thing there.” (RP4)

“Not at all. I just don’t think so because I think a lot of it has to do with history and what our beliefs are. I think about the past and the impact of religion on our culture. It has really had a significant impact on that. It’s a process and it’s taken awhile to manifest. People can be out whore mongering and stealing but yet it is something about being gay that is wrong. It’s like the one sin that is just the worse ever. But that’s why you have people on the DL and that stuff. They will lie all day long but won’t tell you they are gay.” (RP5)

“I would say, like no, not if they don’t understand it... You have to explain it to them first. They have to understand. Not just meeting a black person they are going to welcome you into their community you have to explain it to them.” (RP6)

“No. Because we are, we have now been made part of the pathologies of the black community. For many Black folks we fall in the same line as people who are on drugs, people who have alcohol problems. I mean, you hear again and again when people raise the love the sinner hate the sin type of argument that somehow no matter how much success I achieve I’m still less than authentically Black or less than a fine contributing example of black manhood because I fuck dudes. And a dude that doesn’t come anywhere near close to the contributions I’ve made can fuck a female and be considered more man than me.” (RP10)

“I think overall, I don’t think the Black community is welcoming to gay men. I think that because the Black male has been underneath assault for so long in this society that I think that we are very protective of him. And also I think that Black men have made some really bad choices collectively. Conscious collectively we make bad choices, which then makes the Black community kind of like tire of us or feel that we are not living up to our end of the deal. I don’t think the black community, I don’t think they understand what it means to be a gay man or be a man who loves men or a man that wants to have sex with men. And this kind of goes to a circle of where we started out and that conversation that I had with my friends and I posed the question, “Are we out enough?” Do we need to be out more? What they see is either a guy who is really effeminate or what they see in Hollywood. Will and Grace or whatever they are showing now. I don’t think they know that it’s their nephew, and their son and their grandson or the guy who they really love and respect and stuff like that. They just need to see us.” (RP8)

Some participants felt they were welcoming with conditions. They stated,

On rare occasion. I think it’s with a lot of conditions. I think its one of those things where they will welcome you as long as you don’t talk about it. As long as they don’t see

it. Its like, “okay, he’s gay but I don’t want to see his boyfriend or I don’t want to see him talking about his boyfriend or I don’t want to see his friends.” They don’t want you to live basically. You can be there but they don’t want to see your life style. They don’t want to share it or experience it.” (RP7)

“My personal experience has been that many don’t accept but they tolerate. That was in my own family. For years I thought that because my mother and I had such a great relationship, I assumed that she accepted my homosexuality and that my dad just tolerated it. But in the end, I realized that my dad was the one who accepted it and my mother was the one who tolerated it. It was very bizarre. She just tolerated it.” (RP12)

When asked if they felt they have been welcomed in the Black community, only participant RP5 felt that he was unwelcome as gay within the Black community.

“As a gay man? No! Those that know, I would say yes, however, with my new recent events I’d say no. I’d say it’s a challenge. Especially with my mother. And with my family definitely no. With my friends, they might be okay just because they are exposed and aware and have traveled. They are open minded about stuff. My relatives though, it wont go well.” (RP5)

The other participants all stated that they felt they have been welcomed although it has been situational (i.e. what environment they are in, how masculine they are, etc.). Some responses include:

“Yeah, I think the answer would be negative if they knew I was gay first when they met me. That would automatically color their opinion. But if they do not know that I am gay when they meet me then they are typically fine.” (RP1)

“Back in LA, I would say after they got to know me and see where I was coming from, yeah. But they give me a hard time at first because they don’t understand. Like if they don’t understand stuff and they try to separate themselves from them but after I explain

where I'm coming from they get to know me as a person, yes they do welcome me into their community." (RP6)

"I'm constantly trying to prove why I'm okay to somebody." (RP10)

When asked if homophobia exists within the Black community, all the participants stated yes. Various participants gave the following responses:

"Yes. I think people don't understand it. Especially with HIV now. Its just a big confusion about what it means to be gay. When I do tell people about me they are shocked because I do not fit that stereotype." (RP5)

"Oh yeah, especially with the whole Down Low and the HIV thing which is really just blown out of proportion. Just this hysteria that Essence magazine and Oprah Winfrey culture has created. You know, always ask your man if he is Bi or Gay. I think it's really gotten out of control and it's made people paranoid and suspicious. Not saying that there isn't a reason to be because it is a problem and there are guys who do that. But I don't think that it's enough of a reason to put a blanket label on every gay guy as being underhanded and dishonest and out to spread some disease. I don't think that's fair." (RP7)

"Yes, I always say this to these two friends of mine. The Black community will forgive you for almost everything except for being gay. If you look at the history of the gay community, you can steal from the church, cheat on your wife, become a crack addict, you can have kids out of wedlock, not take care of your biological kids, you can do all of that. You can even abuse little girls but I just really think that it's the last thing that we as a community do not forgive for." (RP8)

"Homophobia exists, just like racism; I think that it permeates every culture. And it's based on not knowing or not understanding what is the source of homosexuality. And because heterosexuality has a procreation piece to it, there is basis that it is natural.

Homosexuality does not have a procreation option so people have a tendency of thinking that it's unnatural. Also, because Black people on the surface are highly religious; particularly Christianity or Islam, and both of those groups at some point have been critical of homosexuality culturally not necessarily based in religion at all. So therefore you have that additional thing. Because of both of those, you have homophobia." (RP14)

When asked if they have experienced homophobia within the Black community, only three participants stated that they have not (RP1, RP3, RP12). RP12 stated that he does not know if he has ever experienced homophobia. RP1 and RP3 stated that because of their masculine appearance, they have not had to deal with homophobic attitudes within the Black community. RP1 and RP3 stated,

"I myself have never experienced walking down the street and had someone call me a fag. Because someone's probably scared I will shoot them (laughter) in all honesty." (RP1)

"I can't say that I actually have because not a lot of people gauge me as being gay. I think it's because I carry myself the way I want. I don't try to be something that I'm not." (RP3)

All the other participants that stated that they had experienced homophobia stated that it was verbal being called a fag, a faggot, or a sissy (RP2, RP4, RP5, RP6, RP7, RP8, RP9, RP10, RP11, RP13, RP14, RP15). Various participants gave the following responses:

"Yes I have experienced it. I have experienced it a lot now that I'm thinking about it. For example, when I go out with my ex-partner, he dresses a little more feminine than I would like. If we are on a metro or on a bus or walking the street you can see facial expressions and you can see the talking on the side and people confused. It's not that big of an issue, but you can see that they are outdone. They are like what this, this is crazy. And we live in an area where the gay population is HUGE! So for them to look and act and talk like that its crazy. There was times I would be embarrassed to hang out with

people like that, but I'm over that and it's to the point now; it's like, if he wants to dress like that, who cares. Nobody is talking about what you are wearing or anything like that. And I feel that if people are seriously that homophobic to the point where they want to tease somebody or talk about somebody or beat them up. I feel they may be going through certain issues themselves. (RP2)

"I have been in situations where I've felt uncomfortable or I've had people blatantly call me a fag or whatever. Or yelling stuff out their cars or whatever." (RP4)

"Actually in my fraternity (I was around 19). One of my really good friends, she knew that I was gay and her cousin was dating one of the guys in the organization. Somehow she found out I was gay and she told him and he started telling all these people. Oh he's a faggot, he's gay. This was really upsetting to me because this was somebody I had never done anything to. They didn't really know. That hurt. It took me a long time to recover from that. I still don't think I have sometimes, recovered from that, as far as my level of trust of people. That was bad. I had anxiety attacks and such. I remember going to a banquet with some people for Black Men United at a college and almost being sick just being in that space. It was weird." (RP7)

When asked if experiences of homophobia have affected their ability to live the lives they feel they should be living, of those who have experienced homophobia, four participants stated that it has affected their ability to live openly (RP2, RP5, RP7, RP8). Their comments are as follows:

"I am not happy with the point where I cannot go out and I still feel uncomfortable going out with gay people. Cause I'm still working on that. And I feel bad because I'm gay. If someone finds out that I'm gay or that I'm hanging around gay people, why should I feel bad about that? It's more so like those stories you hear about people going out and beating up gay people and killing them just because they are gay. That's what I get nervous about and I don't want to get into a brawl, I don't want to get into a fight where you lose control just because we are out at the movies. But I feel uncomfortable because

you just don't know what's going to happen. I always tell my friends that there is a time and a place to be out and let your hair down. And there are times that you need to put your hair up and relax a little bit. And there are some gay men that don't care. Well, if you don't care you are going to run into some problems." (RP2)

"I know so. I'm very aware of what I wear because of incidents like that. I am becoming less self conscious about what I wear. I wear things now that I would definitely never have worn two years ago. I don't care anymore. I think it's because I'm becoming more comfortable with who I am and I can do that. I think a lot of it has to do with how I was brought up. I am very conscious of how I act when I am in certain settings. I scope areas that I'm in before I can feel free to act myself. But as you get old you just stop caring. I pay my own bills and no one takes care of me so that's where I am now." (RP5)

"I think so, a little bit. It made me approach my family a little bit differently; my extended family. Black people here, I don't particularly trust a lot of the straight Black people here. Particularly the women because I just don't want to be the topic of conversation. You know, 'is he gay or is he straight.'" (RP7)

"Yes and no. I live in a great neighborhood. I, you know, I think I would have more social events or parties at my home, because when I purchased my house 10 to 12 years ago. The whole thing is I wanted to have these great parties and invite people over. Invite a diverse group of people over for really great social events. And sometimes I think, you know what (because I'm not really out to my neighbors but I'm not really in either), I sometimes think if I have a party and I have it on the front of my yard or my back yard or coming out of my house; 20 obviously gay men, what would my neighbors think? Would they think differently of me? My elderly neighbors who I go over and help stuff with, women, would they think differently of me. Would the teenage boys who live across the street who say, "Hey what's up Bro?" Are they going to say is he a faggot or is he gay. So yeah I do think about that." (RP8)

Three participants stated that it affected their ability to live openly when they were younger; however, now that they are adults, experiences of homophobia in the Black community does not affect their ability to live the lives they feel they should be living (RP9, RP10, RP11).

“If I go to back when I was a teenager like 16, 17ish. You know, I felt a little threatened by that. I felt like that if I decided to come out, which I wasn’t even thinking about at the time because I didn’t quite understand my feelings at that point, but it did run across my mind a few times. Like, what if I was really out and gay. How would these people perceive me and, you know, being scared to do so because of how certain family members talked about gay people and viewed gay people. But as I’ve gotten older, all of the sudden I just became, more of who I am and just really, to put it simply, after years of certain experiences, I just came to this ‘really I just don’t give a shit philosophy.’ This is my life and I have to lead it.” (RP9)

“Probably at my earlier years yes because I was scared to do certain things. I was scared to participate in sports and things like that. I was scared to go to gym because if I was changing I was afraid people would say I was looking at them and I probably wasn’t and didn’t want them to begin with. So I would say in my younger years it definitely held me back. I couldn’t do the normal things because when I did want to play football or stuff like that guys didn’t want to play with me because they felt like I was gay. Or if I wanted to do anything I was always talked down upon. So I would say for certain things yes.” (RP11)

Five participants, although they have experienced homophobia within the Black community, stated that it has not affected their livelihoods (RP4, RP6, RP13, RP14, RP15). RP14 gave a very unique answer stating,

“No because it goes back to the gay community. I don’t think that black people in general have political power in a way that White Americans do. Therefore, whatever their bigotry is against me I don’t see as being capable of holding me back. Because if

they reject me I know I can go and become a republican and live a very well great life in the White community and just love it.” (RP14)

He added,

“Now if Black people had policy control where they are enacting all these anti- gay legislation then obviously it would affect me in a way. But as long as there are people out there who are fighting for fairness then those are the people I’m going to be focusing on and I’m going to be backing them.” (RP14)

The three participants that have not experienced homophobia in the Black community answered as follows: RP1 stated that it has affected his life because he has seen his friends affected and in turn, has used their experiences as learning experiences in the event that he’s ever put into similar situations; RP3 simply stated no as he has not had any homophobic experiences within the gay community; and RP12 answered no as he does not know if he has ever experienced homophobia in the Black community. RP3 discussed problems within the gay Black community in his response stating,

“I’ve never had those incidences (homophobia in the Black community). I’ve had more of problem going to a gay Black club than a straight Black club. Black gay people mostly have attitudes if they find that you may not have interests in them. I’m more interracial and most people at Black clubs are into Black guys. So if they’ve seen you around with White guys they give you shade or attitude. It’s always been that way and its always going to be that way. They think that because you are going outside of your race it’s a little different.” (RP3)

When asked how they have survived within the Black community as a gay Black man, overwhelmingly, just as they stated as means of survival in the gay community, all of the participants stated that it’s been a mixture of self-confidence, support systems (i.e. family, friends, various organizations, etc.), and God. Various responses included:

“My own immediate family can not understand it but I do have an external family that can help me through it.” (RP1)

“Again I think by being myself and being real. I’m not going to pretend like I’m not myself or like I’m not a gay male. I worked at a gym and I was the only gay guy there and I thought it was odd. But I kept it real and I’m still funny I think (laughter). I’m still going to be myself. I’m not, not going to say what’s on my mind just because I’m gay and I’m Black. As long as you are true to yourself and you are not a shady person you will be respected.” (RP4)

“Friends! My best friend is also of Jamaican descent. He has been very helpful talking to me about things. Hanging out with people with like minds and to just be able to relax and be myself.” (RP5)

“Being myself. Staying positive. As long as you are not out there being, what’s the word, flamboyant and coming like disrespecting straight men, they don’t have a problem. As long as you don’t bring it to them then you okay. I don’t disrespect people because I don’t like to be disrespected. (RP6)

RP6 explained what he meant by disrespecting stating,

“Like coming on to straight men. Making them feel uncomfortable and talking about what you do and how you do it because I have friends like that. Stuff like that.” (RP6)

“Basically I’m not pushing my lifestyle on anybody. I think that’s how I’m managing to survive and now I’m managing to really keep eyes off of me. But at the same time I want people to know, but I just don’t want to push it upon them. So I think, mainly because, you know, I’m not out there pushing my lifestyle on people I’ve been managing to survive for the most part.” (RP9)

“Lots of good positive role models, supportive friends, lots of prayer. Lots of prayer, and good belief in God. Yeah, those two things. Prayer and good friends and supports. And

enough self esteem in myself to say no, I don't have to succumb to this...yes I can.
(RP13)

“The Black community, that also includes people who are gay, straight, bisexual, and transgender has been the community to be the most supportive and that's where I draw most of my strength from because they have similar experiences.” (RP14)

Chapter six revealed several themes and helped identify those obstacles the participants face as gay Black men in both the gay and black community. The participants acknowledged that they were accepted in both the gay and Black communities, but a majority of the time it involved stipulations such as proving they are “okay” (i.e. not stereotypically gay or Black), hiding or masking their sexuality or race in order to “fit-in,” and remaining silent in regards to their lifestyle and Black culture. The participants also disclosed that perceptions by the larger society of both the gay community and Black community were obstacles in their lives. The participants, when discussing the gay community, revealed that the gay community was viewed as predominantly white, gay men were perceived to be overtly feminine, and a majority of the participants stated that they felt racism was prevalent within the gay community. The participants, when discussing the Black community, revealed that they felt the Black community was conflicted about homosexuality, the participants stated that the Black community was viewed as anti-gay because Black people do not understand homosexuality, and the Black community was perceived to be angry, unintelligent, etc.

The participants also acknowledged perceptions of Blackness and masculinity as an obstacle. Some of the participants stated that gay men are perceived to be feminine and Black men are perceived to be masculine. Because of this disconnect, the participants often felt conflicted when trying to understand who they were...especially when involved in either of their respective communities. The participants overwhelmingly disclosed methods they utilize to live their lives with minimal stress. The participants, in various ways, restricted their lives in order to not have to face racism, homophobia, or some other form of discrimination. Some examples included: changing the manner in which they wear their clothes; changing the manner in which they talk with certain groups; not acting overtly feminine or “Black” when in certain settings; and not going to certain venues for fear of dealing with racist or homophobic individuals. Lastly,

the participants identified coping mechanisms they use when involved in both the gay and Black communities. When in the gay community, the participants identified their friends and family, themselves, and religion as ways to survive. When in the Black community, the participants identified similar coping mechanisms: their immediate family; being open regarding their sexuality and being who they are; positive role models; etc.

In the next chapter, I analyze the results and uncover the themes found throughout the research process.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The following themes emerged throughout the research process: the effect of Black stereotypes and gay stereotypes on the gay Black male community; acceptance with stipulations in the gay community and the black community; racism in the gay community and homophobia in the Black community; perceptions of blackness and masculinity's affect on gay Black men; living with restrictions; and mechanisms gay Black men utilize to cope and survive within the gay and Black community. These themes had strong correlations to previous work performed in the field.

The Effect of Black Stereotypes and Gay Stereotypes on the Gay Black Male Community

All of the participants discussed manners in which stereotypes about race or stereotypes about homosexuality affected their ability to live their lives without restrictions. When discussing the Black community, every participant identified the Black community as homophobic. The main reason cited for the homophobia that exists within the Black community was misunderstanding of what it was to be homosexual. The participants felt that Blacks only knew about homosexuality through media outlets and various negative stereotypes. Gay Black men described Blacks as viewing them as a pathology, effeminate, weak, non-masculine, non-trustworthy, disgusting, unnatural, etc.

Because of these stereotypes and perceptions of homosexuality by the Black community, the gay Black men in this research often felt they had to “explain” what homosexuality was or “prove” themselves to be accepted. Multiple participants stated that once they talked to a Black individual or interacted with them and “disproved” whatever stereotype that Black individual had about homosexuals, they were typically accepted. The participants in this research cited greater aggression from the Black community regarding homosexuality and many participants stated that they do not interact with the community because of how they feel they are perceived. Gay stereotypes were also evident in the participants “coming out” stories. The majority of the participants, although accepted now, had difficulty coming out to their families. Several participants stated that their families and other Black individuals perceive homosexuals to be carriers of HIV. Like Icard’s study (that disclosed that gay Black men were more likely to hide

their homosexuality than whites), participants from the study stated that they were selective in disclosing their sexuality, especially in the Black community. Lastly, when asked if the Black community was homophobic, all the participants stated yes and stated that it was because of the way white media has portrayed Black homosexuality. These results correlate with Gregory B. Lewis (2003) whose attitudinal study disclosed Blacks attitudes regarding homosexuality were predominantly negative.

Gay Black men also identified Black stereotypes as problematic. Participants who preferred relationships with white men or desired relationships with white men found it difficult because of how white homosexuals perceived Blacks. Some participants also stated that they felt excluded at times and did not feel that white homosexuals treated them the same. The majority of the participants identified the gay community as having race problems. A majority also disclosed instances of, what they perceived to be, racist actions against them in the gay community. These actions were overwhelmingly due to perceptions white homosexuals had of Black men. Lastly, several participants felt that the segregation within the gay community was dependent on how the white homosexual understood Blackness.

The way gay Black men perceive themselves correlates to W.E.B. DuBois double consciousness. The gay Black men in this research often felt torn between the gay community, the Black community, and being a man in society. Having to combat stereotypes makes it difficult for these gay Black men to find a home in either community. This correlates with Marlon T. Riggs discussions of the stereotypical gay Black man and its affect on the gay Black male community.

Acceptance with Stipulations in the Gay Community and the Black Community

This research disclosed that while gay Black men did feel accepted at times within the gay community and the Black community...that acceptance often came with a stipulation. Stipulations, according to the research participants, in the gay community were assimilation and/or sexual interest. The participants stated that if they demonstrated traits that were similar to the white community, they were often accepted into the community without any problems. Some participants even stated that they felt more accepted in the gay community when they muted their "Blackness." The participants also stated that if the whites had an interest in gay Black men, then they also were accepted into the community.

Stipulations, according to the research participants, in the Black community were silence (vocally and visibly) and explanations of what it means to be homosexual. The participants stated that they often felt that they were accepted into the Black community as long as they did not speak about their lifestyle or demonstrate their lifestyle (i.e. holding hands with another man, kissing another man, being flamboyant or effeminate, etc.). The participants also stated that they felt accepted in the Black community once they got a chance to talk to the Black individual one on one to show them that not all gay people are what the media has portrayed. Ultimately the participants stated that they had to act “straight” and not reveal any inclination that they were homosexual.

These stipulations speak to a great deal of the literature in this field as it focuses on silence. The gay Black male voice has been silenced according to academia in this field and the answers from the research participants reinforce this action. It appears these stipulations act as regulators within both the gay community and the Black community and their acceptance of gay Black men. Overall, the manners in which the participants restricted their lives in both the gay and Black communities revealed that racist and homophobic attitudes directly impact gay Black male’s ability to live their lives openly and freely in both their communities. The participants did not directly acknowledge these actions as restrictions when asked directly if they felt racism in the gay community or homophobia in the Black community restricted their life chances and life experiences.

Racism in the Gay Community and Homophobia in the Black Community

A theme that was clearly demonstrated in this research was that racism does exist within the gay community and homophobia exists within the Black community. Only one participant, RP5, stated that racism did not exist within the gay community. All other participants stated that racism exists in the gay community. This agrees with Keith Boykins sentiment that racism is not just prevalent in white society, it’s prevalent in all subcultures as well. All participants stated that homophobia exists within the Black community. In instances where the participant did not experience either phenomenon, they knew of a friend that had experienced one, or both.

This research seemed to disclose that homophobia in the Black community had a greater affect on the lives of gay Black men. Authors such as bell hooks, Keith Boykin, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Eric Brandt, Rudolph P. Byrd, Barbara Smith, Cheryl Clarke, and others have all

discussed homophobia within the Black community. The authors ask the Black community to not rank oppression and see homophobia as another form of oppression similar to racism. Several of the participants stated that it's hard negotiating being gay and Black because they did not know which community spoke to them the most. An example would be RP1. RP1 stated that he was taught to be Black while he was innately gay. He also states that, because of his appearance, no one usually can tell he is homosexual. However, they can tell he is Black and that's how they perceive him until they get to know him. He is torn between how he has been stereotypically defined and what he believes himself to be.

Perceptions of Blackness and Masculinity's Affect on Gay Black Men

This theme was extremely prevalent through the research participants' interviews. The participants overwhelmingly described that the Black community saw gay Black men as weak and non-masculine. As Black men they discussed being torn between how they should present themselves as men and how they should present themselves as gay men. Mentioned earlier, Traps: African American Men on Gender and Sexuality by Rudolph P. Byrd and Beverly Guy-Sheftall, pieces together several articles concerning race, sexuality, and masculinity regarding Black men. The participants, in their interviews, discussed the ways in which this perception of blackness and masculinity restricted them from behaving certain ways in certain settings. This paranoia has caused some of the participants to put up guards when placed in heterosexual settings.

The participants agree with my assertion that one can be both homosexual and Afro-centric. All the participants have a strong affinity for the Black community and a strong desire to be welcomed into the community. However, they feel that because of perceptions of masculinity and homosexuality, they cannot penetrate that barrier into the Black community. Those participants that appear to look heterosexual did state that they felt they were initially more accepted by the Black community.

Living with Restrictions

Another theme prevalent in the research data was the participants desire to live without restrictions. All of the themes listed before this one paint a picture of the restrictions gay Black men face in attempting to live their lives openly. All the participants mentioned in their

interviews, if not present at some point in their lives, that they felt restricted. Whether it was being able to speak openly about a partner or another man or simply dressing in a certain manner. All the participants, especially regarding disclosing their sexuality, stated that they demonstrated restraint at some point in their lives. Many participants stated that this is why they perceive the gay community to be predominantly white (because Black gays are afraid to disclose their sexuality). Living in this manner demonstrates that these gay Black men are not living their lives to their full potential.

*Mechanisms Gay Black men Utilize to Cope and survive
within the Gay and Black Community*

The final theme prevalent in this research was the mechanism used by gay Black men to cope and survive within the gay and Black community. Gay Black men utilized different coping mechanisms when in predominantly white gay settings versus predominantly heterosexual Black settings. In the gay community, the participants identified the following coping mechanisms: participants relied on themselves; participants established a strong base of friends; participants did not rely solely on the gay community for support (sought support elsewhere); acceptance from family and friends (i.e. affirming positive experiences); and lastly, participants stated that their religion made it easier for them to survive within the gay community.

In the Black community, the participants identified similar and different coping mechanisms. Coping mechanisms within the Black community included: acceptance and affirmation from their immediate family; having a large group of friends they consider family; being open regarding their sexuality and not pretending to be someone they are not; some participants acknowledged that they survived by not being flamboyant or discussing their homosexual lifestyle; some participants stated that they did not push their lifestyle on others; positive role models; and lastly, some participants felt they simply fit in the community because of shared oppressions.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to discover “whether racism in the gay community and homophobia in the Black community restrict gay Black men’s ability to live their lives to their full potential?” Through 15 in-depth qualitative interviews utilizing the Scholar Activist

approach, I sought to answer that question. Despite only two participants citing racism in the gay community as restrictive to their opportunities to live their lives to their full potential and eight participants citing homophobia in the Black community as restrictive, given the participant responses to the multiple questions asked throughout the research process I believe the answer to be yes to both.

Only two participants, RP2 and RP10, out of 15 participants identified both racism in the gay community and homophobia in the Black community as restrictive to their opportunities to live their lives to their full potential. Despite only 13.3% of the participants citing both as restrictive, various responses to other questions disclosed that many of the men interviewed do not live their lives as openly as they stated. I feel that this number is not representative of the restriction the participants face in their daily lives. The results from the research questions and the themes that emerged prove that the participants do restrict their live experiences because of racist and homophobic attitudes in the communities they claim membership to.

Throughout the interview process, three overarching questions were used to center the gay Black male perspective: How do gay Black men describe their lives; How do gay Black men describe what their lives ought to be; and What obstacles do gay Black men identify as restricting their opportunity to live their lives they way they feel they ought to be living them? In asking these questions, gay Black men disclosed that they censor themselves in various manners (i.e. what type of people they choose to interact with, the manner in which they disclose their sexuality and how much they choose to disclose, in relationships, what type of venues or settings they interact with, etc.). The themes fleshed out manners in which gay Black men censor their lives with regularity depending on where they live, work, and go out for leisure activities. Therefore, this research demonstrates that gay Black men's lives are restricted, to a degree, by racism in the gay community and homophobia in the Black community.

Future research should focus on support structures gay Black men utilize to negotiate both the gay community and the Black community. Participants within this research stated that they rely heavily on family, friends, their faith, and various gay Black male organizations to survive. Many of the participants called these non-familial structures "external families" or referred to them as their family although none of the individuals were interrelated. I also think it's important to research at a greater depth homophobia within the Black community. While I feel that both racism in the gay community and homophobia in the Black community impact gay

Black male life opportunities, upon completing this research it appears that the participants placed a great emphasis on the importance of acceptance within the Black community. The participants demonstrated great knowledge of why they felt they were ostracized. Despite the perceived homophobia within the Black community, many of the participants also described the Black community as accepting and welcoming (although their experiences and perceptions were different).

I also feel that future research should address the issues of double consciousness that gay Black men face. Participants identified that they were conflicted between understanding who they were and who they were told they were. As Black men they felt they had to be masculine, as gay men they felt they had to be feminine. The conflicting stereotypes harm gay Black men's ability to understand who they are. Lastly, as opposed to focusing only on gay Black men, research need to be conducted on the gay Black community as a whole. Not once did any of the participants mention Black lesbians or Black transgendered individuals. This leads me to believe that there is a major disconnect between the Black GLBT communities.

Having completed the research, I feel that a greater emphasis needs to be placed on GBM support systems. The individuals I interviewed for this research spoke highly of relying on these systems for guidance and acceptance. I believe that if the gay community and the Black community could tap into the resources of GBM support systems, they could begin to tear down the barriers that they have in restricting gay Black men's life opportunities.

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