ABSTRACT

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AFRICAN AMERICAN GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN: AN INTERSECTION OF VULNERABILITY

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In the African American community, homophobia and homonegativity have been shown to be disproportionately prevalent. Unfortunately, while much of this ostensibly stems from a belief that it is for their benefit, research has shown that African American gay and bisexual men are forced to deal with oppression and discrimination in multiple, intersecting aspects of their social and personal lives; this has been proven to negatively affect their mental, emotional and physical health. African American gay and bisexual men are forced to maintain a dual minority status—racial and sexual—and this places them in a unique, precarious intersection of vulnerability. This paper presents what the available literature on this topic suggests can be done to, at least, buffer the harm this population experiences. The implications of these findings are discussed.

AFRICAN AMERICAN GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN: AN INTERSECTION OF

VULNERABILITY

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INTRODUCTION

Homophobia refers to the emotional response that a person experiences in their

interactions with gay, bisexual and lesbian people, and this includes discomfort, anger,

anxiety, and fear, while homonegativity describes the cognitive component to this

discrimination—"negative attitudes, beliefs, or actions toward homosexuality" (Negy &

Eisenman, 2005, p. 292). Homophobia and homonegativity have been shown to be

prevalent in the African American community, and even more so than in other racial

communities such as Whites. There are many theories as to why this is the case, most of

which are seemingly driven by religion and culture. In the African American community,

homosexuality is too often connoted with being the cause for the high levels of

HIV/AIDS in the community (Phillips, 2005); men secretly having sex with other men,

while living an ostensibly heterosexual lifestyle and maintaining relationships with

women (Phillips, 2005); the result of a White power structure that emasculates African

American men; and a plague on African American men who are seen as an endangered

species (Gayles, 2008). Unfortunately, there is an abundance of evidence suggesting that

the homophobia and homonegativity stemming from these beliefs serve only to harm the

physical and emotional health of African American gay and bisexual men (Crawford,

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Allison, Zamboni & Soto, T., 2002). Moreover, in some cases these men are effectively

barred from their only sources of support (Crawford et al., 2002).

Statement of the Problem

Because of a double minority status, African American Gay and Bisexual Men are

often faced with the adversity of heterosexism and racism, therefore predisposing them to

experience negative life events. Experiencing violence and discrimination due to their

sexual orientation and/or race; losing their job, home, or child custody are some examples

of these events (Crawford et al., 2002). This suggests that the current attitudes of

homophobia and homonegativity towards African American gay and bisexual men,

within the African American community, and the historical, conventional approaches to

dealing with it, are serving only to harm this population (Gayles, 2008); this is in

opposition to the imagined belief held by some that it is for their benefit (Gayles, 2008).

Indeed, in the cases where the homosexuality is tolerated, the issues that African

American gay and bisexual men particularly face are often overlooked or disregarded.

What is also very troubling is that homophobia and homonegative attitudes have shown a

positive correlation between church attendance and African American enculturation

(Negy & Eisenman, 2005), while European Americans—the people who may have first

instilled Christianity into African Americans—are less likely to exert or experience

homophobia and homonegativity within their communities. There is a disconnect here

that needs to be addressed.

Purpose of the Study

Research shows that homophobia and homonegativity continue to be detrimental to African American gay and bisexual men, but instead of any visible attempts to combat this—particularly in the African American community—there only seems to be a silent tolerance of their identity when there should be a discussion of what is necessary to improve these harmful conditions. This paper seeks to investigate how homophobia, homonegativity, and racism work in the lives of African American gay and bisexual men to create the disproportionate emotional and psychological harm that is typically observed within this population. With homophobia and homonegativity being more prevalent in the African American community, and African American gay and bisexual men being harmed by it, it behooves the African American community to acknowledge this issue and address it. Literature on this topic has discussed the origins of these higher, disproportionate levels of homophobia and homonegativity (in comparison to European Americans) and the basis upon which they still stand, but the time has come to integrate tested theories on what can be done within the African American community to protect gay and bisexual men from the harm they typically face.

Significance of Study

African Americans, a *racial* minority, are predisposed to discrimination and oppression; identifying as gay or bisexual also places one in a *sexual* minority status. For African American gay and bisexual men these two minority statuses are compounded, putting them in a uniquely vulnerable situation, and this demands particular attention for the plight that they face. As this paper will discuss more fully, African American gay and

bisexual men often find themselves in a particularly precarious place, faced with choosing to remain silent about their sexual orientation or losing the only support system they have.

Ascertaining the elements in the lives of African American gay and bisexual men that cause, or at least contribute to, the negative effects observed will provide a foundation for the subsequent steps that can be made to protect or buffer against their incidence. Understanding the factors that contribute to the straits of this uniquely vulnerable population's star will better position mental health practitioners to address the issues particular to this population and create effective treatments/interventions. Similarly, the implications of this paper's findings will provide researchers a guidepost of the direction that future research can take in understanding this issues African American gay and bisexual men face.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter will discuss the findings of literature that provide insight on the underlying elements contributing to the issues African American gay and bisexual men are particularly experiencing. Also, this chapter will present the two major issues this study seeks to address; the Afrocentric Perspective and how it can be applied to the issue being discussed; and an overview of the Social Learning Theory and how it can be used to understand the relationship of the concepts being discussed.

Historical Perspective

According to Griffin (2000), there are two reasons for the negativity typically seen with African Americans towards homosexuality: (1) White, Christian, slave-owners, who had negative views of homosexuality, converted slaves to Christianity, and (2) by treating gay as the 'despised other,' emulating the dominant (White) culture, African Americans could hope to escape the label of being sexually immoral and deviant. He also explains that, while most African Americans are generally unaware of this, their understanding of sex and morality can be attributed to having English Christian social pushed upon them over the last three centuries in this country (Griffin, 2000). Further, after analyzing data from in the 1993 National Black Politics Study, Lemelle (2004)

found that African American males who maintained a weekly church attendance reported having attitudes significantly more negative towards gay men than African American men who attended church less frequently.

Similarly, after examining involving the responses of Blacks and Whites that had been completed for over the course of more than 20 years, Lewis (2003) found that Blacks reported having stronger disapproval of homosexuality than Whites; 75 percent of Blacks agreed to the notion that homosexual relationships are "always wrong" (Lewis, 2003, p. 73), and that over 33 percent suggested that God is possibly punishing people for "immoral sexual behaviors" through the spread of AIDS (Lewis, 2003, p. 75). Moreover, Blacks that were same gender loving encountered higher amounts of disapproval from family members and friends that were straight than similar Whites (Lewis, 2003).

In addition to Churchgoers, Negy & Eisenman (2005) found that college students who were African American possessed more negative attitudinal and affective reactions to lesbians, gays, and bisexuals than their White counterparts. Also, they found a positive correlation between the level of African Americans' socialization and immersion into the African American community and the amount of homophobia and homonegativity they expressed (Negy & Eisenman, 2005). Moreover, Timothy Edwards (2013) found that the attitudes of men towards gay men, as compared to heterosexual women, are much more negative and that in the African American community homophobia is something commonly seen.

In the words of Gayles (2008, p.184), "…positive African American masculinity and homosexuality are placed in opposition to each other." He argues that African American men are seen as victims of a White power structure that, through a denial of

their manhood, are 'fantastically' transformed into homosexuals. And the efforts to 'redeem' African American men speak to a longstanding "Black-men-as-an-endangered-species trope" (Gayles, 2008, p.185). And Akbar (1991, p. 37) found that in the African American community, masculinity and homosexuality are seen as diametrically opposed, and this is further exacerbated by the widely held, hyper-masculine (read: heterosexist) concept that Black men should "stand up and control their environment. Then they must secure and defend their resources" (Gayles, 2008, p. 185). This suggests that homosexuality is connoted with being a weakness or lack. Being an endangered species—within the context of a sexual/racial hierarchy—suggests that the adversity African American men face is worthy of much more action and attention, being handled more seriously, even when compared to the adversity African American women face (Gayles, 2008).

Next, there the is myth surrounding the "Down Low" (DL) controversy which refers to the idea of African American men who were having sex with other men secretly, but sustained heterosexual relationships with women while also presenting themselves as masculine—as opposed to being effeminate (Phillips, 2005). While the term originally referenced infidelity associated with heterosexual relationships, it later became the label used specifically for homosexual sex among African American men (Phillips, 2005).

When public health officials began noticing that African American women were contracting HIV/AIDS at the highest rate, proportionately, in the United States, they needed an explanation and thus the theory that emerged that this was due to bisexual Black men who were in with women who were unaware of their homosexual behavior (Phillips, 2005). Also, this DL phenomenon has been egregiously mislabeled as a leading

factor in heterosexual African American women being reported as having the highest rate of HIV/AIDS rate in the United States (Phillips, 2005).

Disproportionate Homophobia in the African American Community

Throughout the research presented thus far, one theme that appears is the disproportionate levels of homophobia that African American gay and bisexual men experience compared to other racial counterparts. For example, as stated earlier, Griffin (2000) found African Americans' negativity towards homosexuality to be centered on religion. In an attempt to remove the labels of sexual deviance and immorality (i.e., seek approval), African Americans have learned to view homosexuality as unacceptable. Furthermore, a large part of African American's sexual identity and understanding stem from having the English Christian values imposed on them.

In *Sexual Identity, Mental Health, HIV Risk Behaviors, and Internalized Homophobia Among Black Men Who Have Sex With Men* (Amola & Grimmett, 2015), researchers wanted to examine the connections between sexual identity, self-esteem, depression, HIV status, HIV Risk and internalized homophobia as it related to Black men who have sex with men. They found that Black men who have sex with men are pressured to (ostensibly) identify as heterosexual and to be silent about their homosexual behaviors. In an attempt to escape the stressors of homophobia that they face in the African American community, as well as within the larger homophobic U.S. culture, a homophobic mindset is often adopted by Black men who have sex with men (Amola & Grimmett, 2015); this is done by separating their sexual behavior (i.e., having sex with men) and sexual identity (Amola & Grimmett, 2015).

This study (Amola & Grimmett, 2015) suggested that for Black men who have sex with men, those who identify as heterosexual had the highest internalized homophobia scores. The researchers of this study suggested that this is due to many African American men being taught that homosexuality—and all the behaviors associated with it—is in opposition to their religious beliefs, and, moreover, incompatible with their culture (Amola & Grimmett, 2015).

Also, Amola & Grimmett (2015) found that Black men who have sex with men showed a positive correlation between internalized homophobia and depression, while also finding a negative correlation between internalized homophobia and self-esteem. This means that, for Black men who have sex with men, as their level of internalized homophobia increases so does their depression levels. However, researchers determined self-esteem impacted internalized homophobia the most and posited that these findings hint at building self-esteem as the most effective buffer to internalizing homophobia (Amola & Grimmett, 2015).

It is also important to note that Black men who have sex with men and are unaware of their HIV status demonstrated higher levels of internalized homophobia than those who were HIV-positive (Amola & Grimmett, 2015). However, HIV-negative Black men who have sex with men demonstrated remarkably less internalized homophobia than did both those were HIV-positive and those unaware (Amola & Grimmett, 2015). When considering the aforementioned factors that contribute to the incidence of (internalized) homophobia, as well as an HIV-positive status generally being associated with homosexuality, it makes sense that higher levels of internalized homophobia would be seen with HIV-positive. Perhaps the positive diagnosis of an HIV

infection leads these men to feel self-pity or loathing for having received this so-called punishment from God, whereas a negative diagnosis allows one to remain secure in their sexual orientation from, at least, averting punishment.

Szymanski & Gupta (2009) found that among African American LGBQ persons, internalized homophobia negatively impacts mental health. Self-esteem had a mediating effect on the relationship between internalized homophobia and psychological distress (Szymanski & Gupta, 2009). This suggests that, in addition to affecting psychological stress directly, the negative effects of internalized homophobia appear to be partially due to a reduction of self-esteem (Szymanski & Gupta, 2009).

With the contemporary definition of Down Low, gay and bisexual African American men became the scapegoat for the rampant contraction of HIV/AIDS for heterosexual African American women (Phillips, 2005). However, the problem with this idea is that it erroneously misrepresents men who have sex with men as being predominately African American. However, this behavior being specific to African American men could not be further from the truth. In his study, *The Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places*, Lawd Humphreys (1970) set out to gather qualitative data on the culture of (anonymous) homosexual sex in public restrooms. Of all participants in the study, the majority were White men. Furthermore, "Most of these men identified as heterosexual and viewed their homosexual activity in one of three ways: a) as recreational, b) as a substitute for insufficient heterosexual sex, or c) as a way to add variety to a predominantly heterosexual lifestyle" (Phillips, 2005, p. 6). It seems that not only has this phenomenon been going on for at least a few decades, but also that it certainly is not specific to African American men.

Dual Minority Status

Some reasons that might explain the higher risk for African American gay and bisexual men are the stressors that result from regularly experiencing heterosexism and racism. Gay and bisexual men are considered a sexual minority, and they often experience discrimination like other minorities groups (Crawford et al, 2002). Additionally, experiences of oppression and discrimination, which aren't limited to blocked access to resources, continue to remain on-going experiences in the lives of many African Americans. Moreover, where there is acceptance and tolerance of homosexuality in African American communities it often is accompanied by an unspoken agreement that African American gay and bisexual men remain silent about their orientation, not making any public displays of it (Crawford et al, 2002).

Crawford et al. (2002) found that African American gay and bisexual men have higher rates of heavy substance abuse in comparison to their sexual counterparts, and elevated levels of anxiety and depressive mood disorders as compared to European American homosexual or heterosexual African American men; while the incidence of AIDS has decreased dramatically among European American gay men, decreases in African American gay and bisexual men have been minimal. Some factors that may be contributing to this elevated risk are heterosexist and race-based stress (Crawford et al., 2002).

The rates of heavy substance abuse found amongst African American gay and bisexual men are higher than heterosexual African American men (Richardson et al., 1997); African American gay and bisexual men, when compared to heterosexual African American *and* European American homosexual men, have been found to possess high

levels of mood and anxiety disorders (Richardson et al., 1997). Black men who have sex with men have shown to have riskier sexual behaviors and lower self-esteem (Lewis, 2003). Also, while the rates of European American homosexual men that have been diagnosed with AIDS has significantly decreased, there has been little decrease in the rate of African American gay and bisexual men being diagnosed with AIDS (CDC, 1999).

Moreover, the impact that racism has on the well-being and health of African Americans has been increasingly studied over the years (Greer, Laseter & Asiamah, 2009). Recently, research has revealed a significant relationship between racial discrimination and negative psychological and emotional symptoms that include substance use, depression, and general distress symptoms (Greer, Laseter & Asiamah, 2009).

Greer, Laseter & Asiamah (2009) conducted a study to examine if gender was a factor in the relationship between mental health symptoms shown in African American and the stress associated with racism. They found that that African American women reported lower levels of stress from institutional racism than men. African American overwhelmingly perceive themselves to be treated unfairly, disproportionately, within societal institutions such as the criminal justice system (Anderson, 1990; Barlow & Hickman-Barlow, 2002; Bowman, 1992; Greer, Laseter & Asiamah, 2009). Perhaps African American men report higher levels of stress from institutional racism because of a belief that they are disproportionate targets of discrimination in society (Greer, Laseter & Asiamah, 2009).

When collectively reviewed, the data that has been gathered strongly suggests that African American gay and bisexual men in the United States are at a higher risk for developing emotional and physical health issues than either their straight or White counterparts (Crawford et al, 2002).

Afrocentric Perspective

The Afrocentric Perspective seeks to promote a social science paradigm that is more representative of the cultural and political reality of African Americans. It aims to promote a worldview that provides for the incorporation of spiritual, moral and humanistic values of people across from cultural and ethnic groups. Moreover, the Afrocentric Perspective strives to erase the negative misrepresentations of the ancestry of African people, while also "legitimizing and disseminating a worldview that has existed for thousands of years, and still exists in the hearts and minds of many people of African descent today" (Schiele, 1996, p. 286).

According to Schiele (1996, p. 286), there are three main assumptions that the Afrocentric Perspective makes about human beings: "(1) human identity is a collective identity; (2) the spiritual or non-material component of human beings is just as important and valid as the material component; (3) the affective approach to knowledge is epistemologically valid."

In regards to the concept of human identity, rather than rejecting that concept of individual uniqueness, the Afrocentric Perspective rejects the idea that the individual can be understood separately from others in his or her social group; individual identity is a fluid way of expressing a collective, group ethos (Schiele, 1996, p. 287). This concept of

human identity can be directly applied to one's understanding of the research problem. Each African American gay and bisexual man is a part of a bigger, collective African American group identity. In keeping with the tenants of the Afrocentric Perspective, this means that one cannot fully understand the vulnerable position these men are in until it is perceived through the context of their group identity. If African American gay and bisexual men's group identity directly influences (or determines) their individual identities, they are then predisposed to internalizing their culture's disproportionately homophobic and homonegative ideas, and this consequently has many harmful effects on their and their health and self-stem (Richardson et al., 1997; Lewis, 2003; Edwards, 2005; Negy & Eisenman, 2005; Szymanski & Gupta, 2009; Amola & Grimmett, 2015). Thus, future attempts to address this problem should include this understanding of human identity.

The Afrocentric Perspective stresses the significance of spirituality--the non-material aspects of human beings; spirituality can be understood as the unseen universal essence that all human beings are connected within, as well as to a "Creator or Supreme Being " (Schiele, 1996, p. 287). In the Afrocentric paradigm, the Soul, which is "the amorphous" component of the human being that transcends time and space, is regarded as a source of study just as legitimate as the mind and body (Schiele, 1996, p. 287); moreover the Afrocentric Perspective holds that the mind, body, and soul are inseparable phenomena. When this concept of all human beings being connected spiritually (read: on a profound level) is applied to the current study (and perhaps all research regarding humans), it behooves every person—regardless of race, gender or sexual orientation—to regard the plight of African American gay and bisexual men as equally significant as a

problem that was plaguing them. Also, if the mind, body, and soul are interconnected then any issue plaguing the mind and/or body will necessarily, negatively affect one's the soul.

Finally, a major tenet of the Afrocentric Perspective is that the most direct experience of the self is emotions, and moreover, that thoughts do not occur independently of feelings; affect (feeling or emotions) is thus viewed as a valid source of knowing (Schiele, 1996). Whereas European American culture typically views logic and emotions as mutually exclusive, the Afrocentric Perspective utilizes a more holistic way of understanding the world (Schiele, 1996). With this concept in mind, any research on this topic would be remiss, and therefore inadequate, if the direct experience of African American gay and bisexual men—and how they feel about it—are not sought out and recorded. If the feelings of these men are indeed a fount of valid knowledge, future research needs to concern itself with garnering this valuable information for a true understanding of their predicament is to be had.

Perhaps the Afrocentric Approach, being a holistic by its nature (Schiele, 1996), could be used to collect a more thorough (and appropriate) understanding of the factors that are particularly negative to the well-being of African American gay and bisexual men, such as those discovered by Amola & Grimmett (2015); with the information this research would produce, more effective methods to buffer against these factors can be factors can be developed. With African American gay and bisexual men experiencing multiple levels of oppression, as well as alienation from their own social group, it becomes clear that they are a particularly vulnerable population, and this alone demands a need for attention. Also When applying this understanding of the Afrocentric Perspective

to the discussion of homophobia and homonegativity as it pertains to African American gay and bisexual men, utilizing this paradigm promises to yield more salubrious interventions for their overall well-being.

Theoretical Framework

When attempting to discern a particular theory in the literature that undergirds the discussion of homophobia and homonegativity, especially as it pertains to African American Gay and Bisexual men, one theory that seems appropriate to apply here is The Social Learning Theory. The Social Learning Theory, which was introduced by Bandura (1977) originally, posits that the process of learning is one that is cognitive, takes place in a social context and happens by observation or direct instruction. Also, learning takes places through vicarious reinforcement, which occurs by observing rewards and punishments.

Social Learning Theory draws heavily on the concept of modeling (i.e., learning by observing a behavior.) In particular, children watch the various behaviors of the people around them, and the individuals being observed are referred to as models. There are many of these models of behavior that surround children in society (e.g., the child's parent(s)), their friends/peers, schoolteachers, and the television they are exposed to (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1986). Observing these models, children are given examples of behavior to emulate, such how to act towards others, or what is associated with masculinity/ femininity. Children attend to their respective models—which are people in this case—and remember their behavior (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1986). After some time, they may go on to emulate (read: copy) the observed behavior. While children may

not always imitate behavior that is appropriate to their respective gender, there are many factors predisposing a child to behave in a way that society considers gender/sex appropriate (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1986).

Children are more likely to attend to and emulate the people they perceive as similar to themselves (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1986). Thus, a child will more likely imitate the behaviors that are observed by people who are of the same sex. Additionally, people's reaction to the behavior being imitated will either act to reinforce or punish it. If the behavior that a child emulates is rewarded, the child is encouraged—and thus more likely—to continue performing the behavior; the behavior has been reinforced (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1986). Reinforcement can be positive or negative.

When applied critically to the understanding of how the disproportionality of homonegativity and homophobia operate in the lives African American gay and bisexual men, the principles of the Social Learning Theory help to elucidate the underlying factors that contributing to it. Studies have shown that heterosexual men's attitudes are consistently more negative than heterosexual women and exhibit higher levels of sexual prejudice (Edwards, 2013). This means that African American gay and bisexual men are likely to receive negative reinforcement for engaging in, and expressing, behaviors that are associated with homosexuality, especially if an African American male children perceives himself to be similar to other men of his social group (Schiele, 1996). This behavior is then likely to be modeled by the same men, perpetuating the homophobic and homonegative behaviors and beliefs.

Indeed, African American men who were same-gender-loving faced more disapproval from straight friends and family than their White counterparts (Crawford et

al., 2002; Edwards, 2013). If the African American culture holds particularly negative

views on homosexuality (Akbar, 1991; Griffin, 2000; Crawford et al., 2002; Lewis, 2003;

Lemelle, 2004; Negy & Eisenman, 2005; Phillips, 2005; Gayles, 2008;), and

homosexuality is attributed to being weak (Gayles, 2008), implicitly hushed (Crawford et

al., 2002) then African American gay and bisexual men are likely compelled to feel that

there is something faulty about themselves, internalizing these feelings. Unfortunately,

this internalization has shown to have detrimental effects on their health and well-being

(Richardson et al., 1997; CDC, 1999; Crawford et al., 2002; Szymanski & Gupta, 2009;

Amola & Grimmett, 2015).

The Social Learning Theory can also aid in understanding how the negative

effects of a dual minority status, at least in part, is brought on through the process of

observation. As shown by Greer, Laseter & Asiamah (2009), African American men have

learned to feel disproportionately targeted by many institutions in society, especially

within criminal justice systems, and this has shown to create higher levels self-reported

levels of stress than women. If these men are learning/emulating behaviors and beliefs

that correspond with feeling disproportionately oppressed, this will doubtlessly bear

unhealthy effects on their self-esteem levels and self-identity (Richardson et al., 1997;

Crawford et al., 2002; Szymanski & Gupta, 2009; Amola & Grimmett, 2015). Further

African American gay and bisexual men learn, through interactions with those within

(African Americans) and without (Whites) their immediate social group that they aren't

accepted or supported (Crawford et al., 2002; Battle et al., 2002).

The Social Learning Theory discusses the way that children (i.e., people) learn

how to behave, and African Americans are no exception to this. For African American

men who identify as homosexual, have learned homonegative and homophobic behaviors and thoughts, a precarious situation emerges where they are this is internalized and negatively affects their mental, physical *and* social health (Richardson et al., 1997; Crawford et al., 2002; Battle et al., 2002; Szymanski & Gupta, 2009; Amola & Grimmett, 2015).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a systematic review to investigate how homophobia, homonegativity, and racism work in the lives of African American gay and bisexual men to create the disproportionate emotional and psychological harm that is typically observed within this population, and also determine the factors in the lives African American gay and bisexual men work to counter, or at least buffer against, the emotional and psychological harm that is typically observed. This study utilized a systematic review to collect, synthesize, and analyze data.

Methods of Study

A systematic review is a literature review that seeks to locate, synthesize, and analyze evidence-based research from previously conducted studies. Its general purpose is to summarize the information gathered and thus provide insight into how it can be used practically in social work, as well as identifying where further research needs t be conducted. A systematic review focuses on thoroughly identifying and synthesizing research that answers specific questions, specifically from replicable methods (Littell, Corcoran, & Pillai, 2008).

In this study, research was conducted using the Robert W. Woodruff Library System at the Atlanta University Center to access databases such as Sociological Collections, Sociological Abstracts, PsycINFO, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection.

At first, the researcher attempted to research "African American homophobia," and "negative effects of homophobia." After reviewing the research this produced, the researcher realized that "homonegativity" was a key term to necessary to fully express the scope of this topic. Upon further research, in keeping with the tenants of the Afrocentric perspective, it became salient, and appropriate, to research the surrounding, influencing factors with keyword searches such as "racism and homophobia," "religion and homophobia," "Negative effects of homophobia." The researcher then researched "Afrocentric Perspective" to explore and discuss it's tenants (especially as it relates to the research topic), and "theoretical framework homophobia " and "Social Learning Theory" to explore the theoretical frameworks that seem most applicable to this study.

This study was organized as according to the headings—statement of the issue, the purpose of this study, the significance of this study, the historical perspective, the study issues, the Afrocentric Perspective and the Theoretical framework. The researcher gathered information using 68 articles, 5 books, and 1 websites. These resources were found within several subject areas, disciplines—social work and social sciences, psychology, government, gender, sexuality, racism and health.

Limitations

One of the major limitations of the research on this topic is the lack of it that has

been conducted. There is a plethora of research that has been conducted on effects of

racism on African Americans, and similarly, the effects of homophobia on the general

population have been researched abundantly. However, the researcher had difficulties

finding literature on African American gay and bisexual men. As a result of this, the

researcher used several resources that were over 10 years old. The lack of this

information can most likely be attributed to the fact that while decreasingly so each day,

homophobia is still a taboo subject for many, having only recently become acceptable to

discuss openly. To overcome these difficulties the researcher used recent literature on

homophobia and racism, particularly as it pertained to African American Men, separately

and compiled the information that seemed to overlap both topics.

Another limitation the researcher experienced was a lack research that discussed

on the Afrocentric Perspective. There were only a few articles that were explanatory of

the Afrocentric Perspective, many of which were family studies or referring specifically

to African countries. Because of this, the researcher had only one article that could be

utilized to understand and explain the Afrocentric Perspective in this study.

Finally, a major limitation of the literature on this topic is the lack of research that

has been conducted on effective intervention models and strategies to combat

homophobia, especially for African American men. While research factors such as self-

esteem to have some protective effects on the negative effects of homophobia, there

needs to be much more research conducted on effective methods to help protect against,

or diminish, the negative psychological, emotional and physical effects of (internalized)

homophobia and homonegativity.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Chapter one introduced incidence and scope of the circumstances surrounding homophobia and homonegativity within the African American community, and the harmful effect this plays on African American gay and bisexual men. Finally, it presented a statement of the research problem, and the purpose of this study was stated and discussed. Chapter two of this paper has presented the background data that has arose in the literature of homophobia and homophobia as it relates to the African American gay and bisexual men, particularly within the African American community, an overview of the Afrocentric the Afrocentric perspective and Social Learning Theory, and an explanation of how they both can be applied the issue being discussed. This chapter provides a synthesis and analysis of the information gathered on the two major study issues.

Findings on Disproportionate Homophobia in the African American Community

The study this has discussed the reality that homophobia and homonegativity have been shown to occur more, proportionately, in the African American community than in other ethnic communities. African American gay and bisexual men are in an environment that appears to be oppressing them from multiple dimensions. They are pressured to

behave as heterosexual (Crawford et al., 2002; Amola & Grimmett, 2015), even in the instances when it is *known* that they are not (Crawford et al. (2002), and this speaks volumes to the cognitive and emotional dissonance that must be experienced.

Furthermore, in an attempt to be accepted and "right," they internalize the homophobia that they have been taught all their life, and this teaches them to believe that, on a very fundamental level, no one is interested in who/what they truly identify as. This forces them to then feel that if they can pass as heterosexual they will not be shunned or abandoned by their social support systems (Crawford et al., 2002; Amola & Grimmett, 2015). Feeling pressured to masquerade as heterosexual in order to avoid homophobic reactions from their community, some Black men who have sex with men feel unable to affiliate with the gay community (Battle et al., 2002; Crawford et al., 2002; Amola & Grimmett, 2015).

In an attempt to emulate their models/ the behaviors they have learned, and arguably to escape negative behaviors (Bandura & Walters, 1963), African American gay and bisexual men adopt the homophobic and homonegative attitudes and behaviors of the dominant, heterosexism culture they live in. Indeed, the pressures of these homophobic attitudes are so strong that Black men who have sex with men have learned to divorce their sexual identity and sexual behaviors Amola & Grimmett (2015).

The findings of Amola & Grimmett (2015) are important to note because they highlight some background factors that contribute to the high prevalence of internalized homophobia, particularly for African American men. It is not simply that, as is the case in the dominant culture, homosexuality is taboo, but it's also a situation where these men are ultimately lead to believe that choosing to identify as homosexual—at the very least,

in their immediate community—is choosing to lose their connection with friends and family as well as their identity as an African American men; they are literally made to believe that they cannot be Black *and* homosexual at the same time (Lewis, 2003; Gayles, 2008). When one is pressured or forced to ignore or hide such a major aspect of their identity, the cognitive dissonance that must necessarily occur from this can doubtlessly be healthy. Faced with the threat of social and emotional abandonment, many African American gay and bisexual men learn to sustain dual lives, and this often carries significant psychological ramifications (Greene, 1994).

As a result of assuming and internalizing the homophobic, homonegative attitudes of their social group, African American gay and bisexual disproportionately experience psychological, emotional, and physical health issues (Richardson et al., 1997; CDC, 1999; Crawford et al., 2002; Szymanski & Gupta, 2009; Amola & Grimmett, 2015). Adding insult to injury, the emergence of the Down Low myth that African American gay and bisexual were the leading cause of the of African American women contracting HIV/AIDS (Phillips, 2005) only exacerbated the homophobic and homonegative attitudes in African American community; these men became labeled in the larger society as the cause for the rise of HIV/AIDS in the African American community. (Phillips, 2005)

If the impetus for the condemnation of homosexuality in the African American community is ostensibly to save these men, to better their position in society (Griifin, 2000; Gayles, 2008), then one is led to realize that this is an oxymoronic approach to achieving such goals. If homophobia and homonegativity have been shown only to harm African American men, a more effective and healthy approach becomes necessary. One

clue that emerged in the literature is the negative correlation between levels of internalized homophobia and self-esteem (Amola & Grimmett, 2015).

Findings on Dual Minority Status

Gay and bisexual men represent a sexual minority, and this means that like any minority group they often face discrimination. When coupled with the experiences of oppression and discrimination that African Americans face (e.g., blocked access to resources), it becomes a circumstance where African American gay and bisexual men have to manage a dual minority status. Moreover, African Americans are less likely to have access to gay communities and it is thus much more difficult for African American gay and bisexual men to find alternative sources of acceptance and support (Lewis, 2003); when interacting with White gays, African American gay and bisexual men often face racism (Lewis, 2003), and many experience racism in interactions with White gay and bisexual men (Battle et al., 2002).

The need to compartmentalize one's existence emerges once realizing that they are only partially valued within the African American community (Greene, 1994), and this often leads African American gay and bisexual men to seek out the European American gay community in an attempt express the other parts of their identity; but, even here, gay and lesbian ethnic minorities regularly experience race-based discrimination in gay and lesbian social setting (Battle et al., 2002).

It has already been shown African American men perceive themselves to be unfairly treated, disproportionately, by the many institutions of our society because of their race, and self-reported higher appraisals of stress as a result of this racism (Greer,

Laseter & Asiamah, 2009). African American men have been shown to have higher rates of heavy substance abuse, elevated levels of mood and anxiety disorders, unabating levels of HIV/AIDS than their White gay and bisexual men (Richardson et al., 1997; CDC, 1999; Crawford et al., 2002; Greer, Laseter & Asiamah, 2009); racial discrimination has a been correlated with negative psychological and emotional symptoms, and substance use (Greer, Laseter & Asiamah, 2009).

Tolerance and acceptance of homosexuality in African American communities, while observed in many cases, typically comes with the implicit agreement that gay and bisexual African Americans are to remain quiet about their sexual orientation (Crawford et al., 2002). Thus, when faced with the threat of social and emotional abandonment from their community, African American gay and bisexual men are coerced into living a dual existence that often leads to significant health issues (Greene, 1994; Richardson et al., 1997; Crawford et al., 2002; Lewis, 2003).

Having to maintain a dual minority status—racial and sexual—African American gay and bisexual men experience a multifaceted form of adversity. They feel mistreated, discriminated against or abandoned by their most immediate social group (i.e., family, racial community) due to heterosexist, homophobic beliefs/behaviors, while simultaneously also feeling a separate, racial discrimination from the larger (White) society, including their White gay and bisexual counterparts.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This paper has introduced and described homophobia, particularly as it pertains to

the African American community, how it has been shown to harm African American gay

and bisexual men, and the incidence and scope of the issues; the methods used in this

study was also explained. Two major issues that arose in the literature—African

American gay and bisexual men's disproportionate experience of homophobia and

homonegativity, and their dual minority status—were presented and discussed. The

Afrocentric perspective and Social Learning Theory were described, as well as the

manner in which they may be incorporated into one's understanding of the issues being

addressed. This chapter will summarize the key points of the study, as well as discuss its

implication for social work policy, practice, and research.

Discussion

After reviewing literature surrounding the societal forces at play that leads to the

homophobia and homophobia negativity African American gay and bisexual men face, a

few concepts emerged:

(1) Because of the DL myth and it erroneous, egregious attribution specifically to

African American men, society is led to believe that the immoral behavior of Black men

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is to blame for the widespread incidence of HIV/AIDS in the African American community. However, White men just as often, if not more, engage in DL sexual experiences (Phillips, 2005; Humphreys, 1970). (2) African American men face much more negativity and disapproval about their sexual identity and orientation from their heterosexual friends and family than do their White counterparts (Lewis 2003). Because of this proportionately higher experiences of homophobia and homonegativity within their culture, African American men who identify as gay or bisexual men are often forced to compartmentalize their identities, which leads to what is known as a dual minority status (Crawford et al., 2002); (3) Having to deal with oppression and discrimination for both their racial and sexual minority statuses, African American gay and bisexual men are effectively sustaining a dual minority status. (4) In the historical, social context of African American culture, homophobia and negativity are a result of the homophobia and homonegativity expressed by Christian, White slave-owners. Moreover, homophobia and homonegativity are positively correlated with religious affiliation and church attendance Griffin (2000); (5) African American gay and bisexual men are at an elevated risk for emotional and physical health issues than their White and European American counterparts (Crawford et al, 2002).

Research has shown that African American Gay and Bisexual Men are forced to deal with oppression and discrimination in multiple, intersecting aspects of their social and personal lives, and this has also been proven to negatively affect their mental, emotional and physical health. The literature discusses the background research on the intersecting forces at play within the experiences of African American gay and bisexual men. Moreover, these discussions help elucidate the factors that contribute specifically to

homophobia and homonegativity as it concerns African American gay and bisexual men. While it may not be entirely obvious on the surface, these factors include (but are not limited to): heterosexism, racism, religious affiliation and participation, morality, and cultural engagement.

Implications for Social Work

When considering research on the negative effects that homophobia and homonegativity and racism have on African American gay and bisexual men, the Afrocentric Perspective can help guide researchers and clinicians alike develop a more informed and appropriate understanding of what they are; the information gathered from research suggests that the attempts to attend to these needs through the Eurocentric Perspective, dominant here in the U.S., have had rather dubious results (Schiele, 1996; Phillips, 2005;).

With Afrocentricity focusing on forming a multidimensional understanding of an individual, more appropriate methods can be established to better understand and address the particular needs of African American gay and bisexual men. Using its major principles—collective human identity, spirituality, and emotions being one's direct experience of the self, a legitimate subject of study (Schiele, 1996)—researchers can cater their methods of collecting data on this population by being reflective of the culture African Americans live in. Moreover, those who advocate for policies benefitting African Americans or LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transsexual) groups can be sure to have the incorporate the understanding that there are vulnerable men who live in the intersection of the two.

Understanding some of the major ways that homophobic and racist behaviors/feelings are taught better ensures that effective methods to buffer or counter the issues resulting from this are created. The Social Learning Theory provides that one learns (socially) by observing and modeling the behaviors of those perceived as most similar to oneself (Bandura & Walters, 1963). In practice and research, understanding the manner African American gay and bisexual men learn positions social workers to develop interventions/programs geared at teaching them, especially as children, how to value themselves despite the negativity they'll undoubted encounter regarding their sexual preference and race.

The relationship between racism and internalized homophobia and psychological distress and self-esteem suggests that mental health professionals should be able to identify, examine and challenge the ways that racism, homophobia and homonegativity affect African American gay and bisexual men clients, connect these effects to the larger heterosexist and racist milieu in order to help prevent blaming the victim, and assist African American gay and bisexual men clients in understanding how their internalization of this racism and homophobia may be correlated their self-esteem levels and/or psychological health (Szymanski & Gupta, 2009). Based on the findings of Szymanski & Gupta (2009), for interventions designed to decrease clients' emotional and psychological distress to be effective they should work at decreasing internalization of heterosexism would be important in helping to increase self-esteem levels.

Outreach projects and workshops directed towards helping clients establish a critical understanding of how destructive the social oppression that exists in our society can be, and this might help protects against some of the harmful effects of homophobia

and racism on the psychosocial well-being of African American gay and bisexual men (Szymanski & Gupta, 2009).

Finally, there needs to be much more research done on this topic. As stated earlier, one of the main limitations of this study is the lack of research conducted on this particular population. While there has been research conducted on the negative effects homophobia can yield, as well as those yielded by racism, there is a lack of research on the intersection of the two. For individuals that are experiencing negative effects from disproportionate levels homophobia and homonegativity (when compared to the rest of society), while concurrently facing the adverse effect of racism, there lacks a body of research that social work practitioner, researchers *and* policy makers can use to make evidence-based decisions on what factors best work to protect this unique population. This study thus to concludes that while an better understanding of the underlying effects contributing the particular issues African American gay and bisexual men face—internalized, disproportionate experiences of homophobia coupled with living in a racist society that oppressed African Americans—more research needs to be done to discern which methods work best to address the negative factors specific to their lives.

Also, there has been much discussion concerning the racist, sexist, social, and clinical implications of these studies, but there is a lack of more thorough investigation on the historical and socioeconomic factors that contribute to this issue. That is to say, where does classism play in this dynamic? Is it the case that poor African American gay and bisexual men more susceptible to these negative effect of homophobia and homonegativity than those who aren't? Also, while it is understood that White slave-owners forced their religion onto African slaves, to what extent does this play into the

high levels of homophobia and homonegativity occurring in their culture? Is it not the case that homophobia and homonegativity were prevalent in the religion and/or culture of Africans before being enslaved? These are important questions because they can help determine the extent to which racism and socioeconomic status contributes to this issue, and thereby helping determine the optimal approach to developing a way to abate its negative effects.

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