

Chapter 2

Gender and Black Communities

Semenya's tale begins with a tomboy who always wore pants to school, didn't mind playing rough, and endured plenty of taunts from the boys she regularly competed against in a poor village 300 miles north of Johannesburg. The head of her secondary school thought Semenya was a boy until Grade 11.

Sawyer and Berger (2009)

The above quote is from a news article concerning the elite runner Caster Semenya, at the time, an 18 year old South African world champion gold medalist in the 800 m. Controversy ensued when the International Association of Athletes Federations (IAAF) ruled that Semenya would have to be subjected to testing to prove that she is in fact a woman. The testing enlisted the expertise of psychologists, endocrinologists, gynecologists, and geneticists. She was scheduled to be tested in order to determine whether she would keep her title and medal. Semenya's physique, running style, and tone of voice suggested male sex to the typical onlooker; however gender is far more complicated than these characteristics. What is equally as interesting as the Semenya gender controversy, is the ease at which her parents, Black South African, accept her difference. Both of her parents have been quoted as saying that she was always different; she was never girly. She has frequently been subjected to assumptions that she is a boy, or litmus tests to prove that she is a girl. Her parents say that she was born that way. Medical specialists deemed Semenya to be *intersex* after a series of tests. Intersex has been cited as "born with ambiguous genitalia, sexual organs, or sex chromosomes" (Gough, Weyman, Alderson, Butler, & Stoner, 2008).

Semenya's case is a good example of the challenges faced when one is naturally a gender variant individual. Her experience is attributable to many cultures' socialization towards an overly simplistic binary and mutually exclusive gender categorization of male or female. Unlike Semenya's case in which her sexuality has not been publically made an issue, and her parents exhibit health-promoting acceptance of her difference, often being gender different may raise questions about sexuality and also the degree to which an individual will be fully socially embraced within the community.

The issue of gender nonconformity, sexuality, and acceptance in Black culture is complex. For example, there are some situations in which there is a type of “acceptance” of gender nonconforming expression (i.e. when heterosexual Black male comedians parody femininity), versus other situations in which there is comparatively more rejection (i.e. if one is a very feminine Black male, and openly gay in society). Comparatively less has been written on communities of color in LGBT scholarship, which partly explains the gap in the quantity of in-depth analysis of gender issues among Black LGBT populations. However, one theoretical approach to these issues promulgates gender nonconformity, gender non-traditionalism, and gender transgression within African Americans as means of dismantling oppression and embracing metaphysical belief systems that derive from indigenous collective consciousness and the ancestral collective unconscious (Phillips & Stewart, 2008). This may be useful and relevant for Black LGBT persons who are non-gender conforming.

Research has shown that even among Black lesbian populations there may be adherence to gender stereotyping and gender traditionalism similarly to heterosexual populations (Sneed, 2002). Researchers found that a sample of Black lesbians perceived lesbian gender identity as analogous with heterosexuals’ gender identity views. Traits such as being “feminine”, “warm”, and “adaptable” were negatively associated with a butch identity. Traits such as “masculine” and “athletic” were negatively associated with a femme identity. The women also negatively associated traits such as “sensitive to the needs of others”, “affectionate”, and “understanding” with masculine identity (Sneed). More studies are needed which examine the development of sexual identity and gender identity among Black lesbian populations to expand the writings that have been done on the development of *sexual scripts* among adolescent African American young women (Stephens & Phillips, 2003). Sexual scripts refer to socially constructed guides for how one should behave in a sexual relationship or sexual encounter. Though adherence to these sexual scripts among the lesbian population of Sneed’s study is not necessarily negative, such attitudes may be problematic if they interfere with authentic presentations of oneself, in favor of a self-presentation that one feels is expected.

Additional research on attitudes of gender traditionalism is also needed to expand the work that has been done with a predominantly African American (56%) heterosexual sample of young women who indicated traditional beliefs about women (Parrott & Gallagher, 2008). Their beliefs were discovered to relate to their having higher levels of sexual prejudice toward lesbians. A positive relationship was found between the women’s levels of sexual prejudice against lesbians and their having increased anger in response to female-female relationship behavior. Researchers suggested that the women’s traditional beliefs about women may determine their anger and potentially aggressive behavior towards lesbians (Parrott & Gallagher).

It would be informative to study a diverse sample of Black lesbians for how their gender identities and sexual scripts relate or do not relate to the socio-historical discourse concerning the racist and oppressive images of African American women described by Stephens and Phillips (2003). The researchers identified these images as “Jezebel”, “Mammy”, “Matriarch”, and “Welfare Mother”. In their work, Stephens and Phillips present the four images as the foundation for contemporary

African American female sexual scripts existing in hip hop culture such as “Freak”, “Golddigger”, “Diva”, “Dyke”, “Gangster Bitch”, “Sister Savior”, “Earth Mother”, and “Baby Mama”. How such scripts relate or do not relate to same gendered loving Black women is unknown, but in need of investigation.

Stephens and Phillips (2003) only give scant attention to the lived experiences of Black lesbians in their commentary as they explain the “Dyke” label. However, the focus in their work is more specifically on the presumption of lesbianism, as the label is applied to Black women who demonstrate strength and nonchalant attitudes towards males. It is worth pursuing through empirical research whether diverse groups of African American lesbians have had experiences within the African American community that are consistent with Stephens and Phillips’ reference to lesbians being viewed as asexual mummies or emasculating matriarchs in relationship to their interpersonal encounters with males. It could also prove informative to assess whether the other labels are also represented among young Black lesbians’ identities and sexual scripts as a result of their exposure to hip hop popular culture. Although the four images of the Stephens and Phillips study were used to explain sexual scripts and gendered behavior specifically among young Black women, sexual scripts should also be examined in the study of middle-aged and elderly Black lesbians, as they have had differing degrees of exposure to these pop culture images. Yet, middle aged and elderly Black lesbians have been likely exposed to other sources of sexual scripting. Such investigations would be a welcome contribution to the literature, since for many years now, scholars have written about the images of Blacks depicted in popular culture (Sims-Wood, 1988). It is time that researchers delve into how these years of imagery have impacted gender schemas of populations of Black people who do not identity as heterosexual.

Gender Non-conformity and Transgression as Metaphysical

The *metaphysical approach* to identity or understanding of self is less concerned about social conformity and social structures that are in place to keep individuals confined to one of two binary gender categories. The metaphysical approach to identity, advocates for individuals getting in tune with their spirit and inner vibrations, to transform their thinking in order to be liberated in their gender expression, which is a cultural phenomenon not uncommon among some Native American and African people (Jacobs, Thomas, & Lang, 1997). An example of this is vividly depicted in a segment of the documentary, *Venus Boys* (Baur, 2004), in which a biological female, Storme Webber, who is of diverse ethnic heritage (African, Native American, European) embraces the gender identity of transgender. Storme is comfortable with certain physical characteristics which are typically perceived as masculine features (i.e., fuzzy goatee/whiskers on chin); Storme does not dress in stereotypical nor traditional feminine nor masculine attire. Storme makes the statement in the documentary that transgender individuals were historically healers within some African and Native American cultures, and were historically well accepted in the communities.

Philips and Stewart have related a metaphysical approach to characteristics such as *gender non-traditionalism*, *gender non-conformity*, and *gender transgression*; they define each of these as follows:

- Non-traditionalism refers to expressions of gender, sexuality, or race that would be rated as “outside the mainstream” as it is defined by both insiders and outsiders.
- Non-conformity refers to expressions of gender, sexuality, or race in which people consciously go against the grain of the mainstream in the pursuit of personal authenticity.
- Transgression refers to expressions of gender, sexuality, or race in which people purposefully confront and contest mainstream conventions as part of a larger political agenda for social change.

Internet and cable radio personality, B. Scott, identifies as a multiracial/multiethnic person of African descent who is a self-identified openly gay androgynous man. Scott represents each of the above three characteristics in self-presentation. His gender-nonconformity is particularly noteworthy because of his being born in Virginia, and raised in a rural agricultural region of North Carolina. Scott has stated in interviews that he prides himself on being gender bending and thus challenging rigid notions of Black male masculinity (Arceneaux, 2009). He feels that it makes no sense to conform to arbitrary standards of masculinity, though he has been criticized by some in the gay community who accuse him of reinforcing stereotypes of the flamboyant and effeminate gay male. Such reactions from some in the gay community are testament to the internalized homophobia which challenges freedom of gender expression. To date, there are limited empirical psychological studies that specifically aim to study femininity among Black gay men to understand more about positive marginality for such men, as well as possible challenges that they experience as they live in various communities (Wilson et al., 2010). Increased empirical research in this area is necessary.

Traditional Gender Roles and Identity in Black Culture

It has been elsewhere written that hip hop culture may be examined for its influence on Black identity, including gender identity, among Black youth communities; specifically, hip hop has been discussed as a form of cultural capital used by Black youth to authenticate their Black identity (Clay, 2003; Gray, 2009). However, since the expression of Black identity authenticated by hip hop culture may dictate that gender expression exist along traditional gender roles, those who are gender nontraditional and Black may not be regarded as authentically Black. They may then face social challenges (Lemelle & Battle, 2004; Collins, 2004). Black Caribbean authors have argued that both men and women may be boxed into artificial constructions of masculinity and femininity through media images that reinforce stereotypes (Slocum & Shields, 2008). The more popular these media images, the more that these images

may likely negatively influence societal attitudes towards those who do not fit the stereotype, such as some Black non-gender conforming LGBT individuals. These stereotypes coupled with heterosexism also lead to attempts to box same sex couples into heterosexual paradigms, i.e. when same sex couples are asked by heterosexuals, “Who is the man in the relationship? Who is the woman, in the relationship?” As stated earlier, it should be noted again that sometimes even the same-sex attracted persons themselves may promulgate these heterosexually derived norms.

There is irony when it comes to mainstream hip hop’s promotion of sexism and heterosexism, because there is evidence that “gayness” is embedded in hip hop; though same-sex attracted expression is not mainstreamed or widely depicted as normative within hip hop, it is not uncommon (Tomas, 2009; Dean, 2008). Specific examples of the irony within hip hop regarding Black homosexuality and Black gender non-conformity are seen in (1) the glorification of male sexuality in hip hop, (2) the preoccupation with men’s fashion in hop, and (3) the patriarchy and misogyny within some of the lyrics and videos (Tomas). Women are rarely portrayed as significant in contemporary hip hop culture, even though there are and have been successful female artists in hip hop. However, many of the characteristics of hip hop culture signify male infatuation.

Black cartoonist and satirist Aaron McGruder in his animated series, *The Boondocks*, satirized Black male homophobia in hip hop in an episode entitled *The Story of Gangstalcious*, (Barnes & MacGruder, 2008) in which a closeted Black male rapper denies being gay while also demonstrating obvious sexual interest in and interactions with other Black men. Other Black characters depicted in the episode espouse extreme homophobic statements.

Psychologists have written about satire and the techniques employed within it to convey social commentary (Kreuz & Roberts, 1993). Consistent with the psychological literature on the use of satire, the effectiveness of MacGruder and Barnes’s *Gangstalcious* episode is based in the stability of the mental representations that are present while viewing the episode. Examples of mental components used in MacGruder and Barnes’ conveyance of their message to the viewer and the hip hop community in general with the *Gangstalcious* episode are the following:

- Hip hop is ironically homophobic.
- There is exaggerated machismo in the language and style of several Black male rappers.
- There is still substantial naiveté and denial about the existence of homosexuality within hip hop.

Thus, Barnes and MacGruder’s *Gangstalcious* episode is a satirical parody used to effectively critique the hypocrisy of homophobia embedded in the subculture of hip hop. This episode is in keeping with the intent of satire which is to comment on society and/or the state of the world; it is also meant to be derisive (Kreuz & Roberts, 1993).

In his autobiographical expose on the hip hop industry, Terrance Dean, who once lived as a closeted bisexual Black man, candidly recounts his psychological confusion and stress in *Hiding in Hip Hop* (Dean, 2008). Dean reveals his struggles with trying to project a masculine heterosexual image while constantly experiencing

intense sexual attraction to other Black men in the entertainment industry. What is also interesting in Dean's personal history is the fact that he was presumed to be gay or bisexual by other men, while he was supposedly in "hiding". Psychologically, this suggests a disconnection between the actual image of Dean's Black masculinity and sexuality which he was projecting to others, versus his idealized self image. Often he reveals that he was not as undetectable as a same gender loving man as he presumed that he was. Within himself and among other Black males in the industry with whom he had sexual relations, there was such disdain for male femininity that Dean seemed to be in denial about some of his own personal characteristics which may have prompted questions and assumptions regarding his sexuality as a Black man. For example, although it remains to be examined based on men of African descent, there is research precedent for the likelihood that even characteristics such as acoustic measures (the sound of a man's voice) may be a basis for others predicting Dean's perceived same sex attractions and degree of perceived masculinity (Munson, 2007).

It is evident from Dean's memoir that the patriarchy and misogyny that exists within society at large, and within subcultures such as hip hop seem to promote an aversion to femininity, specifically when femininity exists within a Black male body. Thus, patriarchy and *hegemonic masculinity* have potentially negative consequences for bisexuals (male or female) who are non-gender conforming, and also for transgender men and woman. Hegemonic masculinity embodies the most honored way of being a man, and necessitates that all men present themselves in compliance with its rules of being a man, including the subordination of women and femininity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Caribbean authors have also written on the existence of pervasive patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity within various Caribbean cultures. This directly relates to the negative experiences of Black gay men of Black Caribbean culture whose experiences are often stressful. Such men may be referred to by a pejorative term called *Buller Man* which means homosexual in some Anglophone Caribbean terminology (Slocum & Shields, 2008). The pervasiveness of heteronormativity, patriarchy, and traditional attitudes about acceptable gender and sexual expression negates the sexual identity of gay men and lesbians in some Caribbean cultures; it may also lead to violence against LGBT residents, such as has occurred on the island nation of Jamaica (Padgett, 2006). Also, in other regions of the Black Diaspora such as in Kenya and South Africa, lesbians have been subjected to "*corrective rape*" if they are openly lesbian (Topazzini, 2009). Corrective rape being a violent act enacted against a lesbian to punish her and attempt to change her sexuality.

Persons of African Descent: Gender Transgressions and the Metaphysical

For Black men and women who are bisexual, their sexuality may be deemed gender transgressive because of persistent traditional attitudes about gender roles. Specifically, it may be cognitively challenging for some to understand a person's

ability to be romantically and sexually attracted to both men and women, particularly as the critic attempts to cognitively process what this means in relationship to traditional sexual scripts that are based on traditional gender schema. For example, if someone with traditional views of gender perceives a Black man's sexual role to be the aggressor in the act of penetrative sex with a woman, this person may become confused and uncomfortable with the reality that the same Black bisexual man may also enjoy receptive sex when in a sexual act with another male. The converse is also equally plausible; a bisexual Black man may enjoy a more dominant and aggressive socio-emotional and sexual expression with a man, while being more sexually submissive and interpersonally docile in relationships with a woman. Similarly, varying possibilities may apply to the emotional and sexual experiences of bisexual Black women. Unfortunately though, relatively little has been written on Black male and Black female bisexuality, though it has been indicated that culturally sensitive psychotherapeutic ecological approaches may be necessary when intervening for the well-being of African American bisexuals (Scott, 2006).

Historic Black female figures such as Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton, Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith, have been identified as reflecting bisexual expressions of sexual desire (Phillips & Stewart, 2008). African American actress and singer, Nel Carter, lived with a female partner at the time of her death. Thus she too has been identified as a Black bisexual woman. However, only a few Black bisexual women such as Nona Hendryx and June Jordan have openly identified as bisexual, thus rendering many Black bisexual women virtually covered (Yoshino, 2000). Although Nel Carter and Bessie Smith represent examples of Black bisexual women who loved other women, their sexual identities existed within the realm of what has been described as a sort of "*down low bisexuality*" (Phillips & Stewart). As such, only scant attention has been given to their same gender loving relations. Thus, their sexual identities have been marginalized. Knowing more about such populations of Black women is likely to also prove informative for health related interventions which are greatly needed. For example, Nel Carter, experienced many health challenges. She experienced two brain aneurysms, and fatal heart disease in association with obesity-related diabetes; Carter also at one time in her life battled substance abuse. Her Black bisexuality coupled with various health challenges is consistent with reports from psychologists regarding the relationship of intersecting identities of oppression with social, economic, and cultural barriers to achieving optimal health (Greene, Miville, & Ferguson, 2008).

The degree to which Black men openly and comfortably claim and express bisexual identity, has not been adequately addressed in scholarship, yet the bisexual behaviors which exist in a more clandestine manner have been extensively explored in media presentations (i.e., Oprah Winfrey Show) of the "*down low*" (DL) phenomenon. Though Black authors have not consistently agreed on the degree to which DL behavior should be emphasized in relationship to the cultural complexities of HIV/AIDS in Black populations, Black authors have consistently presented the label as one that over time has become more narrowly defined to refer to men who desire a private life of sex with other men, while also using it as a marker of masculinity not stereotypically associated with gay men (Boykin, 2004; King, 2004).

Largely, however, the prevalence of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Discuss” attitudes has rendered bisexual members of Black populations relatively invisible within discourse and scholarship on African American sexuality. This is ironic given that researchers have uncovered that bisexuality is more prevalent among ethnic minority men relative to other men (Heckman et al., 1995). There are various cultural complexities contributing to this discrepancy between behavioral manifestations of Black male bisexuality and open acknowledgement of it (Sandfort & Dodge, 2008). Successful and healthy same-gendered loving Black men have extolled the complexities and challenges of being included in the black community’s standard definitions of black masculinity. One of the men of the study was quoted as saying that even other black gay men valorize masculinity to the degree that they often prefer someone who appears to be “a straight man who just happens to sleep with men (Wise, 2001)”.

Redefining black masculinity within the Black community to be more expansive and thus inclusive would also increasingly benefit Black transmen who have been outspoken about the salience of their combined Blackness and maleness (Lora & Ziegler, 2008). Redefining Black masculinity may also have implications for Black trans women, some of whom have reported a strong desire to be romantically involved with a traditional masculine heterosexual-identified Black male. However, due to the threat that such a relationship often poses to the heterosexual-identified male’s Black masculinity, several transwomen have had to face the reality that pursuing such heterosexual-identified Black males may be life-threatening, because the pursuit may evoke violence (GSSA, 2009).

Drag, Negro Faggotry, and Other Gender Transgressions

In the foreword to his autobiography, *Lettin it All Hang Out* (Charles, 1995), drag queen supermodel, RuPaul Charles discusses his developmental trajectory towards embracing his Black masculinity. “...when I am in drag I feel totally at ease with my feminine side, now, for the first time in my life. I feel totally at ease with my masculine side. It’s not just the way I look, it’s the way I feel that I am projecting.more to do with what’s coming from the inside than things on the outside, like my goatee or my baggy pants. And I’m loving it! It’s almost like I’ve found a long lost twin brother and been reunited with something that, until now, was just a shadow in my life (Charles, 1995, pp. X–XI).” As a drag queen, even as a little boy, RuPaul was very comfortable in makeup and heels. He candidly states, however, that the other aspect of who he is – the masculine persona – had to gradually develop as opposed to innately manifesting as a part of his identity. In contrast, his femininity was innately present.

Helpful to RuPaul’s gender transgressive expression was the acceptance that he received from his older sisters and his mother. Though his mother was foul-mouthed and often displayed what many would consider verbally abusive language towards her children, such language did not extend to her stating negative or unhealthy commentary on RuPaul’s femininity as he was a developing boy. Although researchers

have found that such family acceptance of LGBT youth is longitudinally health beneficial for LGBT persons (Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2009), RuPaul later in life did develop substance abuse issues, which he explains as due to his feelings of being different among his peers.

Though RuPaul is among the most well known examples of an openly gender transgressive man of African descent (along with 1970s disco singer, Sylvester) other Black men have “played” with gender in ways that have largely been viewed as non-threatening. Subsequently these Black males’ gender queerness has been acknowledged, mainstreamed, and largely accepted within significant portions of the Black community. Such men of African descent are Little Richard, Dennis Rodman, Michael Jackson, and Prince. We mention these Black males here solely in the context of gender nonconformity; however other scholars have categorized Black men such as RuPaul, Prince, and Dennis Rodman as examples of “*White Negroes*”, with Rodman and RuPaul specifically being described as performing minstrelsy (Magubane, 2002). Magubane labeled these Black men as white psychologically, though physically of Black race. Though Magubane writes that she defines them as *white negroes* not because of their gender nonconformity, it is difficult to disentangle her views from this characteristic, particularly as her work is published in the journal, *Men and Masculinities*.

What in these gender non-conforming Black men’s histories (other than their celebrity status) has allowed them to be comfortable being who they are, is worthy of examination among a wider number of Black men who possess such characteristics. Studying relatively happy and healthy Black men who are gender queer and yet diverse in sexual identity would prove informative and also consistent with a post World War II push in psychology to focus moreso on the positive behaviors among human beings which relate to a better quality of life. The more that we can learn about such men of African descent who are comfortable embracing feminine characteristics, and yet still be comfortable in their Black maleness could be used to ease feelings of difference among young children of African descent who do not fit neatly into the gender binary, or who may be instinctively gender transgressive as was RuPaul Charles as a Black boy.

In addition, as we learn more about ethnically diverse samples of gender queer individuals, we may be able to advance indigenous psychologies which relate to more contemporary gender theory which embraces symbolic, spiritual, and mythical gender emergence (McKenzie, 2006). The concept of *gender diagnosticity* allows for changing definitions of masculinity and femininity with shifts in time, settings, and cultures. One contemporary psychological perspective is that we live in an era of *gender emergence* in which masculinity and femininity are not fixed realities based upon biological sex (McKenzie). It may prove beneficial to the advancement of diversity if greater numbers of Black persons from western societies come to understand open displays of masculinity and femininity within biologically male, biologically female, or intersexed bodies irrespective of whether the expressions fit a sex stereotype.

The association of any Black person with white race, due in part to gender nonconformity is problematic. It has been found that outside of African American

culture, one may find acceptance of gender nonconformity that contradicts commonly held views about African gender conformity (Teunis, 2001). Using a case study from Dakar, Senegal, Teunis reveals that gender and sexual identities in Africa reveal more diversity than what much of the literature suggests via reports on AIDS and sexuality. There seems to be a greater variety of sexual behaviors than the work focusing on heterosexual transmission of AIDS in Africa would suggest. However, secrecy and lack of public scrutiny has kept the diversities hidden. Teunis calls for longer term ethnographic studies to uncover more of the diverse gender expression and sexuality across the continent of Africa that he learned about in Dakar. Dakar, Senegal was chosen for the investigation due to its large population and lack of specific laws forbidding homosexuality as in other African nations such as Kenya, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.

MIAKAS

Men Interested in AKAs (MIAKAs) are comprised of gay men of African descent who embrace their femininity and have adoration for the Black sorority known as Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated (AKA). Embracing their femininity, and boldly enacting gender transgression, MIAKAS have subjected themselves to ridicule, anger, and verbal assault as they show passion and respect for AKAs (Blumfield, 2008). The additional controversy of these men's interest in AKAs is spurred by the males' emulation of the AKA's feminine style of dress, wearing of the pink and green colors, imitation of the sorority's probate and step shows, imitation of the women's mannerisms, and MIAKAS upholding of the traditions of the sorority, AKA. MIAKAs are gender transgressive in their affinity for femininity; thus, this is a key reason for the anger and criticism that they arouse in their Black heterosexual peers. The negative reactions to these same-gender loving feminine Black men known as MIAKAs relates to more traditional historical views of gender that purport that it is best for men to be masculine and for women to be feminine; however, more contemporary views of gender refute the validity of this claim (Lippa, 2005). Mainstreaming discussions of gender, masculinity and femininity within Black communities in light of contemporary views of gender may aid in the understanding of behaviors such as those enacted by MIAKAS. A lack of understanding of the social and developmental psychological explanations for MIAKAs' behavior has been reflected in the commentary of critics who question why MIAKAs do not join gay male fraternities or question why they do not join heterosexual dominated traditional Black fraternities. Such questions reflect a lack of understanding. The options to join gay or traditional mainstream Black fraternities for MIAKAs would not fulfill MIAKAs' needs to express uncensored femininity; femininity is a comfortable and natural part of MIAKA's identity. Femininity can and does naturally exist within Black male bodies. Additionally, the irony of the intense disapproval of MIAKAs by some, lies in the fact that underground chapters of MIAKAs continue to exist on the campuses of several historically Black universities (i.e., Dillard,

Morehouse, Texas Southern, Langston have all had MIAKAS in their midst) as they have for several decades.

Some men and women within the context of HBCUs have characterized the MIAKAs' gender transgressive behavior as mockery of the AKAs (Blumfield, 2008). However, the *affiliative coping model* provides a plausible psychological explanation for the MIAKAs' behaviors. These mens' creation of MIAKA chapters may actually be a strategy used to manage heterosexism, which includes the building of a support system within oppressive environments (Wilson & Miller, 2002).

The affiliative coping model has merit in explaining the MIAKAs' behavior; affiliative coping suggests that the mens' "sorority" behaviors may be ways of coping with heterosexism experienced from heterosexual Black men in Black fraternities at the HBCUs. Some openly LGBT, gender non-conforming individuals have experienced struggles with regard to attaining full membership and unquestionable acceptance in greek life on campuses. Much like the U.S. military, though LGBT persons have always been present in these organizations, often they have covered their sexual identity or passed for heterosexual. Men and women who possess non-gender conforming mannerisms or style may find it more difficult to cover or pass, thus they may resort to forming their own groups that allow them to express themselves and bond as they so desire.

We must also examine why MIAKAs may opt not to join fraternities that are designated specifically for gay men (i.e., Lambda Phi Theta, Gamma Mu Phi, and Delta Phi Upsilon). The complexity of reasons for this are not presently fully understood, but this could be studied via asking research questions of MIAKAs about their gender identity schema, and specifically asking questions about their constructs of masculinity/femininity. Finally, for HBCUs, which are primarily within southern states where there is high religiosity, condemnation of homosexuality may be even more prevalent, thus impacting LGBT individuals' comfort level in attempting to join traditional groups on campus. Research has shown a positive correlation between frequency of prayer and greater condemnation of homosexuality among members of sororities and fraternities (Robinson et al., 2004). The existence of MIAKA "chapters" is not a new phenomenon of established social networks of Black gay feminine men. MIAKAs' presence and pride in their organization is consistent with the culture of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU), which have traditionally shown reverence for Black greek life in the undergraduate experience (Harper & Harris, 2006).

Negro Faggotry and Patriarchal Parody

Black heterosexual identified comedians Eddie Murphy, Damon Wayons, and David Alan Grier share a common history of performing what filmmaker and activist Marlon Riggs referred to as *negro faggotry* (Riggs, 1991). Negro faggotry refers to these comedians' performance of stereotypical parody of effeminate gay men, with the conscious objective of deriding such Black gay men's existence in pursuit of

a laugh from the audience (Johnson, 2003). However, Johnson has discussed these Black male heterosexual comedians' behaviors as queering their own Black masculinity. Specifically, Johnson deconstructs the comedians' behaviors from a psychoanalytic perspective which purports that unconsciously these comedians' parody of Black male femininity stems from the patriarchy that is entrenched in their rigid notions of authentic Black masculinity. This rigidity prevents some heterosexual Black men from embracing and identifying the parts of themselves that relate to a gay femme Black man (Johnson). Thus, unconsciously, in their parodies of Black male femininity (equivalent in their performances to gayness), Murphy, Grier, Wayans and other Black heterosexual identified male comedians have been described as melancholic over the loss of this part of themselves that cannot be comfortably expressed outside of their comedic performances. Their behavior has been described as a complex result of loss, refusal to grieve the loss, and then subsequently the incorporation into their psyches, a feminine component of themselves, which manifests in their comedy routines. The result of their performing such routines is the queering of Black masculinity to include feminine aspects of what these men really desire that they could express in everyday life. In classic Freudian interpretation, these motivations would not be a part of the comedians' conscious awareness. The existence of these Black comedians' feminine expressive behaviors, solely within the context of their comedic performances, contrasts with the feminine and open expressiveness of MIAKAs, who are Black men who fully embrace their femininity. If feminine expression were perhaps more acceptable among wider populations of Black men, then perhaps comedy would not have to be relied upon as the primary avenue for its expression among some heterosexual identified Black men.

On a related note, though not directly examined within the literature on negro faggotry, are the feminine personas of other Black male comedians, who instead of parodying Black gay feminine men, they parody Black women. This can be seen in the performances of several heterosexual identified Black male comedians such as Tyler Perry as *Madea*; Martin Lawrence as *Sheneheh*; Jamie Foxx as *Wanda*; Eddie Murphy as *Rasputia*; Flip Wilson as *Geraldine*; Ricky Smiley as *Bernice Jenkins*; and Cedric the Entertainer as *The Cafeteria Lady*. The humor found by some, in these Black mens' performance of drag likely stems from the patriarchy that underscores the "ridiculous" thought of a Black heterosexual man choosing to dress as the "lesser" sex. Also for this same reason, it is likely that the opposite behavior is not similarly seen as being as humorous for a Black female comedian to perform drag, i.e., as a male persona.

Psychologically, it is worth investigating the question of why such behavior has been so widespread among Black heterosexual identified male comedians? Are there explanations beyond the patriarchy inherent in the behavior? It is worth exploring why Black male comedians in drag and *negro faggotry* performances are acceptable as gender transgressions within many sectors of the Black community, but it is not as acceptable when gender transgression exists among Black gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons. It is plausible that the explanations are to be found in the complexity of cognitive, environmental, and social role theories of gender, as well as overall discomfort with various aspects of diverse black sexuality.

Increasingly open discussion of the subject of this chapter within mainstream Black media has begun to occur. On October 19th 2009, Black syndicated radio talk show host, Michael Baisden, aired the issue of male students of Morehouse College dressing in feminine attire, including heels, mini-skirts, and make-up during class attendance at the college. Baisden received on the air calls from segments of Black America regarding the issue, during which disapproval was expressed by both Baisden and his cohorts, as well as callers. Though the attitudes during the segment were not open and affirming, the fact that the discourse occurred is encouraging, as typically such issues are not addressed in mainstream Black media. Based on the content of the discussion, and the college under discussion, HBCUs will need to acknowledge their LGBT students sooner rather than later.

A few Black actors have skillfully portrayed gender transgressive characters in dramas (Ving Rhames as drag queen Holiday Heart in *"Holiday Heart"* and Queen Latifah as Cleopatra "Cleo" Sims in *"Set if Off"*). However, these individual dramatic performances have gone unacknowledged as impetus for discussions about the reality of these identities within Black communities. Gender schema among Black populations may likely positively shift to acknowledge more diverse expressions of gender among Black men and women, as there continues to be increased mainstreaming of Black gender transgression in media. The following examples reflect such mainstreaming: Isis (Black transwoman model) from *America's Next Top Model*; Bebe (Black Cameroonian Drag Queen) from *RuPaul's Drag Race*; Vogue Evolution (Black gay male and transwoman dance crew) from *America's Best New Dance Crew*; Felicia Snoop Pearson (Black masculine lesbian actress) from *The Wire*; Dorae and Tiara featured in the 2006 documentary *Transtasia*; and J. Alexander (Black gay gender-bending modeling coach) from *America's Next Top Model*.

Conclusion

There are members of Black populations who switch their gender expression between masculine and feminine. There are members of Black populations who combine masculinity and femininity in the same expression, with several contradictory elements within the same self-presentation. There are members of Black populations who exemplify queer gender expression while lacking clearly defined gender categorization. Such persons may still though, reject commonly used labels among white populations such as transgender or queer. A need to move beyond the binary based on the acceptance of multiple and culturally diverse examples of gender expression is necessary, such that individuals can be comfortable expressing their spiritual selves and authentic expression. This is in keeping with cultures such as some Native American and African cultures in which such persons have been described as sacred, gifted, natural, and spiritual beings. As presented in this chapter, there are examples of persons of African descent, historically and contemporary who fit these descriptions, but these persons have not been extensively formally studied for

the information that may be learned from their lived experiences. Complex cultural explanations underlie discomfort with certain forms of gender transgression among some people of African descent. Increased empirical research into the limitations placed on black male gender expressions and gender schemas for Black men and women is needed.

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