Buller Men and Batty Bwoys:
Hidden Men in Toronto and Halifax Black Communities

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT
This thesis was born of my desire to put forward a critical analysis of racialized heterosexism within Black diasporic communities. Central to this project is an elaboration of how such heterosexism is manifest as a form of bio-nationalism that is fundamental to many contemporary discourses of Black identity. The dual starting points of this analysis are the recent scholarly work theorizing the politics and socially transformative possibilities of Black same-sex practices [particularly in the work of Lorde, Mercer and Riggs] and my own experience growing up in Trinidad and living in Canada as a “buller man”, one who is communally identified [and publicly embraces this identification] as participating in male same-sex practices. With a framework developed on this double basis, I then present a detailed study of 19 Black men who participate in same-sex practices on a variety of terms and with various degrees of family and community awareness of their desires and experiences. These interviews provide a unique perspective on an until now, hidden dimension of Black communal life in Canada. Stressed in the analysis of these interviews is how these men negotiate the structure of heterosexist and homophobic domination that define the circumstances of their lives in the Black communities of Toronto and Halifax. This domination is also traced to the discourses of Black nationalism and the Black church. I argue that this dominance enacts a regressive form of “bio-nationalism” which legitimates a regulatory politic that effectively excludes Black same-sexed men from membership in Black diasporic communities. I conclude with a consideration of the transformative vision for a Black communal consciousness that would embrace all its members.

The findings in this dissertation highlight several educational, communicative and pedagogic issues for the contemporary educator to articulate a broader definition of Black nationalism, Black history and Black consciousness in Euro-Canadian/American contexts.
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Dedication

To My Mother Christina Crichlow and Father Emrah Crichlow
Chapter One

Buller Men and Batty Bwoys:
Hidden Men in Toronto and Halifax Black Communities

Dread words. So dread that women dare not use these words to name themselves. They were names given to women by men to describe aspects of our/their lives that men neither understood nor approved. (Makeda Silvera: “Man Royals and Sodomites: Some Thoughts on the Invisibility of Afro-Caribbean Lesbians.” 1991: 14)

Introduction: The Politics of Language:

This dissertation is located in my personal and collaborative struggles to interrogate the ways in which certain popular forms of naming and the associated realities of these names are integrated with and implicated in the daily realities of African-Canadian and African-Caribbean Black men who engage in same-sex relations. Pivotal to this project is my desire to critically analyze the intersections of race, nationalism, identity and sexuality for English-1

1In Jamaica women engaging in same sex relationships are called man-royal and or sodomites. Sodomite derived from the old testament. It is commonly used to describe women engaging in same sex practices (or any strong independent woman) Man-royal is peculiar to Jamaica, a culture historically and strongly grounded in the Bible. For more on this see Makeda Silvera, "Man Royal and Sodomite: Some Thoughts on The Invisibility of Afro-Caribbean Lesbians" (1991).

2This project is informed by my own personal, professional and academic experiences as a buller man and the collaborative efforts of other buller men, batty bwoys and gay men from Toronto and Halifax. I juxtapose my experiences alongside these men’s experiences and narratives. I see this project very much as a detailing of the correspondences among the politico - sociocultural structures of my research subjects, myself and the text, by exploring how we understand, name, experience and negotiate heterosexism and create survival spaces in various Black communities.

3The capitalization of "B" in Black refers to the usage of it as a noun and descriptive identity of African people; it acknowledges a common heritage, a cultural and personal identity symbolic of those from the continent and those in the Diaspora and not as color coding.
speaking⁴ African-Caribbean men living in Toronto and African-Canadian men born or raised in Halifax who engage in sexual practices with other men. The task⁵ of writing about these intersections raises a necessary set of preliminary considerations. What are the structures that inform and signify the indexical relationship between categories of social life and the experiences of those whom these categories seek to characterize? More particularly, how do historically-specific categories of sexualized identities, interwoven with relations of race and nation, reference the experience of men with such identities?

The complex issue of signifying a racialized and sexualized identity is raised by Audre Lorde (1994) in her critique of the application of the Western term “lesbian” as a way of referencing sexualized identities for Black women who engage in same-sex relationships. Lorde asserts the cultural and historical specificity of a Caribbean same-sex identity, an identity that requires its own linguistic self-identification. Lorde suggests the alternative word: “Zami.”⁶ For Lorde, the term zami signifies a cluster of meanings, associations, issues, concerns and structures of identifications that differ from those associated with lesbian, a term with distinct origins and associations in White Western culture. This is not to say that zami

⁴English-speaking African-Caribbean here refers to Caribbean peoples, embracing essentially the Anglophone colonized territory. Included are the people of Trinidad & Tobago, Jamaica, Guyana, Barbados, Bahamas, St. Lucia and Grenada. Absent in fact, but not in spirit, from this dissertation are the Spanish, Dutch, French and Papiamento speaking Caribbean peoples.

⁵Task here reflects the beginning of the development of a Black male same-sex framework for addressing the lacuna in literature on Black same-sex realities for African-Caribbean and African-Canadian men. This project begs for a continuation of a dialogic relationship in Black communal living on a daily basis.

⁶Lorde reaching back into the past, remembering her Grenadian mothers’ history in a small island called Carriacou, tells us that zami is a Carriacou name for women who work together as friends and lovers. The word comes from the French patois for "Les amies," lesbians. For more on this see Lorde’s book "Zami: A New Spelling Of My Name". Freedom California, The Crossing Press, 1994.

2
is a mono-referential term without differences. However, Lorde argues that those Black women with Caribbean and African-Caribbean backgrounds who engage in same-sex relationships articulate a sexual identity different from that designated by the term “lesbian.” This difference is captured through the historical specificity and location of Black women who, in very particular communal circumstances, live out their lives in social, functional and erotic relationships to each other, through actual social practice. In this sense, zami, therefore, is not the Black equivalent of “lesbian” (a white concept). Its deployment arises from the need for a new or quite historically specific term to express and make visible hidden experiences and newly acknowledged Black same-sex communal realities. Thus, according to Davies, the name zami implies, “. . . a similar move to find new language and new starting points from which to express a reality, as is, for example, Alice Walker’s definition of ‘womanist’7 as another term of meaning for Black Feminist” (Davies, 1994: 121-22). Khayatt, too questions the universalizing assumptions behind the concept of lesbian. She states that, “the incompleteness of the conceptual framework currently in use to discuss ‘lesbian’ identity has meant that the experiences of women whose cultures have produced different identities but similar desires are not fully recognizable under the term” (Khayatt, 1995: 3). Consequently, a mechanistic description of the complex forms of social regulation and resistance has evolved that excludes the experiences of those women it claims to describe. This critique of white Western lesbian politics by Lorde, Davies and Khayatt is the starting point for my project on English-speaking African-Caribbean and African-Canadian men who

7For Alice Walker, “Womanist” embraces a spiritual function while acknowledging the same-sex love among women as an attempt not to isolate same-sex practices from women. (Walker, 1982).
engage in same-sex relations and practices. Like these authors, I am seeking appropriate language to begin to theorize Black men’s same-sex practices from a non-western viewpoint.

In this project, Black men who engage in same-sex relations will be defined as “buller men”\(^8\) and “batty bwoys.”\(^9\) For purposes of this work, the terms buller man and batty bwoy will be used interchangeably as concepts and language to talk about and explain the living, social and political conditions of Black same-sex men from the Caribbean and Canada\(^10\). These terms represent a set of relationships and life stories that are indigenous to Black Canadian and Caribbean\(^11\) culture. Life stories here are not so much some perfect records of

\(^8\)Buller man is a derogatory term used to describe same-sex male relations in Trinidad & Tobago, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Barbados. "To be a bugger; to be (male) homosexual. G - Said that he heard M - say that C - 'bulled his way through the Gold Coast in St. James'. G - Said that he understood the word ‘bull’ to mean to be a homosexual. Thus it is also to gender with the male cow. The word appears to have a different history in Barbados. Sir Denys Williams, Chief Justice of Barbados, stated in a judgement dd 87/06/17 'that the natural and obvious meaning those words [he bulled his way to success] to a Barbadian audience is that the plaintiff engaged in homosexual activity ... that the plaintiff ... had ... committed the offense of buggery" (Richard Allsopp, 1996: 120).

\(^9\)Batty bwoy/man is a derogatory term used in Jamaica, Antigua and Guyana (Allsopp, 1996: 84), to describe sexual practices between men who engage in same-sex relations. I have not been able to discover the etymology as I have been able to do with buller man. The absence of adequate history of the genesis of the term and simultaneously a positive embracing of which this culturally unspeakable term is used, has resulted in a negative use of the term in contemporary theories of African-Caribbean and Black same-sex sexuality.

\(^10\)While the concepts buller man and batty bwoy signifies a break with the white hegemony of lesbian and gay politics (and recent development of "queer"theory), they are concepts with a distinct history within English speaking Caribbean culture. All of the African Canadian men interviewed became familiarized with the concepts through popular cultural musical forms (rap, reggae, hip hop, movies) and socialization with people from the Caribbean living in Halifax. While it is the case that Black men living in Halifax would not have the same range of experiential referents with these terms as men with a Caribbean heritage, I choose to apply these terms in order to avoid locating the men in a white queer discourse and identity, a project for defining a historically specific Black same-sex identity.

\(^11\)The Caribbean vernacular for talking about people who engage in same-sex relationships is culturally varied. In Jamaica, for example, man royal and sodomite are used
past life experiences of all the men. Rather, they form a fabulated strategy for recording a community of men and their survival within communal structures, often with selective memories of the past that they wish to share with us. It must be recognized that within English-Caribbean and Black Canadian cultures there are differences between countries in terms of both historical position and languages for naming sexual practices. For example, in a mixed Diasporic space, like Black Toronto, one can easily hear an amalgam of terminology. I have chosen to emphasize the terms “buller man” and “batty bwoy” because of the centrality of these designations in contemporary Canadian Black culture, especially in Toronto. There is no intent here to insist that bullers or batty bwoys hold one stable sexual identity. Indeed, I would suggest the very notion of a “sexual identity” is itself suspect. Rather, I am emphasizing that when discussing the actualities of the lives of Black men who enter into same-sex relationships, something concrete and significant is evoked by referencing the experiences of these men through the indigenous terms buller man or batty bwoy.

In defining and/or accepting these men as bullers or batty bwoys, I am insisting that we understand the cultural specificity of their lived conditions and social situations. This is a group of men whose heritage is an integral part of the history, geography, political economy and culture of the colonized English-speaking Caribbean and who are in the process of
to describe the interaction, love, social and sexual relations between two women. In Barbados, wicker describes the relationship between women, or as Barbadian legend has it, "it is an old, cross-grained woman" (Allsopp, 1996:603). However, in Trinidad, where I am historically located, and in Grenada, St. Lucia, Dominica, Carriacou and St. Vincent the term zami is used for women loving women. The male vernacular for men in sexual relationships with other men in Trinidad is buller man, panty man, mama man, or marico man. While Antigua, St. Lucia, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Grenada use batty bwoy, auntie-man, pantyman or buller man to reference sexual relations between and among men.
forging a same-sex identity. In other words, for the terms “buller man or batty bwoy” to have any more than the most facile of significations (a designation of phenotypical racial features), we must come to understand how lives marked by sexualized and racialized identifications are lived within very specific communal relations. How one lives amid the relations of the family, the workplace, community; how one engages others for purposes of pleasure and utility must be recognized as, at least in part, regulated by those historically instantiated, powerful modes of differentiation and oppression called sex and race. In terms of safety, these men negotiate their relationships within the structure of dominance that exits within Black heterosexual and homophobic communities. Heterosexist violence takes place against individuals in same-sex relations in many communities, not just Black ones, but there is a specificity to how it is lived in Black communal settings. The act of identifying oneself as a buller man or batty bwoy places an individual, historically and geographically, in proximity to a specific set of narratives, images and values. This naming ties identity to the history of the people in the Caribbean, to a historical, cultural, collective and personal sense of ancestral heritage, language, body gestures, and memory that is specific to African-Caribbean men engaging in same-sex relations.

Buller men and batty bwoys are not “gay.” Gay, like lesbian, is a white western term. Sociologically speaking, they reference a particular lived experience that is not a white experience. This dissertation documents and analyzes that experience to produce knowledge and to understand the naming of difference within a historical specificity similar to Lorde’s reclamation of zami and Walker’s proclamation of womanist.

The Invisible Men
The shortage of literature by or about buller men and batty bwoys in Canada marks the buller as analogous to the *Invisible Man* in Ralph Ellison's classic novel of the same name. (Ellison, 1947). A buller is not seen or heard, even though he exists, in a sexualized and racialized form. In Canada, bullers experience a triple form of oppression: racism and heterosexism within white society, racism and the sexualization of racism within the white gay community, and heterosexism within the Black community. Unlike the rich literature on white, gay and lesbian cultures in Canada, there is a paucity of written literature on the lives of buller men and batty bwoys. As a result, very little is known about how buller men negotiate their identities within Canadian and other North American societies. Denial of heterosexist privilege, combined with white racial privilege, has led to a void in academic and social science literature. In Canada, many of us bullers and batty men who are academics and cultural workers have been denied access to publishing by a racist industry. In our own communities, we are denied the luxury of writing and researching, where the subject of same-sex relations is treated as a form of gender inversion. White gay and lesbian academics continue, like their heterosexual brothers and sisters, to write as if they have access to everybody's experience and emotions, while denying bullers a voice and a moment to journalize for ourselves.

As Chan (1989) has observed, while studies of lesbian and gay experience in North America have expanded in the last two decades, they have most often been studies of the White, middle-class experience. The impact of racial and ethnic differences between gays and lesbians has remained largely unexamined. The interconnectedness of sexual identities and ethnicity contributes to the complex debate on identity(ies) development and is definitively underdeveloped in relation to Black men whose sexual practices engage them in loving other
men and who borrow from the current North American constellation of sexual practices and identities, namely, bisexual or gay. Green (1994), has noted that the complex interrelations between sexual orientation\(^\text{12}\) and racialist ethnic or Black identity have not been deconstructed; nor have the aspects of gay and lesbian identity development been explored in relation to ethnic and racial identity formation. This dissertation investigates the life experiences of bullers and batty bwoys living in Canada, from African-Canadian and African-Caribbean cultural backgrounds, in an attempt to begin to address this neglect.

The terminology I use intimates that, for historically-specific reasons, Blacks and whites have different epistemologies and therefore, language signifies differently for each. Furthermore, a cursory acknowledgment of the differing epistemological relation to reality of bullers and batty bwoys, as opposed to gays, suggests that unacknowledged racism requires continuing the project of examining, documenting and analyzing the language and tools of human agency used by buller men and batty bwoys. Language transmits the specificity of a culture. As indigenous terms, buller men and batty bwoy locate specific men within a set of social relationships that share an understanding of the terminology and wholly enact a definition of the culture and community of Caribbean speakers. Their identifications are, partially, imparted through the language they use when attempting to privilege, maintain and occasionally contest values central to Caribbean culture. As Mikhail Bakhtin notes, language has its own embedded history and memory.

Language has been completely taken over, shot through, with intentions and accents . . . All words have the “taste” of a profession, a genre, a tendency,

\(^{12}\)Sexual orientation, according to Simpson (1994), refers to an individual’s predisposition to experience physical and affectional attraction to members of the same, the other or both sexes. Established early in life, it is the result of a little understood but complex set of genetic, biological and environmental factors.
a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. (Bakhtin, 1981: 293).

To define oneself as a buller man or batty bwoy, linguistically, places one in a set of communicative relationships, where the parties share a history and parlance that define a mutual place within a shared linguistic culture. There is a need to reframe sexualized identity through a language which incorporates some historical specificity and makes visible who people are. Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphael Confiant (1990), writing on the importance of *Oral Inscriptions and The Ethnic Self*, as it pertains to Creole language, argued that:

"Taking over oral tradition should not be considered as a backward mode of nostalgic stagnation . . . To return to it, yes, first in order to restore this cultural continuity . . . without which it is difficult for collective identity to take shape. To return to it, yes, in order to enrich our enunciation, to integrate it and go beyond it . . . We may then, through the marriage of our trained senses, inseminate Creole in the new writing. In short, *we shall create a literature*, which will obey all demands of modern writing while taking roots in the traditional configurations of our orality (1990: 896).

Buller man and batty bwoys are indigenous ways of describing English-speaking African-Caribbean male same-sex relations and the social practice of this same-sex identity. These terms are full of specific intentions, suggesting picaresque constructions and surreal scenes. A mother tongue is a language with a history. In that sense, it is instituted before our birth and remains after our death. Its patterns can be filled with one’s own motivation and cultural context. Speakers fill language with intentions, occupy it for the span of their lives and leave it for other users. In essence, there is a historical, cultural, linguistic, collective and personal sense of ancestral heritage and memory for men of English-speaking African-Caribbean heritage. These identities reference modes of social behavior and conduct."
This dissertation recognizes that the Caribbean linguistic markers “buller man” and “batty bwoy,” have not been reworked by Black communities in ways that begin to connote positive affirmations and identities as have words like “queer,” “fag,” “gay” or “homosexual” in western and North American societies. The political subtext of this work is, in fact, to appropriate this tradition of reworking linguistic markers and to begin to (re)articulate an understanding of buller man and batty boys in that tradition. This project expands the theoretical tradition of deconstructive works by Lorde, Khayatt, Moraga, Anzaldúa, Mercer, Julien and other “gay and lesbian” activists and academics. This dissertation attempts to start this process for Black men in Canada who engage in same-sex relations to reclaim this historical-cultural moment. I politicize this particular process of self-naming and the connotative reevaluation associated with self-naming in order to reverse hegemonic traditions and reconstitute a way of affirming one’s sexuality on very different terms than Black culture, in particular, has allowed to date.

To understand bullers and batty bwoys Western terms will not suffice. The sexual practices of men loving men in terms such as queer and gay, are embedded within dominant Western and European notions of sexual difference and do not assume a Black Caribbean or

13 Homosexual is a word that has a particular origin on the scientific study of sexuality in Western and European society to define a particular pathology on how one lives one’s life along sexual practices. It is a word most people in the West take for granted as having a universal meaning. The words homosexual, gay or queer are European and derogatory in their origins and will not be used in this dissertation to discuss same-sex relations between Black Canadian men of Caribbean origin or descent, but must be clarified because of the common usage of the association of the word as used by most in the West. Michel Foucault using Carl Westphal’s (1870), "Archiv Fur Neurologie," argued that the very construct homosexuality, "comes from the medical community and as such is constituted as a disease and of course, as a crime, legally and politically" (Foucault, 1978: 43). Gay and lesbian theorists and activists in the West have attempted to reverse the historic negative connotation of words such as homosexual, fag, queer, gay, or fruit and use them in positive and empowering ways.
North American Black experience. Rethinking, re-appropriating and including terms such as buller man and batty bwoy are attempts to de-stigmatize and to politicize the concepts. We need acceptance and usage of Black same-sex Caribbean identified terms to carve out a space and identity(ies) for ourselves in Canadian society and Black communities. This dissertation enters the terrain of buller men and batty bwoys with the clear notion that buller man and batty bwoy are not equivalent terms to gay and that there is a need to reference sexualized identity through language. Bullers are not gay. Their lived reality, their sense of knowing what they know, epistemologically, is quite different from that of gays. Given this, in order to provide bullers and batty bwoys with a language for developing their own political agency, the terminology of buller man and batty bwoy is useful, but cannot be as simple as a name change. To understand something of the experience of Black men who engage in same-sex relations with other Black men, one has to understand the specificity of that lived experience. It is important to code that identity as different in order to begin to describe the actualities of Black men’s lives and the lives of other men, rather than have them subsumed in the generalized specificity of gay white lives.

This study contributes to the limited literature on buller man and batty bwoys by giving voice to people who have been made invisible and are often cast as examples of the sexualized exotic.¹⁴ The sexualized exotic Black male body can also be seen as sexually dangerous and violent. Within the process of show and tell, the Black male body loses human

¹⁴Examples of the Black male as exotic and sexually racialized can be easily found in Robert Mapplethorpe’s work on Black men, or in most male same-sex magazines that attempt to portray Black same-sexed men. As argued by Kobena Mercer in his critique of Mapplethorpe’s fascination on the Black male body: Black + Male = Aesthetic, erotic object. Regardless of the sexual preferences or orientation of either artist or spectator, the sense generated by this system of images is that the essential truth of Black masculinity lies in the domain of sexuality (Mercer, 1988: 143).
agency and is diffused by a process of commodification that strips it of dignity, self-worth and voice. This study also contributes to “queer” theory by enriching it with images and experiences of men often placed on the margins.

**Shifting The Gays**

For many Blacks in the Caribbean and in North America, the terms “gay” and “queer” conjure stereotypical images of a population that is characteristically white, effeminate, weak and affluent. These descriptors can actually efface, rather than affirm, the socio-political and cultural history I am referencing in this dissertation as buller men and batty bwoys. The terms “gay” and “queer” fail to reference the complex and multifaceted issues, such as the interrelations of colonialism, racism, sexism and imperialism, which play an underlying role in social construction. Essex Hemphill (1991), in his observation and critique of the white gay and lesbian community, commented that:

> The post-Stonewall white gay community of the 1980’s was not seriously concerned with the existence of Black gay men except as sexual objects . . . It has not fully dawned on white gay men that racist conditioning has rendered many of them no different from their heterosexual brothers in the eyes of Black gays and lesbians. (Hemphill, 1991: xviii)

Same-sex activism within white western society has embraced queer as a term that signifies political activism, identity and social practice. Queer has become a way of renaming and re-appropriating a historically negative concept and affirming same-sex identifications. It has also posited same-sex practitioners in western societies as a discrete ethnic group, using arguments that support the creation of a flag, language and community, which have historically been used to construct non-whites as ethnic/minority groups through language, custom and food. Commenting on the use of the word queer as a style of European, North
American and/or “Americocentrism”\textsuperscript{15} in gay politics, queer activism and social justice, Michael Warner, posits that the term is “thoroughly embedded in modern Anglo-American culture, does not translate easily and is a politically unstable. Queer dates from the George Bush, Margaret Thatcher and Brian Mulroney era” (Warner, 1993: xxi). I became familiar with the concept queer, after migrating to Canada and socializing with primarily white gays and lesbians in this country. I cannot recall how many times I was confused when they (my white friends) would use North American political and cultural expressions to talk about their gay and lesbian lives.\textsuperscript{16} These terms were extremely confusing to me. In Trinidad, the word gay was always used to express a sense of happiness, or people having a fun time, as is demonstrated in Trinidadian writer Raoul Pantin’s book \textit{Black Power} (1990). Pantin, writing on the aftermath of the February, 1990 Black power revolution, states, “... and for all the Black Power Rhetoric, the crowd still seemed in an a gay, lighthearted mood” (Pantin, 1990: 58). Further, Samuel Johnson, in \textit{The Economist}, June 29, 1996, captioned a cartoon with the following: “Avoid unwanted Carnival Babies. A few days of gay abandon can mean a lifetime of regret. Go to your family planning clinic”(Johnson, 1996: 88). In the Caribbean, it was usual to hear our grandparents and parents use the terms “gay” and “queer” to describe the behavior of people who behaved “happily,” “partied it up,” or were “crazy,” or “insane.” But the in/appropriateness, applicability and usage of these terms for bullers, including those living

\textsuperscript{15}I borrow this concept from Paul Gilroy’s article “It’s a Family Affair” (Gilroy, 1992). It is used to talk about how America sees itself as the center of the universe whereby setting the frames of reference for every one else. In this case, Black same sex subjectivity must develop a politic through white American gay political frames of reference.

\textsuperscript{16}Here I am referring to language such as queer, fruit, diesel dyke, drag queen, gay and other western expressions. These terms were not used by me nor my friends when I lived in Trinidad during the 70s and 80s.
in or leaving from the Caribbean, Africa and Asia, has not been a concern for members of the white gay and lesbian movement.

The inapplicability of North American, Western or European homosexual concepts such as queer, fruit, lesbian and gay to Caribbean and other Black, identified bullers is an important distinction to make in establishing the political, cultural and racial grounding of Black same-sex loving. Questions of class and colonial discourses are also important elements in this debate. The writer James Baldwin, although a native Black American, often spoke of his discomfort with the term “gay.” When asked if he felt like a stranger in gay America, Baldwin responded:

Well, first of all I feel like a stranger in America from almost every conceivable angle except, oddly enough, as a Black person. The word “gay” has always rubbed me the wrong way . . . I simply feel it’s a word that has very little to do with me, with where I did my growing up. I was never at home in it. (1968: 150).

Baldwin has been severely critiqued by many for distancing himself from the term. In his novel Giovanni’s Room, James Baldwin’s emphasis is on Giovanni as an individual who suffers the consequences of being afraid to fall in love, rather than as a same-sex symbol. Interestingly, this insistence on rejecting a label closely parallels what the Black men in this project expressed. The literature used by many theorists and activists in North America does not address the Americentricism and colonialism inherent in the gay and lesbian movement; nor does the literature produced by Black lesbian and gay activists in North America address the concerns of bullers and batty bwoys in the Caribbean or non-American parts of the Diaspora.

The Americanization and colonization of the White North American gay and lesbian movement reflects a form of epistemological cultural and academic imperialism, one that
makes invisible, yet homogenizes all life and experiences of same-sex people by presenting universalized frames of reference as if they pertain to all forms of same-sex naming and same-sex oppression. For Black men engaging in same-sex relations in the Caribbean or even to some here in Canada, these terms may have little or no relevance, given their dual or triple identities and the manner in which they live and organize their lives.

**Shame and Contradiction In Black Cultural Frameworks**

While renaming social-sexual practices within Black cultural frameworks is an important aspect of affirming a self-identification, it can also be a humiliating and contradictory experience for some men. Black male nationalists Baraka, Farrakhan and Cleaver are obsessed with, “gayness” as a “White man’s disease.” Dr. Llaila O. Afrika in his book *African Holistic Health* embraces “gayness” as a disease, he also argues that “western man (White man) is the victim of AIDS. Also those Black men who follow western sexual perversions are AIDS victims” (Afrika, 1989: 32). Not only is the buller/gay Black man diseased, he is also AIDS-ridden according to some Black nationalists. Furthermore, for some, “gayness” is interpreted as a sign of European decadence or a weak masculinity. In this context, men who participate in sexual relationships with other men are often regarded as race traitors. It is important to note that this narrow, political, but oppressive view held by some Black intellectuals and leaders has been a major influence in creating shame and contradiction in the psyches of the ensured and in marginalizing their lived realities in same-sex relationships. These leaders appeal to a fairly large percentage of Black populations in North America and the Caribbean, and their ideas are circulated and embraced by many who believe in their work.
The negative connotations associated with the terms buller man and batty bwoy still remain in Black Caribbean communities. While men may identify with terms that are culturally unspeakable, they may not want to be publicly-identified on such terms in Black communities. Many choose not to be named or identified as gay, buller man, or batty bwoy. This is a common practice for many, including those who are simultaneously or occasionally involved in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships, typically described in western terms as “bisexual.” This public refusal to be named a buller man or batty bwoy has its roots in multiple sources. There is no question that the Caribbean origins of buller man and batty bwoy contain venomous connotations. As lesbian activist and scholar, Jewelle Gomez has written, “it’s very difficult to cleave to that negativeness” (Gomez, 1983: 63); thus, the self-appropriation of buller man and batty bwoy has a double edge.

One of the questions that arises is, why do some men still desire to be identified as bullers and batty bwoys, given these negative connotations? Certain individuals choose to identify in order to assist in the erasure of these negative connotations. The process of erasure attempts to change the semantic and affective meanings of the terms and provides culturally-specific Black and Caribbean language consistent with lived reality. In addition, these terms provide a point of self-reference. As linguistic markers, they specifically identify a particular set of associations that define the parameters for many men from English-speaking African-Caribbean backgrounds. More specifically, these terms have historical, cultural and linguistic contexts and identities. These words, when used against a person suspected of practicing same-sex loving and sexual relations, carried and asserted a certain public and familial shame. This shaming often results in feelings of uncleanness, guilt and isolation. These conditions are the result of the impact of a religious community’s use of oppressive language, combined
with lack of support, in terms of social services, available to buller men and batty bwoys. The “victims” of these terms endure a violence (psychological, economical, emotional, communal and familial) that forces them into invisibility and the resulting pain must be internalized. In a society that values and prioritizes heterosexual loving over same-sex relationships, that uses the constructs and brutal force to silence bullers and batty bwoys, they are denied the agency manifest in a same-sex relationship.

In Black communal settings particular bodily practices are morally regulated. As a result, persons engaging in same-sex practices attempt to assert and construct a communal sexuality that is perceived to be heterosexual, despite the presence of same-sex feelings, desires and tendencies. The moral opprobrium heaped on Black same-sex practices within Black communal settings in African-Canadian and African-Caribbean cultures urges us to move in the direction of setting a counteractive agenda for Black same-sex sexual agency and its bodily practices. A part of this shame no doubt derives from the Christian or biblical legacy, along with Black nationalist labeling of the buller man as “diseased,” “a race traitor,” “feminine,” and “sick.” Christianity and Black nationalism17 have marked these sexual inscriptions as evils embedded within Black communal structures. They are sources of the shame experienced by Black men engaging in same-sex practices. These two Black guiding ideological principles offer powerful signifiers about appropriate sexuality, about the kind of sexuality that presumably imperils the race/nation and about the kind of sexuality that is

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17 According to Wahneema Lubiano (1997), Black nationalism, in its broadest sense, is a sign, an analytic, describing a range of historically manifested ideas about Black American possibilities that include any or all of the following: racial solidarity, cultural specificity, religious, economic and political separatism. (This last has been articulated both as a possibility within and outside of U.S. territorial boundaries) (Wahneema, 1997: 234).
beneficent to Black families, the Black nation18 and Black nationalism. Shame, then, is
grounded in Black ideological logic that gets translated into sayings such as, not just anybody
can be “a good Black nationalist” or “good Black Christian.” However, to make the shame
of buller men and batty bwoys culturally specific is to say it does not have an exclusively
western Christian or Biblical origin. For buller men and batty bwoys the virtue of their shame
is embedded within specific referential cultural markers and collective memories of African-
Caribbean religion. In an article in the Village Voice (January 1993) on buller men and batty
bwoys in New York City, Peter Noel stated that:

Legend has it that the Buller man is cursed with a Jumbie, an evil spirit sent
by the Obeah Man. Bullers can only become “straight,” so the legend goes
when the Obeah man himself is lured with bark, calabash, Julie mango and
angel hair trapped in a rum bottle under a silk cotton tree. (Voice, January
1993, Volume XXXVIII, # 2).

In some Caribbean islands, the “Obeah Man or Woman” is seen as a person to be
feared, because they are seen as dealing with evil spirits, the “Jumbie.”19 For many Black folks
believing in God, Christianity and biblical teachings, the Obeah Man and the Jumbie is wicked
and evil and must be feared. Part of this misunderstanding is grounded in White colonialists
ignorance regarding religious practices (Obeah and Shango) brought to the Caribbean from
Africa by enslaved Africans. Failure to understand and/or to appreciate Obeah as an African
religion, or a survival of African rituals, led White colonialist to constructing these as evil

18Nation here derives from the Latin word natio meaning birth, race, people nation
or to be born. Hence Black nationalism and the Black nation are used as concepts to refer
to Africa as "motherland" the place of birth where Blacks must turn for salvation.

19In Trinidad, Jumbie is an evil spirit of the dead that assumes human forms and
sheds its skin at night in order to raid the abode or steal the voice of living persons. An
operation which it must complete before day break comes, when it must hide (Allsopp,
1996: 317-18). In essence, the Jumbie is supposed to be a ghost, spirit, mischievous or
malevolent spirit, creature or person that functions at night (John Mendez, 1983: 71).
instilling fear in Africans embracing Obeah and Shango while Christianizing ("civilizing") them so that they could understand Black slaves' forms of resistance to white domination. 

John Mbiti (1969), for example, argues that what some people call superstition, witchcraft or magic, are aspects of cultural world-views. His book *Traditional African Religious and Philosophies* informs us that:

> Most [traditional] peoples . . . believe that the spirits are what remains of human beings when they die physically. This then becomes the ultimate status . . . Man [or a woman] does not and need not, hope to become a spirit: [s]he is inevitably to become one, just as child will automatically grow to become an adult. (Mbiti, 1969: 69)

Mbiti further informs us that African religions reject the socially-constructed dichotomies between sacred and secular, spiritual and political, which are prevalent within western societies. Obeah and the Obeah man are reaffirmed in Black Caribbean culture as one of the traditional African beliefs to cure the buller man. According to Richard Allsopp, “Obeah is a system of secret beliefs, in the use of supernatural forces to attain or defend someone from evil” (1996: 412). It is what one may be tempted to call witchcraft in Western society, because of the special use of herbs, candles, incense and poisons, aimed at mystical healing, harming or charming. There are moral and biblical values built into the understanding of some Black folks that same-sex practices are sinful and against the judgement of God. The Obeah man or woman, then, is the ultimate force that could cure a buller or batty bwoy from evil temptations. The Obeah man or Woman is a person (*who wo'k's obeah*) “who carries out the practice of Obeah as a secret profession and has paying clients”(Allsopp, 1996: 412). To be cured from being a buller you must pay the Obeah “man” a fix sum of money and this spiritual healing is done over a couple of days, or weeks.
In summary, the sources of shame for some buller men and batty bwoys is grounded in Black/Caribbean culture grounded in religious and traditional values and practices that at best are in opposition to same sexed practices.

**Black Communal Structures Entering The Critique**

It is often hard to sustain meaningful dialogue between members of heterogenous Black communities: heterogenous in terms of values regarding family history, class and sexual orientation. For men who engage in same-sex practices, this means being overlooked or forced into the homogeneity of the Black nation, Black family and Black communal structure, leaving no room for difference or visibility. Hence the title of my dissertation: *Buller Men and Batty Bwoys: The Hidden Men in Toronto and Halifax Black Communities.* The voicing of African-Canadian and African-Caribbean men and of the need to work across multiple forms of difference, is a morally and politically important project to make Black communities become more accepting of buller men’s and batty bwoys’ lived conditions. Both in political contexts and in the context of friendship, such a project within Black communities can be enriching. We must address the heterosexism and violence that these men experience, in order to reveal this wealth of experience in Black communities.

In the process of addressing these and many other concerns, it is not my intention to represent Black communities as more heterosexist and barbaric, lacking in logic, compassion, social justice and sensitivity to human rights, than other communities. Rather, it is to enable bullers and batty bwoys to move from *persona non grata*, into active participating members in their Black communities. Of necessity bullers and batty bwoys would first have to push the
community to revise the normative frames of reference of Black identity and representation. By Black identity and representation, I refer to Black heterosexist social power that resides in the specific arrangement and deployment of subjectivity in the cultural and ideological practices of heterosexism in Black communities. This must be critiqued, deconstructed and contested in a project of possibilities, in order to begin to rebuild and include members of the community who are ostracized and marginalized because of their same-sex practices.

This dissertation urges us to work in the tradition of what Paulo Freire calls "a social praxis...[t]hat is helping to free human beings from the oppression that strangles them in their objective reality" (Freire, 1985: 125). Heterosexist oppression, which is often an internalized or repressed form of sexuality, requires a multi-layered understanding. The oppressiveness of racism, sexism, classism and heterosexism are intricately linked for buller men and batty bwoys. Despite the different patterns oppression takes, many of its machinations follow the "blame the victims syndrome," and deny bullers and batty bwoys their human agency; view heterosexual relationships as "normal" within Black communities, and label same-sex relationships as deviant, sick or immoral. This gender inversion reifies an inherent superiority of one form of loving over all others. Such oppressive views reproduce hegemonic practices that are problematic, divisive, regressive and exclusionary because they regulate, oppress, deny and suppress the fantasies, differences, desires and practices of bullers (Lorde, 1984). Our desires as bullers should be a quest for the recognition of something that can be proved both aesthetically and politically and can be provoked to a particular end (Lorde, 1984). Within this context, heterosexism must always be viewed as an ideological construct,

20"Normative frames of reference of Black identity", includes buller bashing by Buja Banton, Shaba Ranks and Minister Louis Farrakhan as the norm
maintained through state and non-state institutions and organizations. Heterosexism is a construct that denies human agency and stigmatizes "non-heterosexual" behaviors, identities, desires, joys, pleasures, relationships, intimacies and communal life.

Institutions such as the Black church, Black nationalism and the Black family are the triple pillars obfuscating any progressive politics on the issue of Black same-sex loving. As Lorde states, heterosexuality or heterosexual identity "... operates from the premise that heterosexuality is the 'norm' or privileged practice and any other form of human sexual, or emotional existence is deviant, sick or abnormal" (Lorde, 1984: 28). The denial of sexual agency by heterosexist oppression within Black communities results in an "othering" of same-sexers. The Black community's vaunting of this othering is often interpreted by other communities as an indication that we are more heterosexist and homophobic than they are. But it is important to see this public othering in the context of the narrowly-defined Black nationalism discussed above and the articulation of religious beliefs that regulate and control difference. The Black heterosexist analysis is based on the centrality of race or race first, which, in essence, is reductive politicking. Craig Owens has argued that "homophobia is not primarily an instrument for oppressing a sexual minority; it is, rather, a powerful tool for regulating the entire spectrum of male relations" (1987: 221). The effect of this heterosexist

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21The ongoing debate about race, racism, sexuality and gender within various Black communities continues to place race or racism first, while all other identities such as gender, age, ability and sexual orientation are put aside or completely ignored. The argument made is that "the White man" (racism as gender specific) sees colour and does not see sexual identity or orientation. Bearing in mind here the patriarchal undertone to who the White person is that constructs the Black person as raced. Here race and racism are manipulated to subsume Black same-sex desires, and made to blur and suppress all interplay between same-sex desires, gender and racism.
regulation, within the context of Black male relations or bonding, is that Black men must perform as cool, tough studs, in order to prove their Black masculinity or maleness.

The male sex-role ideology, Charles Socarides argues, “embodies the competitive ego-centricity of the capitalist market system, that further militates against the solidarity of the homoerotic bond which threatens the atomizing methods of domination” (Socarides, 1974: 228). The regulatory forces of heterosexism, as lived through racism, victimize and deny Black men the ability to be affectionate, emotional, or compassionate with each other both in public or private spaces. This also includes for many of them their women, and their children as well. This is a power paradigm firmly ensconced in a heritage of brutality.

Many of the men I interviewed voice the pain of having been silenced or excluded because they were perceived as “being different,” “not masculine enough,” “not Black enough,” or conversely, “too Black.” This research is also about lived human experiences and relationships and focuses on those lives that are positioned within particular “heterosexist structures of dominance” within Black communities. Black structures of dominance are felt in many ways, including public shame, loneliness and exclusion from Black communal living. In using the phrase “structures of dominance,” I am referring to the myriad of ways in which bullers and batty bwoys are positioned within social relations of Black community life so that we come to anticipate how our presence will provoke practices of marginalization in the form of symbolic, if not physical, violence. Nikki Giovanni reminds us of the symptomatic and cathartic violence that must be challenged in order to transform Blacks from victims into active subjects documentation. It is my assertion that structures of dominance are essentially
the effects of the increasingly hegemonic discourses\textsuperscript{22} that have given definition to a well-articulated Black cultural formation, which I reference as a form of Black consciousness and collective struggle. By “collective struggle,” I mean a set of practices that are organized in ways (dominated by men) to solve historic problems in the struggle for self-determination in the context of Black community life, especially attempts to promote Black liberation, nationalism, decolonization and Black empowerment. By “Black cultural formation,” I am referencing a form of consciousness and a regulated, complex set of material and symbolic practices, that organize and “normalize” “the Black community.” Within these processes, social forms become implicated projects of moral regulation, which establish the notion of “norming” or the limits of “properss” within Black communities.

Michel Foucault suggests that structures of dominance and oppressive conditions are always locally-contested within discursive fields of force. Foucault wrote:

The power to control a particular field resides in claims to (scientific knowledge) embodied not only in writing but also in disciplinary and professional organizations, in institutions (hospitals, prisons, schools, factories) and in social relationships (doctor/patient, teacher/student, employer/employee, parent/child, husband/wife). Discourse is thus contained or expressed in organizations and institutions as well as in words; all of these constitute texts or documents to be read (Foucault, 1980: 67).

For Black communities, this means that there exists a variety of “discursive fields of force” competing with one another for legitimacy. Such discursive fields, as they apply to buller men and batty bwoys, are organized, not only by Black professional groups,

\textsuperscript{22}For purposes of this project, "discourse" is a double theoretical moment of articulation and representation of the phenomena of the way things will be pictured, named or spoken because of a symbolic system people use to communicate with each other. The manner in which identities, practices and relations are pictured, named or spoken are central primarily because of the historical, social and institutional significance attached to symbols in any form of communication. Critical, herein, are the institutional forms, social relations, material interests and resources mobilized in order to put a practice of articulation into play.
organizations, the Black church and community media, but also by a loosely organized set of relationships among Black communal groups. However, it is the twin pillars: the Black church and groups devoted to promoting a Black nationalist/heterosexual identity, that are the dominant determiners of the discursive fields which permeate everyday life in Black communities. These dominant discursive fields act as moral regulators of everyday life. The subject of "moral regulation," is clarified by Philip Corrigan, who suggested that:

Moral regulation through its reproduction of particular (proper, permitted, encouraged) forms of expressions fixes (or tries to fix) particular signs, genres, repertoires, codes, as normal representations of 'standard' experiences which represent human beings as far more standardly 'equal' than they can be in fact. (Corrigan, 1990: 111)

To illustrate this point, within Toronto's Black communities, "moral regulation" is articulated as textual and verbal practices legitimated and constructed by a heterosexual alliance of intellectuals, clothing and costume designers, ideologues, activists, religious leaders, writers and entertainers. It is important to understand Black heterosexual thinking as continually concretized in practices that promote heterosexuality. These practices have the effect of constructing same-sex relationships as abnormal and outside the normative framework of Black life and Black identities. I underline the fact that this thinking is heterosexual in order to emphasize the common assumption that everyone in the Black community is heterosexual. Insofar as this dissertation challenges this assumption it challenges those who espouse these narrow views to confront their own prejudice and bigotry against bullers and batty bwoys. Black heterosexual thinking is the rooted in a cultural formation

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23These are Blacks who have a very rigid position on Black nationalism, Black consciousness, the Black family, Black sexuality, religion, etc., and are only interested in their own position, views, and intellectual thoughts - and not the views and opinions of others.
encapsulated by prevailing discourses that stress Black nationalism and a policing of the body as a necessary element of such nationalism. In other words, this cultural formation, built into "the Black political project,"\textsuperscript{24} is intended to assert a Black national identity which mobilizes or puts into play elements of moral regulation that attempt to purify racial and sexual identities by silencing "difference."\textsuperscript{25} The incorporation of these discourses by Black leaders and the re-circulation and adoption of these discourses in Black popular culture increase the discourse's hegemony by regulating morality.

Black popular culture is a problematic concept. "Black popular" already assumes a fixed and common or popular identity, which all Blacks must fit into, or abide by. In essence, it is a regulatory concept that polices the performance, actions and expectations of Black bodies whether they are bullers, batty bwoys, bisexuals, or heterosexuals. In this context, "Black Masculinity," under the disguise of Black popular culture, will always erase Black male same-sex eroticism. Attempts by community activists and academics, like Molefi Kete Asante, to develop a community-wide legitimization and celebration of Kwanzaa,\textsuperscript{26} unity for

\textsuperscript{24} The Black political project is a call for the people of African descent to unite, recognize their heritage and to build a sense of community. It is a call for Black people to begin to define their goals, lead their own organizations and support those organizations. This call rejects racist institutions and their values. In general this project is a challenge to normative frames of white thinking that has historically characterized Black power movements in the 1960's. This can be heard at Black rallies for social justice, by community spokespersons advocating Black empowerment, Black consciousness and Black liberation.

\textsuperscript{25} Here the concept "difference" for me has to do with how meaning is made through implicit or explicit constructions of people as buller man, batty bwoy, "gay," sick, or weak. Also too, how the repressive ideological apparatuses in question are able to alienate Black same-sexed identified people from the community by simply constructing, defining or labeling them as different.

\textsuperscript{26} Kwanzaa is an African-American celebration, celebrated from 26th December through January 1st. It is based on the agricultural celebrations of Africa called "the-first fruits" celebrations which were times of harvest, in gathering reverence, commemoration, recommitment and celebration, through December 26 to January 1. There are seven
Black heterosexual nuclear families, with Black heterosexual men and women loving each other in procreative ways; the Black nationalists view of same-sex practices as a White man's disease; a structuring of public demonstrations as a sign of solidarity for Black consciousness; and exhortations from to develop a community-wide unifying commitment in order to invest in Black institutions and develop the Black community, all constitute examples of this moral regulation. Kwanzaa, as a spiritual and communal celebration, in particular, emphasizing heterosexual family values, community participation and concepts of love and togetherness, is promoted by community leaders and organizations who structures public demonstrations and administer Black programs and services. It is the reproduction of communal events like these within Black communities that lends to the creation of a particular form of Black masculinity, while erasing Black same-sex practices.

**Purpose and Structure of the Dissertation**

This research is limited to the life experiences of English-speaking African-Caribbean bullers and batty bwoys and African-Canadian gay men, who live their lives in communities that articulate oppressive notions of sexuality. The purpose of this study is to make at least some of these experiences explicit and to try and clarify what it means for these men to negotiate communal structures of dominance which are informed and regulated by heterosexist thinking. With the word "negotiate," I am referencing the manner in which men live emotionally, physically and socially, in ways that ensure their safety and pleasure. I

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principles to Kwanzaa. They are as follows: Umoja (unity), Kujichagalia (self determination), Ujima (collective work and responsibility), Ujama (cooperative economics), Nia (purpose), Kuumba (creativity) and Imani (faith). These constitute a moral code which regulates the relationships of same-sex practices.
engage in a critique of the discourses of Black communal solidarity which help to legitimate the structures of dominance. It is not always simple to theorize or explain how these Black men negotiate their same-sex practices. It requires affinity with or membership in the culture of the community in question to understand the unwritten codes of same-sex social practices. This gives this dissertation a fourfold purpose: 1) to make public the communal and family experiences of bullers and batty bwoys; 2) to show what it means for buller men to negotiate communal structures, which are informed by certain types of heterosexist thinking within Black communities; 3) to present a critical analysis of how discourses of Black communal solidarity and bio-nationalism provide a legitimation of cultural forms that are oppressive to this segment of the Black community; and 4) to examine the politics and ethics of Black communal life in ways that take into account the joy and suffering of same-sexed people who are members of the community.

In essence, this thesis urges same-sex and heterosexual Black communities, as Audre Lorde so eloquently put it, to:

Commit ourselves to some future that can include each other and to work toward that future with the particular strengths of our individual identities. And in order to do this, we must allow each other our differences at the same time as we recognize our sameness. (Lorde, 1984: 142)

This dissertation also attempts to answer the pressing question of human possibilities raised by Lorde: how do we do this? A brief discussion of each of these objectives is warranted and follows.

(1) **To make public the communal and family experiences of bullers and batty bwoys**
There is minimal awareness about the issues that affect bullers and batty bwoys within Black communities. Black heterosexism and homophobia are addressed, (again not because Black communities are more virulently heterosexist and homophobic than those of other groups), but because it is in Black communities that heterosexist suffering is an everyday reality for myself and many other bullers. We suffer and yet we continue to embrace and laugh with Black heterosexual brothers, sisters, aunts, mothers, fathers and friends. This dissertation argues that making public both the public and private pain of the men interviewed should be seen as a form of politics that is ethical and effective. Making the men’s pain public to Black communities is a responsible task in a project of liberation. This project posits the process of making public the debate around Black same-sex male relations as an effective method for getting others to reconsider the oppressive structures of dominance that the community, organizations, family and church enact on a daily basis. An effective beginning for initiating change requires both a conceptual and practical rethinking of the place of bullers and batty bwoys in various Black communities; as well as addressing the lack of actual support which exists among Black organizations. The questions it raises are: Will this analysis contribute to altering the degree of acceptance of bullers and batty bwoys? Will it compel some members of the Black, heterosexual community to rethink the place of bullers? Will these changes lead to the possibility of more communal and family support for buller men and batty bwoys?

(2) **To show what it means for buller men and batty bwoys to negotiate communal structures that are informed by a certain type of heterosexist thinking within Black communities.**

For some African-Canadian and African-Caribbean men, engaging in same-sex relations involves a denial of self and sexuality in order to be accepted in or become a part of
Black communal solidarity and Black familial expectations. For these men, heterosexist suffering is a daily reality in which most of them are not allowed to comment, complain or challenge. This seems to be the general sentiment echoed by most of the men in this project, when asked about the Black community and how they negotiate their lives. Black heterosexist thinking is also grounded in very specific gender expectations of masculinity that the men in this project must live up to, or suffer the public and communal violence that is associated with being labeled weak, buller man, batty bwoy, feminine or race traitors. These men’s negotiations are not free from the gender trappings of sexism and sexual oppression, because sexual oppression is about traditional roles. These men are forced to subscribe to a heterosexist orientation to be accepted within Black families, Black communal settings and Black diasporic nationalism.

It is impossible to begin to discuss notions of negotiation for these men without talking about violence, public and communal shame, suicide and self-hatred. Therefore, I begin with the assumption that the life of Buller men and batty bwoys, while not solely about oppression and pain, does include a considerable amount of negotiation in order to survive Black heterosexist structures of dominance.

The discussion of sexuality and the negotitative aspect of it is also linked to questions of desire and pleasure. To discuss one’s identity in terms of desires and pleasures is to talk about what one views as pleasurable in the realm of sexuality. Some questions that arise out of such discussions, whether one is heterosexual or buller are: How do you pursue your pleasures? How do you live a life that acts on the erotic and sensuous side of different experiences? For buller men, to pursue their sexual identities on these terms seems impossible outside of questioning how their safety is compromised. Safety references the threat of
exclusion and the potentiality of avoiding the experience of violence perpetuated against them/us. They must negotiate their pleasures in ways that minimize their exposure to individuals in the community who would view them and their behavior as shameful, morally corrupt and traitorous. Thus, a buller is often forced into developing a way of participating in communal structures that allows him to pass as "heterosexual," while continuing to pursue same-sex pleasures and desires. If this form of participation cannot be negotiated, a buller must make the decision to isolate himself from the larger community and function within a relatively self-contained pocket of same-sex associations. Bullers are often forced to form relationships with "others" outside Black communities; this ultimately isolates them from the larger Black community. These networks and support groups of bullers, zamis and batty bwoys, speak negatively of the heterosexual Black community.

(3) To present a critical analysis of how discourses of Black communal solidarity and bio-nationalism provide a legitimation of cultural forms that are oppressive to this segment of the Black community

As an activist and intellectual in the Black community, it is important for me to engage the notions of language, leadership and ideas which provide a framework and vision for what Black communities might be, in relationship to future political work and the intellectual development of the Black community. It is imperative to examine the Black canonic intellectual discourses that circulate, in order to understand the degree to which discourses collaborate with the pain in Black men's lives. I am a buller man who affirm a Black same-sex, nationalistic politic attempting to make sense of how Black men experience domination through Black nationalistic political discourse. This discourse is not simply abstract politics, but implicates Black men in the process. This needs to be radically challenged and transformed. To begin this work, reference must be made to the torrent of works published
by dissenting same-sex and anti-heterosexist writers such as A. Lorde, J. Gomez, B. Smith, E. Hemphill, K. Mercer, C. Clark, b. hooks, E. Hardy and J. Baldwin; and film makers Marlon Riggs, Parbita Parmar, Issac Julien and Cheryl Dunyne. They have challenged and informed my understanding of Black same-sex identities, difference, nationalism; and have influenced my belief in developing a non-hierarchical approach to Black nationalism and Black consciousness. Film maker, writer and activist Marlon Riggs, for example, suggests that a hierarchy of identities on Black issues is problematic, since all characteristics can be “both nurturing and nourishing of your spirit. You can embrace all of that lovingly equally” (Simmons, 1991b: 191). Clearly Riggs’s work and others in this tradition have provided a cornerstone of excellence on this ground-breaking taboo subject.

Furthermore, I investigate how bullers and batty bwoys make sense of and derive their self-worth from their sexual identities. I also interrogate theories of regulation of desires and processes through which the body is controlled when one is suspected, coded or marked as a buller or batty bwoy by others. I examine the multifaceted ways in which buller men and batty bwoys negotiate pleasure and their lives, in the context of the Black heterosexist community, including negotiations around Black activism, the Black family, church, community demonstrations and meetings, music and popular culture. I draw from my own life experiences as a buller man, to add to the diversity and complexity of this new and emerging field of buller men and batty bwoys in Caribbean and Black studies.

(4) To examine the politics and ethics of Black communal life in ways that take into account the joy and the suffering of same-sexed people who are members of the community.

Throughout this study, I limit myself to the lived experiences of bullers and batty bwoys, my own personal experiences and the various positions of social life, education,
immigration status and cultural backgrounds of men living in Toronto and Halifax. I provide a framework for understanding and transforming the way buller and batty bwoy identities and experiences are negotiated within a Black cultural formation that is becoming increasingly hegemonic. Through an inter-textual reading and conception of Black nationalist heterosexist writers such as Elridge Cleaver, Molefi Asante, Louis Farrakhan, Frantz Fanon and Haki Madhubuti, I establish an index of the circulation of their hegemonic canonical discourses and make a connection to Black same-sex practices. I attempt to make sense of how Black men experience domination through Black nationalistic discourse as a political discourse. As mentioned above, this discourse is not simply abstract politics. The logic of this domination corresponds to how bullers are implicated in the very process that I assert needs to be radically transformed.

I will attend to a variety of sexual practices that will clearly define a range of sexual identities, which will rupture the notion that the categories “buller” and “heterosexual” are singular and uniform. I will articulate the very complex and varied forms that exist under these homogenizing delineations.

**Chapter Sequence**

I begin chapter two with an analysis and location of myself in this project as a buller man, in order to theorize some of my own personal and political experiences in the realm of Black same-sex relationships with other English speaking African-Caribbean and African-Canadian men. This is an important point of departure for me. As a buller man, much of what I have lived through has not been documented. This analysis also serves to complement the
lived experiences of the men in this project, as we attempt to create a model for other bullers and members of the larger community through diversity and commonality.

In chapter three, I introduce the methodological framework and begin discussing the interviews continuing a discussion of Black family relationships and their importance to the lives of buller men, batty bwoys and same-sex males. I am particularly interested in how the men were able to find their own place in their families, how they negotiated their family relations and familial shame, family violence, positive family reinforcement, suicide and professional help.

Chapter four continues with interviews of the men and discusses issues raised about the importance and possibilities of participating in both secular and religious organizations. One of its key aspects is the question: What does it mean for these men and others to try to participate in, feel affirmed by or feel a sense of belonging to and identification with, members of the Black community? Here I am interested in the men’s stories around communal participation, whether they feel invisible within Black communities or not, the impact of Black religious values on their lives, violence they experienced and how they negotiated it. This category is investigated under the rubric “Belonging and Identification.”

In chapter five, I discuss the men’s familiarity with Black nationalist discourse, their understanding of Black nationalism and how it has affected their ability to participate in Black communities and have intimate relationships with other men. I also investigate how heterosexism and homophobia in Black nationalism and the construction of a Black hyper-masculinity have affected the men in this study. To accomplish this I provide an inter-textual analysis of how the buller man, as a concept, is articulated, constructed and given a set of connotations within Black intellectual hegemonic discourse. I analyze how race, identity,
representation, pleasure, desire and sexuality are constructed in the Black hegemonic. For example, I look at clarifying how the legitimation of particular texts in the Black cultural canon contributes to an ongoing development of a cultural formation that defines the desirable and proscribed norms of Black identity. More specifically, I explore the systems of thought invoked by Farrakhan, Barraka, Fanon, Morrison, Cleaver, Hare and others when they construct Black same-sex bodies. In particular, given the centrality of the canon to the development of a cultural formation inclusive of Black diasporic historical social development, it is critical to “interrogate” the canon and the attendant circulation of discourses that become a consequence of canonization. The process of interrogation refers to the exercise of uncovering and making visible the terms of conduction and forces of regulation inherent in these discourses.

Through interviews with bullers and batty bwoys, chapter six tries to interpret how they live and negotiate their relationships in specific Black communities of Toronto and Halifax. I also query how they felt about their own sexuality, about bisexuality, lovers and relationships and how they lived these aspects of their lives within the larger structure of dominance in Black communities and the wider society. I examine how they negotiate oppression as it pertains to their sexuality and how they negotiate pleasure. The analysis in this chapter clarifies the substance of the structures of dominance referred to earlier.

In chapter seven, I conclude that there is a Black bio-nationalistic discourse that is heterosexist and oppressive to the same-sex segments of Black communities and that this discourse sets up a regulatory politic that excludes the men who are the subjects of this dissertation, from Black communal life. I also ask a number of questions: Can a dominant regime such as Black bio-nationalism be challenged, contested or changed? What are the
counter-strategies by which the church, family and communal institutions, can begin to subvert Black bio-nationalism and its regulatory forces? Finally, what are the theoretical underpinnings for all of the above, in relationship to rethinking communal Black discourses that integrate and respect the dignity of all bullers in communal solidarity?
Chapter Two

Biomythography: The Collaborative Connections

Introduction: Laying Out Ethical Concerns

The stories you are about to read are not exclusively stories of oppression; they do, however, express a considerable amount of pain and humiliation. The process of articulating my own story and asking other bullers to make public their stories is an attempt to assert and broaden the reality of Black male same-sex existence, which too many people, for far too long, have tried to erase. The assertion and representation of bullers in Black communities are essential to facilitating social relationships that are more humane. I also recognize that through reading these stories of pain and humiliation, the reader or myself, as researcher, may be positioned as a voyeur of those who might be rendered as the exotic other. In the process, these men’s lives may become objectified and their experiences read as entertainment. This inevitable danger raises a number of questions, such as: Is the public presentation of this pain justified by the academic and political project of this work? How can the reader work toward overcoming the possibility of being located as voyeur?

I urge readers to reflect on these questions and to consciously pose the question of how they might be complicit with the stories of these men and myself. The problem of voyeurism and objectification is magnified anytime someone presents excerpts of people’s lives and codes them into data. The presentation of this material to people who have not experienced how bullers live raises a number of ethical concerns. It is imperative that the researchers and, indeed, the reader, adopt an ethical stance in their reading and analytic practices. They must be willing to critically analyze the ways in which their failures to act
upon these oppressive practices contribute to the adversity that impacts the daily lives of bullers and batty bwoys. All of us should attempt to include an analysis of personal complicity with the oppression these men articulate as a fact of their day-to-day lives, on the street and in their communities.

Academic writers have a degree of obligation to account for the type of framework they utilize. Because I am from the Caribbean and because the parents of many of the men I interviewed are also from the Caribbean, these men and I share a social location. (in fact some of my experiences intersect with the experiences of the men interviewed). Because of my shared social location and both my professional and personal commitment to social justice, I am obligated as a buller man to effect some form of positive change. When we engage in work to which we are personally committed, our academic contributions are more likely to come out of a creative, politically-engaged self, one that adds social an academic purpose (Olsen and Shopes, 1991: 200). In pondering how to discuss these interviews, I decided to juxtapose my own experiences with those of the interviewees, thus (elucidating the similarities and differences with the aim of social change). As Trin Minh-Ha has put it “the place of our/my hybridity is also the place of our/my identity” (1992: 29).

My concerns within the larger research and ethical relationships that I enter into throughout the process of (re)presentation of others’ experiences have forced me to consciously work through my own position as voyeur. I am located within the same communal affinities as the group of men. Our relationship to the notion of collective experience is similar, in that each of us endures the brunt of a larger collective structure that burdens our lives. It is the connection cognizance of the complex issues involved when these
lives are made public that I share with these men that has informed my ethical attendance to this research project.

The absence of dialogue between Black heterosexual communities and Black male same-sex communities is central to this exploration. hooks (1988) and Lorde (1984). Both have emphasized the importance of dialogue within Black communities to unearth Black epistemological claims to truth and knowledge. Dialogue, in this case, can be seen as the moment where bullers, batty bwoys, same-sexed Black men and heterosexuals meet to talk about and reflect on their lived experiences and create social ties. Yet, the task of a dialogic relationship seems almost impossible, at least for now.

In Gayatri Spivak’s terms, I see myself located as subaltern: representing self and relating to other similar yet unique experiences in a developmental exploration of other bullers lives and identities. All representation should be understood as constructed and must be seen as partial. This partialness is always interpreted by a particular system of thought. In this case, that system of thought is regulated by Black heterosexist structures of dominance. By partiality of representation, I mean that representation will never be virtual, will never fully reproduce “reality.” The context of Canada’s Black nationalistic heterosexist community contains structures of dominance, where the supremacy of Black heterosexism and morality prevails. Thus it is “essential” to see my subaltern location as a contested place from which I speak. This research project provides a way of understanding how buller men and batty bwoys make sense of their experiences within the ongoing confines of Black nationalism, Black communal living, Black families and the Black church. This dissertation analyzes the experiences of a group of men, myself included, for whom heterosexist suffering is an everyday experience and a heterosexism which, I purport, is paralyzing Black communities.
In this project I do not collapse the experiences of bullers, zamis and man royals, as if, somehow, same-sex relationships for men and women are the same, irrespective of gender. There is a gender-specificity to this project, that has to be taken into account. It is not possible, given the limitations of this dissertation, to include an examination of the lives of women.

**The Genre of Biomythography**

I am a Black buller man born in Trinidad & Tobago, to Caribbean parents of Black, South Asian and Asian backgrounds, commonly known as "Dougla". It is from within this ethnically rich cultural ancestral heritage -- grandparents, parents, family and friends -- that I begin this journey. I use the genre of autobiography, or in the words of Audre Lorde (1982), "biomythography," life story, or representation of the self, in order to translate my experiences of communal heterosexist oppression into this project. Biomythography elucidates Lorde’s interest in using her life story to create a larger framework for other zamis. For Lorde, the individual becomes the collective, as she recognizes the women who helped give her life substance:

A hybrid group of friends, family, lovers and African goddesses: Ma-Liz, Delois, Louise Briscoe, Aunt Anni, Linda and Genevieve; Ma-wuLisa,

27In Trinidad I would be considered a "dougla" meaning a person with a mixture of East Indian, African and Chinese heritage; a derogatory ethnic descriptor the British applied to people of African, Indian and Black descent. It then became a disparaging Hindi word to describe people of mixed Black and Indian heritage. They would say in Jamaica "two little girls from the settlement - Coolie Royals." (Allsop, 1996: ); people so-called being considered by some as socially very low in status in Jamaica. It is also common in Trinidad for the East Indians to describe some douglas or Black folks as Creole people, or to talk of Whites, or the people of Indian, Carib and Arawak blood as Creole people. The term has gone through many meanings in terms of its application to different racialized bodies. But in Canada, due to the social construction of racism, derogatory terms such as dougla, are erased and reduced to a new social construction: Blackness. Herein lies my shift in racial identity from dougla, mixed race or colored to Black.
thunder, sky, sun, the great mother of us all; and Afrekete, her youngest daughter, the mischievous linguist, trickster, best-beloved, whom we must all become. (Lorde, 1994: 255)

In this sense, Lorde enables the move from the singular (I) to the collective (we) in Black or autobiographical writing. Anne McClintock argues that:

Lorde’s refusal to employ the prefix “auto” as the single, imperious sign of the self expresses a refusal to posit herself as the single, authoritative, engendering voice in the text. Instead, her life story is the collective, transcribed life of a community of women - not so much a perfect record of the past as a fabulated strategy for community survival (McClintock, 1995:315)

Marlon Riggs too, in his documentary film Black Is Black Ain’t links his individual identity with that of his grandmother’s “gumbo” as metaphor for the plurality and rich diversity of Black identities. He brings us face-to-face with Black people, bullers, batty bwoys, zamis, same-sexed individuals, young, old, heterosexual, urban and rural, grappling with the paradox of numerous, often-contested definitions of Black life, Black oral inscriptions and Black identities. Identity here is represented as coming to being through Black communities.

In a similar vein, my sense of writing, as influenced by others in the community, continues the tradition of Riggs’ gumbo and Lorde’s biomythography. The absence of frameworks on bullers and batty bwoys made it imperative that I incorporate a biomythography of myself into this project, to assist me in developing a framework to talk about the community of bullers, batty bwoys and same-sex Black men’s lives. I do not posit

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28 A traditional Black American Southern dish made from a combination of sea foods, poultry, meats, sausages etc. For Riggs Gumbo as his metaphor expresses who we are as Black people, "some are light skin, dark skin, Christian, aethisitis, men, women, women who love women, men who love men, a little bit of everything that makes whole Black communities (Riggs, 1995).
myself as a single, authoritative voice. My relationship with the lives of the men in this project was central in developing this body of work. For me, the biomythographical approach was important because I am living proof\(^2\) of some of the experiences the men face in this dissertation. To truly "question is to interrogate something from the heart of our existence, from the center of our being" (Van Manen 1984: 45). As someone located in an organic position as a Black intellectual and buller man, I use the genre of biomythography because it provides a more prima-facie legitimacy to my project in relationship to my community (Antonio Gramsci, 1971). Yet, it is important to note that the questions’ which arise are not superficial, nor do they disappear, merely because I am a member of the community. In the Gramscian sense, an organic intellectual is someone who is positioned to have experienced and be experiencing, the particular consequences of living from a certain social position; someone who has articulated a set of problems associated with one’s life and other people’s lives. In Gramsci’s essay “The Formation of Intellectuals” he provides us with the following analysis of the “organic intellectual”:

Every social class, coming into existence on the original basis of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates with itself, organically, one or more groups of intellectuals who give it homogeneity and consciousness of its function not only in the economic field but in the social and political field as well (1957: 118).

\(^2\)I am not implying that my work cannot be challenged, rather I am saying that I have witnessed and experienced heterosexist Black communal violence as a buller man. That experience co-exists with the painful everyday politics and violence that aided my biomythographing, that it serves as a process of collaboration to assist in legitimizing the life stories of the men and their negotiated daily pain.
The organic intellectual develops a close relationship of familiarity with people and has the opportunity to think through issues, in order to affect change in the oppressive structures of dominance. It is critical to locate myself in this project, to bring into being a self-conscious buller, within a particular set of experiences and social history, to make salient, for the reader, the experiences and ways of understanding that inform my theoretical framework.

There is an integral relationship between the men in this project, their experiences and mine. According to Lila Abu-Lughod, the “discourse of familiarity” communicates how:

Others live as we perceive ourselves living not as automatons programmed according to “cultural” rules or acting out social roles, but as people going through life wondering what they should do, making mistakes, being opinionated, vacillating, trying to make themselves look good, enduring tragic personal losses, enjoying others and finding moments of laughter. (Abu-Lughod, 1993: 27)

It is the complexity of the buller man and batty bwoy experience that has inspired the undertaking of this research project and at the same time, provided a forum for articulating the strength, pride and dignity required to negotiate Black communal living. In charting my biomythography, I locate myself in my childhood memories of schooling and community living, family, religion, popular culture and mass media, sports and trades, girlfriends, as well as migration identity and political consciousness. In short, as a young Black man in the Caribbean, I found a desperate assurance in my masculinity through religion, sports, aggressiveness, loudness, having many intimate women friends and practicing occupations or trades constructed as “manly.”
School and Community Living

Schooling has always been one of the most telling moments when dealing with my sexuality and the process of coming to terms with my manhood. As a teenager, I listened to my school mates and community friends express their hatred toward bullers. I can recall conversations with friends, both in school and the community, that invoked violence such as stoning, and stoning with the intent to kill, men whom they suspected were bullers. On many occasions, I witnessed verbal harassment directed toward bullers or effeminate men, as they walked past gatherings of men standing on the street corner. There were often violent and virulent attacks initiated by my friends and others who disliked and targeted batty bwoys and bullers.

In my family, I often heard my older brothers, when we had arguments or fights, tell me to stop acting like "Reginald." Reginald was a man many in the community suspected of being a buller. The Reginald reference, directed toward me, functioned in a dismissive way and reinforced the obvious fact that I was younger than them, not quite a man yet and needed to be warned about what not to become. When his name was elicited in arguments, it substituted for the actual use of heterosexist oppressive language and was also a way of inducing guilt and encouraging shame and emasculation. I consciously resisted arguing with my brothers, for the fear that they would call me Reginald in front of my parents or friends.

Interestingly, anger toward zami queens was seldom raised, because most people expected women to participate in traditionally feminine gender roles. There were highly

30 More specifically we tend to refer to this as "hanging on the block" or just "lyming".

31 bell hooks has coined the emasculation theory as espoused by Black male theorist as "a dick thing." Implicit in this argument is the assumption that all the power Black men have in a White dominated society is sexual prowess.
feminized gender roles that women played, which involved house-cleaning, child-rearing, cooking, washing, dressing and behaving, that, if fulfilled, excluded the process of being labeled “butch, zami, or man royal.” Women wearing men’s overalls, or doing physical work traditionally constructed as masculine, was not seen as a challenge to the traditional feminine gender roles. If anything, some of the clothes’ women wore reflected signs of poverty in the family or community and it was viewed as acceptable to wear these pieces of clothing until you could afford to buy something new. Here, we see clothes functioning as visible signs of identity, but also subject to disruption and symbolic theft which challenge the very foundation of gender as marked by clothes. Furthermore, acts such as physical aggressiveness, when a woman was fighting for her “male partner, children, girl friend, or a good friend,” were reconfigured and represented as very womanly, a strong woman and at the same time a girlish thing to do. It was never assumed that the woman protecting the woman from male violence had a sexual interest in her, or the women who listened to each others problems had same-sex attractions for each other. It was always seen as women coming together to support one another under conditions of violence and shared communal experiences.

Jacqui Alexander calls this a “gendered call to patriotic duty. Women were to fiercely defend the nation by protecting their honor, guarding the nuclear family conjugal family, ‘the fundamental institution of the society’ guarding ‘culture’ defined as the transmission of a fixed set of proper values to the children of the nation” (Alexander, 1990:13) Or as patriarchal Black nationalist have argued, a women’s role ....“is omnipresent as the nurturer of Black children, the cultural carrier.... and the teacher of the community” (Wahneema Lubiano, 1997: 241). Such public practices and gender expectations of Black women were not classified in a way that drew correlations between these occurrences and sexual preference. This is not to
say that there is not a stereotypical form of gender for women, but rather that, it is blurred for women in ways that it is not for men. Within a Trinidadian communal setting there are areas of women’s behavior which allow women to go unmarked, consequently, they are less policed around a regulated notion of gender behavior and how it is connected, explicitly, to sexuality. The notion of what it meant to look and be “zami” was not as overtly marked as what it meant to look and act as a buller man.

The stability of a male’s sexual identity would be interrogated if he wore the wrong clothes or colours, failed to participate in particular sports, or fight to protect his female partner or show an interest in events constructed as “boyish” or “mannish.” The sexual identity of men who stepped outside of their traditional masculinized or manish roles, was always questioned. Interestingly, it was common to see bullers have very good relationships with older women in the community. Some women, mostly house-wives had no problems in forming close relationships with bullers, as long as the males in question displayed laughable, gossiping, stereotypical, flamboyant, feminine characteristics, presenting himself as less maligned than humorous. Bullers and batty bwoys have been and still are objects of contempt in Caribbean culture. They are part of a communal setting with teachings and practices that involve the policing of same-sex relationships, grounded in religious canons.

32In Trinidad, Antigua, Bahamas, Dominica, Jamaica and St. Vincent, manish is a term used to describe the mannerisms of any person who acts in an unpleasantly precocious way. Any question about babies, intercourse, boyfriends or girlfriends caused ‘worry’ in the minds of parents. "You better shut your mouth, you too mannish". In Trinidad and Tobago, of a male it means to be assertive or self-reliant. e.g. I am a mannish Tobagonian. I don’t want no outsider to tell me how to run my affairs (Allsopp, 1996:370).

33Despite the verbal and sometimes physical attacks on some men’s bodies marked buller, or batty bwoy, some Black women often formed close relationships with bullers and batty bwoys. These men were often used to help some women clean their homes, assist in washing clothes, babysitting, act as a community gossip partner and just used as a partner to "lyme" with. To lyme with someone is to congregate or socialize for pleasure.
Today, same-sex relationships are still a crime in most Caribbean islands\(^3^4\) and can be added to the long line of oppressive “isms” in society. These “isms” have not created, for Caribbean folk, any new spaces, but continue in the tradition of oppressive thinking.

In an effort to temporarily secure my masculinity, or hyper-masculinity and hegemonic heterosexuality, I participated in events such as stealing\(^3^5\) (sugar cane, cocoa, coffee pods, plums, mangoes, chickens) and breaking bottles with slingshots or stones on the street, engaging in physical fights and “hanging on the block”\(^3^6\) with the boys until late at night. These heterosexist masculinist constructions were ways of both asserting and testing my physical strength and attesting to my heterosexuality. During my childhood, these physical acts secured my masculinist persona. Heterosexuality, was as Judith Butler puts it “... a normative position intrinsically impossible to embody and the persistent failure to identify fully and without incoherence with these positions revealed heterosexuality not only as a compulsory law, but as an inevitable comedy ... a constant parody of itself.” (Butler, 1989: 122). For many of us, these forms of hyper-masculinity were like walking with or having a

\(3^4\) With the exception of the Dutch and French islands which follow French and Dutch law.

\(3^5\) Growing up stealing mangoes, sugar cane, plums guavas, and other citrus fruits from your neighbors was an acceptable “male thing.” These supposedly male acts carried with them a great deal of fun and excitement for us as boys. Boys who did not partake in these acts were not viewed as real boys and their sexuality and masculinity was automatically questioned. They were also viewed as feminine, sissies, buller men, panty men and or Shirley. Unlike Western society, where the criminal justice system penalizes you for minor corner store theft, it was accepted under the old sexist saying that boys will be boys, supported by many in the culture. If you did not do this as a young male growing up, your parents, peers, and neighbors automatically started to describe you as different, soft, buller or not normal.

\(3^6\) “Hanging on the block” is equivalent to spending the day at the Eaton Center and not shopping; or spending the day in the park aimlessly. It is a term used to describe a relaxing moment of fun and pleasure. This can or may be interpreted as loitering in western or North American society.
permanent "hard-on," necessary performance which bought our way into the communal construction of a normative heterosexuality. Our fights, for the most part, as David Morgan has articulated, indicated an "overt disdain for anything that might appear soft or wet - more 'a taboo on tenderness' than a celebration of violence" (Morgan, 1987: 48). This then, became a "matter of learning to identify being male with these traits and pieces of behavior" (Morgan, 1987: 82). Young women aided young Black men in maintaining this form of behavior and a young man gained status for being able to do all of the above and not get into trouble with the law. Furthermore, these activities demonstrated "power" to parents, teachers and school friends who felt proud to see that you were not a buller, sissy or coward.

In school, young men often called me buller man if I refused to take part in harassing young women, or to laugh at the clothing of economically disadvantaged students, or play sports after school, or break l'ecole biche\(^{37}\) (skip classes). They also called me buller man, because most of my teachers liked me, I was always a favorite for the position of class prefect, or student body representative. I often scored high marks in my academic courses and failed miserably in trade or technical courses. The young men with whom I associated saw these qualities as feminine and felt that they had the right to call me a buller. Many days I felt unsafe to go to school, but was afraid to let my parents know the reason why. Occasions of homophobic violence and fear within the school setting and of homophobia within my family left me with nowhere to turn for help or advice. On several occasions, I left for school but never arrived. Throughout high school, I lived in fear of men who wanted to beat me because they felt I was a buller man. For me, acting macho was a product of masculinized resistance.

\(^{37}\)Patois. To stay away from school without the knowledge or permission of parents or teachers. As is commonly called in Trinidad "to break biche".

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and I adopted attributes of traditional dominant gender constructions and definitions of manhood - such as being tough, independent, loud, aggressive and in control, in order to erase all powerless signs of being a buller.

Another way in which I negotiated the heterosexist violence was through the formation of relationships with bullers in the community, who were constructed as heterosexuals. These men were tough, big, masculine and aggressive. No one dared to cross their paths. They were also considered to be heterosexual because of their large frames, their hyper-masculine actions and their participation in heterosexual relationships. They were considered a group of “cool guys” on the block. Many young men “hung out” with them when they were going to the movies, smoking pot, going to the river to “make a cook,”38 playing cards on the block, or going to football and cricket matches. Most of these men also had blue collar jobs in the auto industries or refrigeration, sugar cane factories. Their jobs were also a mark of their masculinity, providing protection and forbidding, questions about their sexuality. Through their masculinized fronts, it was assumed that they were heterosexual and true men and brothers of the community. I associated with these men and confided39 in

38 It was and still is a very common practice for young or old men to hang together and cook food while they are socializing. This act of cooking and homosocial bonding is not considered feminine, rather it is seen as manly, because the act of cooking outside of the home was traditionally done with the use of wood and bamboo as the source of energy for cooking. There is a form of physicality in cutting wood and bamboo into pieces that would fit the fire, an act of physicality usually restricted to men. Most times an added dimension to the fun was that the chicken might be stolen from a neighbor’s yard, or the fish might have been caught in the river, a very masculine thing to do. Thus the construction of cooking as a feminine thing was only restricted to within the house and done mostly by women.

39 I confided in these men and felt safe doing that because we had talked about our same-sex attractions towards other men. Some of us also had our first encounter through touch and play with one another to confirm those feelings but, fought it through relationships with women, family, denial and religion. Some of us felt comfortable because we held each other’s secrets around same-sex intimacy that led us to conclude we were operating from the same space on sexual politics and sexual identity. Some of the men also
them, in order to avoid or mitigate any form of violence, verbal or physical, that might have come my way. My association with these men secured me against the often violent attack that bullers experience from gangs of young men, always ready to protect their gender and hypermasculinity. It was common to hear my friends talk about the beatings they had put on men who they caught at the river, or in the savannah in the night, engaging in sex with other men. These acts of violence often took place with police\textsuperscript{40} supporting the men inflicting the violence, leaving the victims without state or communal support.

Through my association with these men with whom I negotiated the often violent and virulent attacks of a community of young angry homophobes, that I was also exposed to a culture of same-sex sexuality through magazines and books that I had never seen before. These actions were a helpful confirmation and provided an avenue for my self-recognition and acceptance of myself as a buller. These men also told me secrets about other men in the community with whom they had sexual encounters, or who they knew were bullers. My ongoing association with these young men reduced my ambivalence by affirmation of my sexuality and they were a source of protection from heterosexist violence. What I always found most intriguing was that these men were also friends with my brothers, yet I never heard my brothers mention anything suspicious about these men’s sexuality. This confirmed had moments where they shared their fantasies and desires about sleeping with men but not being caught. None of these men have ever accepted publicly, or privately a buller man identity, or spoken publicly in favor of such identities.

\textsuperscript{40}The police are known for beating men engaging in same-sex practices in Trinidad and Tobago whenever they are caught. One does not turn to the police for protection because the criminal code of Trinidad and Tobago criminalizes same-sex practices. Violence is a common practice used against men who engage in same-sex practices in Trinidad and Tobago if caught by community members, most of whom are men. You can serve a life in prison if found guilty of same-sex practices by the state, under the Trinidad and Tobago Sexual Offences Act, 1986.
for me that my brother’s social construction and understanding of a heterosexual masculinity was performed perfectly by these men, whom I knew as bullers. Knowing these men facilitated my understanding that I had same-sex sexual desires, made me feel a bit comfortable. I was not alone as a young man with same-sex attractions growing into a man.

Despite this enabling self-recognition on social terms and the growing knowledge of my sensibilities and the possibilities, any form of public recognition was not possible because of the constant fear of heterosexist violence. There was an emerging self-identification, as a result of my feelings and understanding, and by the way other people were naming and subjecting me to violence. Violence against “queers,” argue Bill Wickham and Bill Haver, is “installed . . . in that ideological, lived relation termed daily life itself, as well as in the objectification, thematization and valorization of everydayness.” (Wickham and Haver, 1992: 36) This psychological and emotional violence of compulsory heterosexuality denies many the possibility of a positive self-identification.

Being a buller man in Trinidad meant confronting and negotiating the reality of violence all the time. As a way of negotiating this violence, I was led to embrace forms of a heterosexual identity, constructed and regulated within the social sites of family, schooling, religion and Trinidadian popular culture. Very early in my teenage life I was able to position myself as a buller. However, I also became complicit with the structures of normative heterosexuality that one encounters in family, religion, school, popular culture and community, in order to assist in the negotiation of violence.

Family

I was raised in a heterosexual nuclear family with fourteen siblings, five girls and nine boys. I am the fourteenth child and the last boy. My relationships with my brothers and sisters
suffered from a generation gap. My elder brothers and sisters left home and migrated to North America early in my life. As a result, the last five children formed a close relationship. I grew up with my elder brothers, Ken and Neil, but had very little in common with them. I felt that I could never compete with them in sports and masculinity, so I avoided these contexts. The generation gap was not as evident with my sisters. For example, I had a very close relationship with my elder sisters Brenda, Myrtle, Janet, Ann Marie, as well as the youngest, Hazel.

Within my family, discussions on same-sex relationships only came up in private and were restricted to adults. My parents raised us to embrace constructs and values’ which were inherently heterosexist. We were told what “pure and clean” sexuality was and which member of the opposite sex we would marry and go on to form a nuclear family with. This position stemmed partially from my mother’s upbringing as a second-generation, Caribbean, South Asian41 where arranged marriages were typical and of which she was a product. So in many respects, my mother wished the same for her children. My parents would often ask me, during my teenage years, about the girls in my life. “Do you have a girlfriend yet?” “I have never seen you bring home any girls?” “Are you ok?” These questions were a way of confirming, for them, that I was “normal,” and to signal a warning if something was wrong. It was always acceptable for us to talk about having more than one young woman in our lives, but if you failed to mention any young women, my parents’ role was to suggest potential girlfriends. Most of the time, the girls my parents suggested had Indo-Caribbean heritage, were light-

41My grandmother, who was South Asian, raised my mother with some of the traditional upbringing of arranged marriages, a custom common in some South Asian/Indian communities and societies both on the Continent and the Caribbean. This explains my mother’s insistence that we follow such upbringing.
skinned and well-educated. My parents often told us that Blacks were not a progressive group of people and that if we wanted to make it in life we should avoid relationships with them. There was a neighbor and very good friend of the family who, in his criticism of Black folks - though he himself is Black - would remind us that Black people were like crabs in a pitch oil pan – as one tries to climb out the other pulls him down. To speak in parables was a very common way to pass messages to children from parents and if you did not know what it meant at the time they would say to you, “if you doh want to hear, then you would have to feel.”

Needless to say, my parents never once asked if I was interested in same-sex relationships and not surprisingly, no other sexual identities or options, beyond heterosexuality, were speakable or allowed. This imprisoned me within the constructs and premises of compulsory heterosexuality and constructed same-sex relationships as sinful, traitorous and deviant. Lorde writes: “as a forty-nine-year-old Black lesbian feminist-socialist mother of two, including one boy, and a member of an inter-racial couple, I usually find myself part of some group defined as other, deviant, inferior or just plain wrong” (Lorde, 1992: 47). Within my family, a same-sex identity was mediated by the heterosexist cultural norms about sexuality produced through a communal and societal living that defined these sexualities as unwelcome in Black families.

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42 Looking back at my childhood under a system of colorism - the racist British system which prevailed in my grandparents, parents and my time in Trinidad and Tobago and which still exists today, I never embraced or accepted a Black racial coding. What I accepted then under colorism, with soft hair and light skin privilege was the racist classification of dougla. As my political and social understanding of race and racism matured, I accepted a Black racial coding of self, which was reaffirmed in my migration to Canada.
This typical, unwelcoming family environment, along with the privatization of homoerotic sexuality, are the lived realities for most bullers in the Caribbean. It was assumed that, like my father, I would have a heterosexual family and maintain the family name and identity, through paternity, despite having fourteen other siblings. As hooks, (1992) has argued, the role of and expectation of Black men is to reproduce and maintain the Black family. Part of this pressure also stemmed from the close relationship I had with my father and his expectations of me. In many respects, my father was like an elder brother to me. He trusted me and we did a lot of things together. At the age of eight, he taught me how to drive his motor vehicles and how to do basic auto mechanic repairs -- something he never bothered to teach my older brothers. My father also taught me how to do basic welding, plumbing and masonry repairs and I was often the person he would call whenever he had any basic repairs to do around the house or at my other brothers’ and sisters’ homes. We also had some common friends and socialized in some of the same places. We played cards together with his adult friends, many of whom I highly respected. Playing cards in Trinidad, especially “all foes” at the competitive level, is a popular sport among males, especially if you played on the block (a street corner) or in village competitions. My dad and I were often card-playing partners. I was only a teenager at the time and this meant a great deal to me, because it helped me to erase the signs of being a buller. I also accompanied him to the grocery store, did market shopping with him and paid the house bills. He would often let me drive him where he needed to go and was very proud of me with his friends. When going to places, we would talk about local and international politics, members of our family and other social issues, with the two of us having very vocal opinions on most subjects. Overall, my relationship with my

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43 A card game played by four people, usually as fun or competition.
father was one that I thoroughly enjoyed and the resulting distance that ensued, because I felt I was being dishonest with him about my sexuality, caused me great pain. Despite our shared activities, I never felt comfortable enough to let him know about my same-sex feelings and desires. This produced a deep ambivalence within me. I grew hesitant to work closely with him and yet had no way of refusing. I also knew that my masculinity was secured when I was with him, because his friends would often say, “your son is so nice, he will grow into being a good man”. I felt that the tasks I performed with him were “manly enough” to hide the signs of my emerging sexuality. Hence, I constructed a masculinized persona within the family, as a mask to cover up my ambivalent confusion.

My relationship with my mother was very different; she was a very busy woman who heard everyone’s problems and tended to the financial management of the family. My mother and I did not talk much about other people, political issues, or what was going on in my life. She cared that I got an education, had three meals a day and that I was healthy and happy. My mother was also a very private woman, very cautious about what she said in front of the children. She always reminded us that if we could not say good things about someone, then we should say nothing at all. She hated any form of gossip and was always ready to remind us that we should not keep bad company. She ran the business affairs in the house and I would often turn to her for permission to go places, for money to buy clothes, food, or to socialize. She had instilled in me a different type of structure and I was often more cautious around her than my father. It was my mother who would chastise my behavior when she thought it was stereotypically feminine, saying “Stop acting like a girl.” She had very clearly defined gender roles for her children, which were reflected in the chores she would assign. The boys were always given the field or yard work and the women the house work. The males
were expected to sweep the yard, cut fences, mow the lawn, do any physical work that was needed around the home. The only "soft" tasks the boys were permitted to do were to polish and whiten our shoes for school, clean fish from Saturday Market, shell peas and clean sorrel. I always felt that my mother knew that I was a buller and hoped that it would be cured through religion or a heterosexual relationship. I felt that she knew because she was very particular about where I went, who called for me and what type of clothes or hairstyle I wore. For her, some of these codes represented suspicions about male behavior. I never felt that I could fool her and because of that, I felt a great pressure in her presence.

**Religion**

Christianity is the dominant legal, political and cultural religion of most Caribbean islands -- a remnant of British colonial rule. It is, therefore, common to hear community members, in their objection to same-sex relationships, use religious discourse to condemn same-sex relationships as immoral and sinful. All religious denominations in Trinidad and Tobago Christianity, Islam and Hindi, viewed same-sex sexuality as sinful and sought to morally regulate same-sex bodily practices. I went to church every Sunday and often heard the pastor make reference to biblical verses condemning same-sex relationships. Arguments can be found in Genesis 19; Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; Roman's 1: 18-32; 1 Corinthians' 1 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10; Revelation's 21:8, 21:15. The passages in Leviticus are the most explicit with regard to same-sex eroticism. "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" (Leviticus 18:22) and "if a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them

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have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them” (Leviticus 20:13). My mother, in particular, always made reference to these Biblical teachings whenever she saw a buller man, or heard about someone of whom community members suspected to be a buller. I felt uncomfortable when the pastors talked about marriage and family values, for they always found a way of talking about men sleeping with men. Thus, in church services and Sunday school I felt confused and ashamed, because I was aware of my sexual feelings and tendencies. I continued to attend church services hoping that I could find a “cure” for my desires and feelings.

The sense of duality, articulated by DuBois, takes on a particularly painful and specific meaning for Black bullers who experience powerlessness, rejection, alienation and shame in Black communal living. Although DuBois’ analysis was first applied to the concept of “the Negro” in America, his analysis and concepts are equally applicable to Black men who engage in same-sex practices who are seeking agency, acceptance and approval within the daily heterosexist sufferings of Black communal life. My same-sex desires were rejected by the values of a religious society. The consequences of rejecting oneself as a buller man or batty bwoy is explicated in an adaption of Dubois’s (1903) writings on double consciousness or two-ness of being. Invoking DuBois’s “double-consciousness,” forefronts the sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others. I always looked at family, the parish priest and friends for approval first. As a buller man, my peculiar problem of double-consciousness, appeared to be a major factor in my inability to make up my mind on significant issues like same-sex sexuality, identity politics and political issues such as publicly speaking out in support of buller men. Dubois (1903), argued that with a strong cultural sense of self with a commitment and connection to African people, Blacks will emerge out of this notion of
“double consciousness.” Hence, Dubois urges us to understand the duality of conflict felt from living in an oppressive or racist society. In turn being both Black and a buller meant harboring “two warring souls”:

A sort of seventh son, born with a veil and gifted with second-sight in this American world - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world . . . One never feels his two-ness, their unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (1903: 16-17).

The longing to attain self-consciousness and to merge into a Black man, was a source of psychological confusion and moral regulation that existed inside me and other buller men in Trinidad.

I also went to the Mosque, often for the celebration of Eid-ul-Fitr\textsuperscript{45} (when my mother’s families were having prayers), or to Islamic weddings. Through this socialization I learnt about the teachings of same-sex practices among Moslems. While attending the Mosque, the Imams, (Muslim Priests) were clear on their position against same-sex relationships in Trinidad. This position was more recently expressed by Dr. Yusuf Al-Quardawi in his book \textit{The Lawful and Prohibited in Islam}:

It is a reversal of the natural order, a corruption of man’s sexuality and a crime against both males and females. The spread of this depraved practice in a society disrupts its natural life pattern and makes those who practice it slaves to their lusts, depriving them of decent taste, decent morals and a decent manner of living. (Al-Quardawi, 1995: 2)

\textsuperscript{45}This Moslem religious festival is observed on the first day after the end of Ramadan, the month of religious fasting and the ninth month of the Moslem calendar; it falls twelve days earlier every year of the Gregorian (i.e. western) calendar. The celebration is marked by joyous feasting and acts of charity. In the Caribbean it is usually celebrated in Trinidad & Tobago, Barbados and Guyana. These three islands have the highest percentages of Indo Caribbean people per capita.
Al-Quardawi also observed that the Qur'an, in reference to the people of Prophet Lot, stated that, "homosexuality is a sin, homosexuals seek public recognition and acceptance, they become violent against people who are Godfearing, they seek to perpetuate their evil on the righteous" (Al-Quardawi, 1995: 2). Al-Quardawi argues that this type of sexual relationship "militates against family life, procreation, responsibility, sacrifices for children, for love and care, is based only on physical gratification" (Al-Quardawi, 1995: 2). Dennis Altman, in his classic text, *Homosexual Oppression and Liberation*, "maintains that societies impose upon humanity a repressive regime that channels our polymorphous eroticism into a narrow genital-centered, procreative-oriented heterosexual norm" (Altman, 1971: 74). The confining of sexuality to procreation and the family in "civilized" societies manufactures the illusion of sexual liberation in its social foil. The subordinated are made to bear the social anxiety concerning repression (Adam, 1978: 44). Gayle Rubin, calls this the "erotic pyramid" of sexuality, which has heterosexual procreative masculinities at the top.

Modern Western societies appraise sex acts according to a hierarchical system of sexual value. Marital, reproductive heterosexuals are at the top of the erotic pyramid . . . Individuals whose behavior stands high in this hierarchy are rewarded with certified mental health, respectability, legality, social and physical mobility, institutional support and material benefits. As sexual behavior or occupations fall lower on the scale, the individuals who practice them are subjected to a presumption of mental illness, disrespectability, criminality, restricted physical and social mobility, loss of institutional support and economic sanctions (Rubin, 1984: 378).

That sexual impulse is for procreation and not pleasure is rooted in the Bible, the Qur'an and the Bhagavad-Gita, which have fostered religious interpretations and hegemonic practices that exclude same-sex relationships. Religious sexual intoxication and the ongoing debate about respectability, cleanliness and decency, are institutionalized in social forms like the church, schools and the family. These institutionalized forms mediate the many ways in
which people might view sex, sexual practices, acts and same-sex relationships. Within these institutions and discourses, sexuality, sexual identity and communal cultural identity are controlled by state and non-state organizations. Because of religious and moral regulations of the body and its practices, I always felt that my identity was deployed against the subjective grounds of the dichotomies of good/evil, moral/immoral, sinful/non-sinful. In this scenario, the core of the consciousness as espoused by the various Black communities in the Caribbean and as instituted by churches, the state, and the Black family, erases the ‘realities’ of batty bwoys.

**Popular Culture and Mass Media**

Movies that appeared in Trinidad in the sixties and seventies typically portrayed violence, stereotypes, a colonial and sexist mentality and American heterosexual family values. We were inundated with racist and colonial representations of cowboys and Indians, the Black rapist, stereotypes of the Black macho stud, or the Black comedian. Evil was invariably equated with “Blackness.” We watched television shows and movies like the *Lone Ranger*, *Tarzan*, *The Brady Bunch*, *Lassie*, *Flipper*, *Bonanza*, *Lost in Space*, *Dark Shadows*, *Days of Our Lives*, *The Million Dollar Man* and *Planet of The Apes*. Then came the "Blaxploitation" movie genre of the seventies and eighties, depicting Black machismo and Black language/slang in movies like *Shaft*, *Big Score*, *Held Up in Harlem*, *Black Belt Jones*,

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46Blaxploitation films were about Black actors being trapped in the racist, stereotypic, other position—while White actors were cast as the villains, heroes and smart people. Blacks were always the thieves, shiftless, lazy and unintelligent people. Often the first to be killed, or acts in stereotypically humorous ways to gain acceptance.
Coffee, Sheba Baby, Cleoprata Jones, The Black Godfather and Urban Jungle. Kobena Mercer and Simon Watney argue that:

The hegemonic repertoire of images of Black Masculinity, from docile “Uncle Toms,” to the shuffling minstrel entertainer, the threatening native to superspade figures like Shaft, has been forged in and through the histories of slavery, colonialism and imperialism. (Mercer and Watney, 1988:136)

This representation was important for many Black Caribbean men to imitate, as they self-incorporated codes of “machismo and Black masculinity” in order to recuperate some degree of power over their conditions. This arena of American values in Blaxploitation films influenced Trinidadian popular cultural forms. The depiction of manhood, masculinity and hyper-masculinity in these films had a tremendous impact on how Black men in the Caribbean felt that they should act, behave and treat women and bullers. Most of us started to wear big Afro-hairstyles, plaid pants, high-heel platform shoes, adopt American and not so American accents and claim an identity that we interpreted as cool and popular. Richard Majors and Janet Billson, in their study on Black Manhood defined “cool” as:

The presentation of self many Black males use to establish their identity . . . it is a ritualized form of masculinities that entails behaviors, scripts, physical posturing, impression management and carefully crafted performances that deliver a single, critical message: pride, strength and control (Majors and Billson, 1992: 4)

Parents who were caught up in the American, Hollywood dream, started to name their children after some of the Black movie stars, demonstrating a connectedness with them and their phantasms while reinforcing the division of masculine and feminine and relations. This particular form of masculinity reduced Black men to bodies without brains, insecure and animalistic in qualities, without feelings and compassion. This representation further added to the many insecurities and racist stereotypes that Black men in the Caribbean were already
facing. This stereotyping was not new, it finds its roots in slavery. Slave masters defined, labeled, racialized and sexualized Black men and women as “other” without understanding, valuing or respecting them. As slaves, Blacks were not given the opportunity to define themselves, but rather, the White slave masters, through their usurping White gazes, defined Black manhood and Black femininity.

Trinidadian and Caribbean popular culture also witnessed an interesting shift from heterosexual Black machismo and White family values, to the stereotyping and staging of sexual politics in ways never seen before in the Islands. The Caribbean witnessed, from New York City studios, the first Black “gay” character on television. I can recall from my childhood a Black American male named Flip Wilson, who played the role of Geraldine in a comedy variety, “The Flip Wilson Show Tonight.” Watching Flip Wilson play the role of Geraldine was painful. There were derogatory and heterosexist remarks directed at him from my family and friends during the show. People would often comment and express disbelief that a buller man was on television and wonder why he would embarrass Black people by acting so stupid. Some of my friends said that they wished they could pull him out of the television screen and “put ah good lash upon him and straighten him out.” My parents would caution us about the show and insist that we not watch it unattended. They would recommend that we do school work during the airing of the show.

In addition to Flip Wilson there was Redd Foxx. His movie titled, *Norman Is That You?* (1976), attempted to fight the heterosexual sexual revolution. *Norman Is That You?* is

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47It was not known if Flip Wilson was a Black same-sexed man, but his very presence in a culture that did not value or respect bullers and batty bwoys, presented a challenge to the society’s sexual and cultural politic. It was also a point of celebration and joy for many of us who had internalized our same-sex desires and eroticism in order to survive, for he spoke to us in his Americanized, Black acceptable same-sex humor.
based upon the Broadway play by Ron Clark & Sam Bobrick, about Redd Foxx’s son Lamont\(^48\) who is Black and gay. Norman, after not seeing his dad (Redd Foxx) for a long time, pays him a surprise visit. On this visit, Norman opens the closet\(^49\) door and tells his father about his same-sex desires and relationships. Not only is Red Fox surprised to see his son Norman after many years and discover that he is gay, but his son has brought home his white lover. For the first time a Black American movie depicted Black same-sex eroticism on the screen, at a time when most people in the Caribbean were denying that same-sex eroticism existed among Blacks. Norman, however, in the eyes of many Trinidadians, was polluted by the decadence of whiteness, thus explaining his status as a buller. Built into the psyche of many Blacks is the heterosexist logic that Whites infiltrate day care centers, prisons and schools turning Black males into sissies, bullers, and weak race traitors.

Many Calypsonians,\(^50\) mostly men, sang about Norman that year and the year after.

It is common to be made fun of if you are a buller man, village woman\(^51\), or public figure by

\(^{48}\)Lamont, Fox’s son, acted very hyper-masculine, but was very affectionate to his dates. Whereas his boyfriend (White guy) played the feminine dramatic role of being sexist, feminized and tender.

\(^{49}\)The metaphorical phrase closet is used to talk about persons who are aware of their same-sex attractions and identities, but chooses not to declare it to the public, family, friends, community or work. To be in the closet it is assumed by others that you are "heterosexual," or repressed and living in social isolation. Thus, when Lamont opens the closet door he is publicly affirming a buller man’s identity and is declaring it openly to his family. Such public same-sex identifications are known as being out of the closet.

\(^{50}\)A Calypsonian is one who sings calypso. Calypsonians usually comment on any recognized figure or aspect(s) of Caribbean social life, more often performed by a male singer with much body gesture and some extemporations directed at anyone in the audience. It is a popular musical beat peculiar to Trinidad and Tobago.

\(^{51}\)Village women with names like Ester, Indra, Vashy, Jean, Carmen, Audrey and Violet were the subject of Calypsonians who wanted to sing songs with female names, about sexual politics or gossip.
Calypsonians engaging in musical competitions. Such music not unsurprisingly often appropriated themes that were sexist, homophobic and misogynist in a society where the edifice of a hyper-masculinity\textsuperscript{52} is the key to manhood. Calypsonian Dennis Williams (a.k.a. Merchant) captured Trinidadian pop culture with his 1977, hit titled \textit{Norman is that you}. His calypso\textsuperscript{53} brought to the surface the debate, on television, radio, print media and within communal settings, around same-sex relationships in the Trinidad. Many other Calypsonians, especially those without record labels in their calypso tent,\textsuperscript{54} continued to sing and make fun of bullers during carnival\textsuperscript{55} seasons in the most hostile and violent way.

\textsuperscript{52}The concept "masculinity" is used as problematic construction of Black masculinity defined by narrow definitions of many Black nationalist and academics who see it necessary to "cookie cut" themselves so as to fit into racist construction of Black male hyper-masculinity.

\textsuperscript{53}Calypso is a satirical song and lyrical rhyme commenting on any subject, usually composed for, but not limited to the Carnival season. Calypso grew out of African storytelling tradition and does not require much instrumentation to enhance its appeal.

\textsuperscript{54}A calypso tent is a place where calypso shows and other outdoor carnival celebrations take place. These tents are usually covered with old galvanize, pine tree branches or a tarpaulin.

\textsuperscript{55}Carnival is the ceasing of eating of meat, in preparation for Lent. The festival itself, starts with Jour Ouvert (day break) on Monday morning and ending at Las' Lap on the Shrove Tuesday night before Ash Wednesday. There is the parade of bands the competitions for King and Queen of the bands, band of the year, revelers take to the streets by thousands. It is the massive nationally organized festival of competitive costumed street dancing, calypso singing. Held in the last four days before Ash Wednesday in Trinidad, it shifts in other Caribbean islands to other times of the year. (Cotece Cote La: Trinidad and Tobago Dictionary, 1985).
That year, people started to identify some mas\textsuperscript{56} bands as buller men bands\textsuperscript{57} and some mas bands as heterosexual. As a male if you walked, spoke or acted in manners stereotypically “constructed” as feminine you were guaranteed to be called “Norman” or “buller” from hecklers on the street or within the family. Then there was the all too graphic, violent and homophobic calypso titled \textit{Pepper in the Vaseline}. If anything, this calypso reflected the prevailing communal violence and attitudes that was directed toward bullers and batty bwoys in ways that attempted to harm and punish one’s sexual practices. The hegemonic, heterosexist values of the community, were very clear, echoed in song by Calypsonians. “Come out at your own risk”. You are not accepted; not viewed as “normal” people; nor are you “real” men, rather you are an object to be humiliated.

As an oppressed buller, the Calypso and the debates around the calypso and mas bands constructed as buller men bands were very interesting to me. I started to learn about places and people in Trinidad where a culture of bullers existed. I discovered how they created their space for survival and how they created their sites of pleasure. Although I did not attend the events, or homes of bullers, at least I knew that I was not alone and that there was an emerging culture of bullers that I would be able to embrace someday. If you were an out buller man, you found that everybody called you Norman, buller, anti-man\textsuperscript{58}, Shirley or

\footnotetext{\textsuperscript{56}Mas or mas bands is the festive merry making and street parading of bands at Carnival time, usually beginning with Jour Ouvert. (Allsopp, 1996: 373).}

\footnotetext{\textsuperscript{57}Mas bands that were being stereotyped as buller men bands, were the bands that were led by White mas makers and the bands that were known to attract large amounts of White tourists and wealthy Trinidadians. Mas bands were very class-based and individuals with wealth tended not to socialize with the mas bands that attracted the more common or working poor people. Overall, these mas bands were accepted without state, or communal resistance because it allowed others to see or speculate on the sexuality of people.}

\footnotetext{\textsuperscript{58}Effeminate, or a male that one suspects to be a buller.}
“she,” and that you dare not respond to any harassment, because physical and verbal violence quickly followed, without police protection. Being coded as a buller man during that era, you both challenged and confirmed the heterosexist norms of Trinadian communal living, but could not offer a transformative challenge. The movie, *Norman Is That You?* became a great concern for the pastors in the churches. They reminded the congregation about the evils of sin from same-sex relationships. There was a moral panic about men becoming bullers. Our parents cautiously warned us not to become bullers like Norman. Trinadian popular culture was dealing with the sexual revolution debate and I perceived two options: be silent or join in the slander of bullers. Most of the time I joined in the slander, because it helped me to erase the personal guilt and because it provided privileged membership in the heterosexual club.

There was also a paucity of reading material on same-sex issues. The only material available was the Bible or the local community newspaper which condemned bullers. Trinadian newspapers, such as “Express,” “Bomb” and “Punch,” were notorious for their slandering of men and women suspected to be engaging in same-sex relationships. They would often publish a picture in the paper and write about someone in the most destructive and belittling way, invoking the desire for that person to leave the community or at times even the country. What was even more disturbing and embarrassing, is that people were put in the headlines or as the center-fold of one of the gossip columns when they found out about them. Through this irresponsible media reporting, I often learnt a great deal about other bullers and zanis in the community and had a sense of the type of communal violence to expect if I decided to come out. I often hid from family members when I read these stories.

In reading rooms or libraries, the subject of “homosexuality” was only to be found in the psychology, psychiatry, law, medicine or sociology sections, under the topics of deviance,
immorality, or mental illness. After discovering this pathology, I ceased my search for reading material on same-sex issues. Eventually, I turned to texts written by Black writers such as Angela Davis, Eldridge Cleaver, Eric Williams, Bobby Seal, Stokley Carmichael, hoping to find a paragraph or two on the subject of Black same-sex relationships. Instead, “most” of the ideologues of the sixties provided added impetus to Black communities violent, hostile and negative views on same-sex relationships. The logic of their heterosexist writing is located in the historical and often virulent presence of racism. This is a theme that I will develop further in chapter three. However, it should be noted that these texts continue to play an important role in the formation of Black culture, Black communal solidarity and Black identity. Black literary works, Black consciousness, Black ideology, the discourses of Black activists and Black nationalism have had as their challenge the goal of presenting the race/group in the “best light.” The Black nationalist interpretation of this has often meant depicting Blacks with those qualities, values and beliefs mirrored in White patriarchal right-wing society. For many Black writers this has meant great anxiety around the representation of sexuality, same-sex desire and feminist politics. In the words of bell hooks, Black nationalism has been constructed as a “dick thing.” As Henry Louis Gates Jr. has written:

That is not to say that the ideologue of Black nationalism in this country has any unique claim on homophobia. But it is an almost obsessive motif that runs through the major authors of the Black aesthetic and the Black power movements. In short, national identity became sexualized in the sixties in such a way as to engender a curious subterraneous connection between homophobia and nationalism. (Gates, Jr. 1992: 79).

Sports and Trades

My involvement in competitive sports such as soccer and cricket was a means of survival. Sports was the accepted arena in which young men were allowed to exercise their
masculinized personhood. Sports were strongly encouraged by our parents and by our teachers in the educational system. It was common to hear our parents and coaches talk about how big and muscular the boys were becoming and to hear school girls scream at the display of Black bodies in competitive boys' sports. I remember once while playing football in the savannah with my male friends, a young man with the stereotyped constructs of femininity, walked by. The young men with whom I was playing football yelled out, "Look ah buller man, check she how she walking nah." To call this man’s walk stereotypically feminine implies that he walked with his head held high in fear, that he had a serious face and had an extra twist to the waist and his hands protruded at the sides. The young man being harassed did not respond. My friends went up to him and insisted that he fight. His refusal led to more name-calling and physical attacks. This incident climaxed into an altercation, leaving the young man physically bruised and alone. I stood and watched my football mates physically attack the young man and did nothing. This experience made me question my own safety, and made me wonder how would I publicly affirm a same-sexed identity and inform others of it. I started to think about how lonely my life might be if I did choose to publicly inform my family and friends about my same-sexed identity and what that would mean for my family and the communal settings of which I was a part at the time. I did not want to lose my male friends, who might have called me buller as a put down, as a way of saying to me get tougher and stronger, act more masculine. Here I am reminded of Foucault, who argued that the emergence of the term homosexuality:

as a distinct category is historically linked to the disappearance of male friendship. Intense male friendships were perceived inimical to the smooth functioning of modern institutions like the army, the bureaucracy, educational and administrative bodies. (Foucault, 1985: 43).
Even more disturbing was the fact that there was no protection from the state, nor were there organizations that worked toward supporting bullers. I was called a buller by my friends in the community when we played sports such as cricket or football. According to the young men, I put too much emphasis on being clean, on getting home on time and resisting fights. I can also remember the mother of a family whose house stood where we played cricket in the streets. She would tell her sons and the other young men not to pick me on their team, because I did not like to get dirty, or that I would bat and then go home, or that I was not strong enough since I was a buller man. If I got selected, I tried my best to act mannish or like a "really tough man" and to avoid her and her children.

In my family, all my elder brothers played excellent football and cricket, on the whole they were very good in athletes. I never mastered any of the above sports, but immersed myself into them to erase all signs of femininity and possible community communal suspicions of my sexuality. When I played soccer, men often made fun of me, because I could not kick the ball as hard as my brothers or I did not score as many goals as they did. Most times I was excluded from playing, and when they condescended to select me it was always a substitute - a position I became all too familiar with.

Trades such as welding, plumbing, carpentry and masonry were important to learn in school, at least to the extent that one could be knowledgeable about such things when basic repairs and construction skills were needed in the family or the community. Most communities, out of sheer economic necessity, called upon other community members for help when they were constructing a community project, or building a house. People would pool their resources to help one another out. The men would be expected to do the physical labor, while the women attended to the cooking. Preparing food for those working on these
community projects was very important. The person being helped was expected to supply large amounts of food for the workers. Sometimes, those who were in an economic position to pay his/her helpers they did so in addition to serving food. For many men, including myself, there was a sense of pride in having helped the “Roberts” family to build their new house, by mixing cement, welding their fence or laying bricks. It also provided the opportunity for men to project their masculinized selves to the community and this, in turn, conferred one’s popularity. The projection of a masculinized front came alive especially when women were around – men would often show off their muscular strength by hauling significant weight and comparing their accomplishments to others’. This performance was intended for women, in order to increase the allure of young men. As Ray Raphael, wrote, “our competitive initiations tend to exaggerate rather than alleviate male insecurity and the greater our insecurity, the more prone we are to overcompensating for our weakness by excessive and aggressive male posturing” (Raphael, 1988: 138).

During my youth in Trinidad, sports and trades were valued more than academic achievement. This embrace of a physical form of knowing, displaying a knowledge of your body and a dexterity to master this performance, is still known as one of the sites upon which young men graduate into their Black male coolness, machismo and masculinity. Hence school, family, male communal pressure and Trinidadian popular culture were the agents of the formation and maintenance of social values. The centrality of this physical knowledge is what forced me into suppressing all physical forms of my homoeroticism and forced me into exhibiting with my male insecurities. Many young men in Trinidad today argue that academic subjects such as mathematics, physics and English are for bullers and women, while trades are for men. This stance is intended to maintain a cool Black male front. Raphael further writes,
“that macho, or cool, as constructions of masculinity, is just one more indication of insecurity . . .” (Raphael, 1988: 3). The male image in the Caribbean was always measured by our fathers, older brothers or uncles; neighbors, friends and family relatives reminded us of how big, strong and tough they were, how hard they worked to provide for and to protect their families. They boasted about the many women in their lives. In other words, if I did not have the same number of women in my life as say my uncle, father, elder brother, or a significant male relative, then I was “sick,” “suspected as a buller.” or not “the average young Black male.” My father, however, never fit these stereotypical constructions of manhood. He was very gentle and never worried about the chores he did in the home. Nor was he the type of man who had more than one female in his life. But these stereotypical abusive Black male constructs continue to be the frames of reference by which most Black men are judged.

**Clothing**

The sixties, seventies and early parts of the eighties were marked by rigid gender colour restrictions for me and for women. I was not allowed to wear pink, red, yellow or any color that appeared too “flamboyant or bright,” for these colors were viewed as weak, feminine, “un-cool,” or colors which would be worn by bullers or White boys. The socially coded buller man’s body is stereotyped as “flamboyant,” “effeminate,” “flashy,” and in some cases, loud and childlike. The flamboyant buller who became friends with older Black women in the community could wear head bands, bright pieces of clothing and speak with a feminine voice, as long as he allowed others to laugh at him and make him the village clown. As gay historian Jeffrey Weeks wrote:

> the male homosexual stereotype of effeminacy and transvestism has had a profound yet complex impact on men who see themselves as homosexual. No
automatic relationship exists between social categories and people’s sense of self and identity . . . The most significant feature of the last hundred years of homosexual history has been that ‘the oppressive definition and defensive identities and structures have marched together. (Weeks, 1981: 117).

Black men who contravened these codes were always marked as bullers within our culture and/or community. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick, in her classic essay in Michael Warner’s “Fear of a Queer Planet,” stated:

Indeed, the gay movement has never been quick to attend to issues concerning effeminate boys. There is a discreditable reason for this in the marginal or stigmatized position to which even adult men who are effeminate have not been relegated to the movement. (Sedgewick, 1993: 72).

For Black men generally, effeminophobia has always been a real threat to (their) masculinity, (while for some bullers it is another way of reclaiming parts of their identity that they were taught to hate and despise). For many bullers and batty bwoys, effeminacy is “undesirable,” “blightful,” or “sinful” because it is viewed as a liability within Black communal settings, the family and religious organizations. Effeminacy is seen as one of the most onerous obstacles in the lives of bullers and batty bwoys. Yet employing effeminacy as a challenge to the misogynist and sexist practices in Black cultures, some bullers perform drag or do cross-dressing as venues of self-expression. Sedgewick writes about or people who use appositional forms of sexual self-expressions to challenge traditional norms and values that have set up boundaries around Black masculinity and Black communal living. I find her analysis most pertinent because there definitely are risks for Black men who challenge Black traditional notions of masculinity. Sedgewick writes:

A more understandable reason for effeminophobia, however, is the conceptual need of the gay movement to interrupt a long tradition of viewing gender and sexuality as continuous and collapsible categories - a tradition of assuming that anyone, male or female, who desires a woman must by the same token be masculine. That one woman, as a woman, might desire another; that one man,
as a man, might desire another: the indispensable need to make these powerful, subversive assertions has seemed, perhaps, to require a relative deemphasis of the links between gay adults and gender nonconforming children. (Sedgewick, 1993: 72-73).

It is not surprising then, that the fear of violence, actual or psychological, becomes translated into the lives of men who define themselves as bullers or batty bwoys. My actions and fears of communal and family violence were shaped and grounded in this psychological trauma of same-sex practices.

**Girl Friends and Exploring the Erotic**

I was compelled by social pressures, family and community values to have a few “girlfriends” with whom I was intimate for the purpose of marriage. This was a combination of two forces: the normative prescription of family and community and my own internalized fear and guilt of a same-sexed attraction to men. Thus I sought out intimate relationships with women. These relationships, I hoped, would cure my same-sex erotic feelings and adhere me to the rules of a heterosexist cultural masculinity within community and family. Being intimate with girlfriends, or having multiple sexual partners, was another way to exhibit my toughness and masculinity and to erase public suspicion that I am or could be a buller man. However, relationships with women did not last long, because I was never fully comfortable nor satisfied with the exploration of my erotic, emotional and physical feelings.

The term “exploration of the erotic,” does not refer only to the vernacular usage, but is used to denote a broader sense, as Lorde, has defined it, “as our deepest knowledge, a power that, unlike other spheres of power, we all have access to and that can lessen the threat of our individual difference” (Lorde, 1984: 53). Access to the exploration of the erotic has often been attacked or contained by a form of Caribbean state ordained nationalism and/or
religious hegemonization which has created a "dualism central to Caribbean/Western thought, finding parallels in distinctions between good/evil, man/woman and a range of other binarisms, which have shaped the glass through which institutionalized Christianity (religion) has viewed the world: either/or; good/bad; us/Them; soul/body" (Sedgewick, 1990: 123). It is within these religious binarisms that I judged my same-sex attraction. What this meant for me on many occasions was a sense of shamefuless, unhappiness, sinfulness and dirtiness because of the heteronormative religious and communal hegemonization in my community.

The Caribbean is comprised of all places touched by the Caribbean sea. These had been colonies of Britain, France, Holland, Spain, Portugal and Denmark. Given that Trinidad was a colony of Britain and a bastion of European and North American rule, the values that have shaped our culture and traditions follow the form of Western dualistic thinking, which is grounded in the colonial religious and legal canons of the Caribbean and are translated in the psyche of Black folks as objects of racism, imperialism and colonialism. The gender system (or prison), Steven Seidman, argued in his classic essay entitled "Identity Politics in a Postmodern Gay Culture," "is said to posit heterosexuality as a primary sign of gender normality. A true man loves women; a true woman loves men. Sex roles are a first and central, distinction made by society." (Seidman, 1993: 114). Interestingly, the gender performance, as it has been constructed for Black manhood, has been both heterosexist and sexist in its orientation. Marcel Saghir and Eli Robins stated that, "a majority of gay people irrespective of race [over half of gay men and more than three-quarters of gay women] have had heterosexual experiences" (Saghir, 1973: 92-104). This practice is common to many people in the Caribbean, although not unique to Caribbean culture. Michael Warner, coins this "perceived norm" as heteronormativity, which he defines as, "the domination of norms [sic]
that supports, reinforces and reproduces heterosexual social forms” (Warner, 1993: vii-xxviii). As a social construct, heteronormativity permeates what Gayle Rubin has called the “sex gender system,” the powerful discursive formation that codes everything from social class to race into a particular set of sexualized and gendered identity which constitutes and reproduces the social system in which we live (Rubin, 1984). For Michael Warner, “heteronormativity” is supplemented by a reproductivist conception of the social institutions of heterosexual reproduction, institutions of socialization and heterosexual hegemony (Warner, 1993: vii-xxviii). Clearly the “norm” for most of us as bullers, throughout our histories, has been to accept heterosexuality as the norm and to view homosexuality as “abnormal, deviant, or different.” Perhaps this explains why, according to Saghir and Robins:

> the most frequently encountered emotional reaction following heterosexual involvement is that of indifference. It is not an aversion, nor a conscious fear of heterosexuality, for most homosexual women and men find no emotional aversion and feel no trepidation in becoming involved heterosexually. The determining factor in the subsequent avoidance of heterosexual involvement is the lack of emotional gratification and true physical arousal with opposite sex partners. (Saghir and Robins, 1973: 214).

These norms invade same-sex practices by feminizing some Black men, who, when engaging in same-sex practices, act hypermasculine in order to secure their heterosexuality and masculinity. The regulation of bullers, batty bwoys and same-sex men’s masculinity and sexual practices by Black nationalist and Black individuals embracing stereotypical constructions of masculinity and Black self-expression provides a means for the control of all same-sex sexuality. As bullers, if we consciously or subconsciously attempt to deconstruct and reconstruct the traditional Black, nationalist, male, heterosexual, gender “norms,” we encounter great hostility and in some cases actual physical violence. Nevertheless, I am compelled to resist the myopic definitions of “Black masculinity” and “manhood,” as defined
by Black families, Black religious leaders, activists and ideologues. My resistance to Black self-imposed definitions of “macho,” “masculinity,” or “manhood” is to free me from the “Black gender prison” imposed upon us by White racist constructions of Black masculinity, which go hand in hand with the Black ideologue’s construction of family and Black masculinity.

Dislocation and Identity

I migrated to Canada in 1983, where I was bombarded with the reproduction of Whiteness reflecting the social and political representation of dominance operating in Canada. I constantly searched out texts or movies that contained any form of same-sex representation. What I can remember seeing was mostly stereotypical and White, a reminder once again of my parents’ and the Black community’s view that same-sex relationships were immoral, sick, deviant and White. It was at this juncture in my life that I sought help from within the White gay and lesbian community. Seeking support and positive reinforcement within the White gay and lesbian community, I was referred to a Black organization named Zami. Zami offered me a space and an opportunity to grow and develop my political consciousness around the complicated intersections of race, culture, class, sexuality, gender, identity and their relationship to African-Caribbean culture, Black consciousness and the Black community. By finding an inclusive location in which the various dimensions of my subjectivity could be

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Zami was a Black same-sexed support group formed in the early 80s by a group of men and women from the Caribbean for Blacks living in Toronto. It offered a comfortable space for most of us, in particular those of us in need of support in "coming out." The Black men and women in this group were some of the people we confided in to get support and claim a same-sex identity. This group also created a space for many of us to also develop political and social Black consciousness. Zami, usually organized public forums, socials, took part in the Toronto "gay pride" and met every Thursday at the 519 Church street community center when it existed. This group no longer exists today.
expanded, I was able to come to terms with my own position as a buller and attempt to "come out."

Coming out⁶⁰ in Canada for me meant a total break from family traditions, Black communal forms and religious norms. These were shattered by my conscious effort to inform, in every social or public situation, that I was/am a buller. Every social or public situation was informed of me being a buller because there were no signifiers, transparency, or markers of what it means to look like or be a buller, to allow others to see my sexual identity. In coming out, I attempted a departure from heterosexism and its ideological constructs, embracing a self-naming and affirmation that I am a buller man or batty bwoy. I tried to escape from an oppressive social and ideological construction, to arrive at, or to accept, the position of buller man with all the attendant desires, pleasures, identities, culture, usages of language and values that come with it. This was a process that has been ongoing. Once started, this process never ends, for until the eradication of homophobia/heterosexism there can be no "true" escape. Because of the "normalization" and institutionalization of heterosexism, bullers must continuously enunciate in every new environment, or with every friend, that they are buller men, batty bwoys, or manicou man⁶¹. As I will discuss further in the conclusion, this is a task that goes beyond individual responses. Of course there is the possibility that my parents and siblings will also work hard at denying any form of same-sex eroticism existed in my life, or will avoid discussions that center on the question of sexual identity and family. Neighbors in

⁶⁰My first encounter with the concept "coming out" was through my exposure in Canada with White gays and lesbians. Hence the concept was one I had to struggle with, in attempting to embrace a same-sex identity. The political and social connotation of the concept was very confusing for me, because I did not come from an environment and culture that allowed me the luxury of developing a political consciousness that embraced the idea.

⁶¹In Trinidad a manicou man is an effeminate man. Derogatory for less than a man. (John Mendes, 1987: 95).
Trinidad would often ask my parents, “Is Wesley married yet?” and “Does he have any children?” “What is he doing with his life?” and “When is he coming back home for a visit?” It is this type of exchange that requires the family to also come out, if Black communal life is to achieve its much needed transformation. For society to truly leave heterosexism will also require that my parents, brothers and sisters, when questioned about me, must say something about my living situation.

“Coming out” and coming to terms with it may mean liberation and emancipation for some, but there are many who are not able to come to terms with coming out and are forced into marriage and denial, which become their ways of coping through public repression, private acceptance, arriving at some level of personal comfort that should not be disturbed by those whose sexuality is public knowledge. My coming out in Canada was positively affirmed by a group of men and women, primarily from the Caribbean, who had a house where we met regularly and watched movies, talked about Black Caribbean same-sex politics, sexism among Black same-sexed men, sat at the kitchen table and gave advice to one another about the best ways to cope and, where to find the “gay” village. We shared information about the club scene and talked about the impact of racism and sexism in the White gay and lesbian community. My coming out was facilitated by this group of middle-to upper-middle class women and men from the Caribbean who identified as bisexual or same-sex. This group of men and women made my coming out much easier than if I was living in Trinidad, where
none of these social support networks nor organized groups of identified bisexual and same-sex people existed.

In Canada, in the process of developing my political consciousness and coming out, I also met Black men who were engaging in same-sex relationships although they were married. My past heterosexual experiences enabled me to understand these men. I was able to talk with some of them about how I lived and how they lived, establishing connections that could lead to a support system within the confines of Black communal living. For these Black men, keeping their same-sex relationships private was crucial, in order for them to continue doing work within Black organizations. I was often asked by these men not to do or say anything that would create any suspicion around their sexuality. The closet was their forced and safest place of choice. In essence “the closet” was and is the safest place, allowing us to be anything we want to be in Black communal settings, making it seem like a desirable choice, a place to make and call our home. As Judith Butler noted, “the prospect of being anything . . . seems to be more than a simple injunction to become who or what I already am” (Butler, 1993: 45). In the words of Michelle Cliff, it is a process of “claiming an identity they taught me (us) to despise or reject.” It is time, however, to open up the closet and create the possibility for these men to come out, with all their various and complicated identities.

In addition to Zami, White gay-owned and operated gay and lesbian clubs also offered me a sense of community and belonging. While coming out within White gay and lesbian

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62 In Toronto I and many other African-Caribbean men and women engaging in same-sex relations, were fortunate in the early 80's to be welcomed by two women who had a house that became our home and place to be free to express our same-sexed feelings and desires, gain support and affirm our different identities. It was spaces like these that facilitated and created a space that made coming out possible and less painful than in the Caribbean.
clubs and spaces, I was fully cognizant of racism, harassment, and the sexualization of racism within gay and lesbian communities. This did not stop me from learning about same-sex culture and its attendant values. Despite the alienation, racism and sexualization of racism in my early stages of coming out, it was liberating to be in a dance club with other “gay people” and race was not a concern for me at that juncture in my life. I just wanted to be free, to be a boller and to leave behind the starkness of living under Black heterosexism and in fear. These comments should not be taken out of context. In the absence of Black societal and communal same-sex support groups, spaces and agencies, White spaces (which are sometimes problematic) will be used for support and affirmation of a same-sex identity.

**Community Organizing and Heterosexism**

I can vividly remember a discussion/workshop in February of 1989, Black history month, at the University of Toronto, on Black relationships and the Black family. Black relationships have always been assumed to be heterosexual, especially when placed within the context of Black consciousness and Black nationalist movements. Present at this meeting were Black community members constructed as bullers, batty bwoys, zamis, man-royals, bisexuals and heterosexual men and women, who were all going through a process of

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63The use of these clubs was not free from racist experiences; one was often asked "do you know this is a gay bar? Do you have any identification on you? This picture does not look like you, are you sure this is you?" You cannot stand there without buying a drink. Sometimes I was refused simply because I was not convincingly gay looking and acting to the White scrutineer.

64This is not to say that I became raceless, or was not aware of racism, but rather that the White club space was for me to dream what I, would love to see in the Black community, where I call home. However, heterosexism within my community, fear of physical threats, a lack of resources and support systems drove me to a accepting White gay and lesbian spaces as at least, relatively safe and secure.
decolonization and developing a sense of Black consciousness. There were university students, members of the Black community at large, Qur’anic brothers and sisters, Rastafarians and a diverse group of other Black activists and intellectuals. A young Black woman who described herself as someone who loves and sleeps with women, challenged the exclusive heterosexist structure of the discourse that had been presented; she asked for the recognition of same-sex relationships and families within our various Black communities. Responses to this query, mostly from the males in the room, included shouts and comments such as: “abomination,” “sickness,” “bwoy dem people naasti sah,” “get out the room,” “you must be crazy,” “aal yuh is ah disgrace to jah Rastafari,” “doh talk bout dem naasty people in here,” “dem people is something else,” “ah kyah believe what ah hearing, them man taking man up the ass and them oumann suckin pussy,” “sit down nuh man.”

The rampant homophobic and essentialist Black nationalist, heterosexist verbal violence directed toward the young woman reminded us that we were to be seen and not heard, that our sexual identity was damaging to the purifying elements of Black nationalism. We were also reminded that same-sex relations were “genocidal” against the Black race and that it was the White man’s influence. This discussion quickly progressed to acts of physical threats to some of us in the room. Some lesbian womanist, feminist, mothers, daughters, sisters left the room in tears, vowing never to work in the Black community again; along with others, I sat in the room in fearful intimidated by this angry, ignorant and violent group of Black nationalists, activists and ideologues, and wondered whether I would I be able to attend any Black history classes with them. Whether I would be able to live in the community without being harassed by them? We were told in this meeting that our sexual orientation was not an important aspect of our identity as Black people, despite our being comfortable with
it, despite the importance we attached to it. A young buller man got up to talk in support of his zami sister, and was told by the men in the room, “Brother, please sit down and stop embarrassing us.”

He responded, “I am one of the people you hate and you cannot call me a brother if you hate me.” He was then told that he was a sell-out and to shut up and leave. He left.

Lorde, in *Sister Outsider*, eloquently commented on what was being demanded of us:

As a Black lesbian feminist comfortable with the many different ingredients of my identity, I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole eclipsing or denying the other parts of self (Lorde, 1984: 65).

Like Lorde, it became increasingly apparent to me that there was no dialogic relationship that existed within our communities on issues of difference, no place of conversation to deconstruct the traditional notion of Black family and to give voice to existing multiple forms of sexuality and identities. Within our various Black communities, we Black bullers were constructed or depicted as outsiders and as *other*. Consequently, all of us bullers must fit the narrow description of what Blackness is, as constructed by male leaders of the community. Accept it and join the struggle, the dominant discourse states, negate your sexual identities. Here diasporic Black nationalism is experienced as written on the body on the one hand, and, on the other, written in the context of compulsory heterosexual communal infrastructures. In each case, Black nationalism instigates a form of surveillance that seeks to deny difference. Bhaba wrote that, “this leads to a mediation on the experience of dispossession and dislocation - psychic and social - which speaks to the conditions of the marginalized, the alienated, those who have had to live under the surveillance of a sign of identity and fantasy that denies difference” (Bhaba, 1994: 63). This surveillance was evident through the reaction and reception from the Black nationalists in that university room in 1989.
Behind the expressed conditions of decolonization, Black diasporic nationalism, and Black families, is "one set of narratives which gets sanctioned over another because it can exert authority and privilege elsewhere" (Gina Dent, 1992: 1). Central to the discussion at the University of Toronto that evening, were the questions, "How can we model ourselves after African families living on the Continent?" "Which Afrocentric constructs can we use that present models for family living and the construction of the Black race as family, community or collective"? These questions are crucial to the ongoing debate about Afrocentricity and Black nationalism. Afrocentricity, a concept central to the works of Dr. Molefi Kete Asante (1988), names itself "systemic nationalism," and is entrenched in focusing on consciousness of the individual and not on the collective or the Black nation. According to Asante his discourse enunciates the needs of "the Black community" and ways to successfully fulfill them needs (Asante, 1988:6). Afrocentric thought, however, is not without its heterosexism, which is challenged by many anti-heterosexist writers and thinkers. Gilroy, in his critique of Afrocentric thinking, stated that:

Afrocentric thinking attempts to construct a sense of Black particularity "outside" of a notion of a national identity. Its founding problem lies in the effort to figure sameness across national boundaries and between nation-states . . . the flow is always inward, never outward; the truth of racialized being is sought, not in the world, but in the psyche. (Gilroy, 1992: 305-306).

Gilroy further argued, on the discourse of race and community, that:

In contemporary attempts to interrupt the crisis of Black politics and social life as a crisis solely of Black Masculinity . . . the trope of the family is central to the means whereby the crisis we are living - of Black social and political life gets reproduced as the crisis of Black Masculinity. That trope of the family is

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65The goal of Afrocentic thought and principles is the empowerment of all African/Black people in order to assure our survival economically, politically, socially and culturally in the world wherever we are located. It is a process of self-examination with Africa, as the point of reference for all activities in which African/Black folks engage.
there, also, in the way conflict, within and between our communities, gets resolved through the mystic reconstruction of the ideal heterosexual family. (Gilroy, 1992: 312 - 13)

In addition to my experience at the University of Toronto with other Black bullers and zamis, I remember a hostile and heterosexist experience that I had when I joined the board of directors at the Black Secretariat in Toronto. After being elected to this board, a Black male telephoned the organization and left a message on the answering machine, questioning why there was a Black buller on the board of directors. He further queried whether the Secretariat knew that I was a buller man. His message went on to say that it was an "embarrassment" to the Black community to have read in Share. (Black community local newspaper in Toronto), that a buller man was on the board of directors of a progressive black organization representing Black values. While this did not deter me from working with the Black Secretariat’s board, in the little time I spent there, the organization did nothing to address my experience of communal homophobia. Similarly, in a more recent experience with the “African Canadian Legal Clinic”, a board member accused me of having a “gay” agenda, because in this board member’s opinion I was asking too many “gay questions” of potential employees of the Clinic when I was sitting on an interviewing and hiring committee. This board member of the African Canadian Legal Clinic resigned and refused to make an apology or acknowledge any responsibility. It was and is difficult to work within the confines of heterosexist principles and polices, which place the burden of shame on the bodies marked as sick, traitorous, or immoral, charging us as responsible for disrupting the ambience of a pure Black organizational culture.

The Black Secretariat is a Black community organization in Toronto, whose goals and objectives are to help develop community, economic and political consciousness within the various Black communities in Toronto.
I am now openly proud to be a Black buller. At the time I choose to "come out," identity politics in Canadian Black communities was almost singularly located within the discursive fields of race and heterosexuality. I struggled to overcome my inward and horizontal battles, in order to speak out against heterosexism; and as a result I have endured the anguish and pain that too frequently accompany the alienation and public shame of "coming out" or "being "outed." I have also interrogated the fear of maligning the Black community and even more profoundly, the possibility of personally damaging the "image of the race". I have been told on numerous occasions that it was a "race issue, now come on you know race come first." These experiences have led me to conclude that while Blackness informs every act I stand for, because of the transgressive logic of heterosexist Black nationalism, I stand to lose contact with the very people with whom I intend to work. However, while the social construct Blackness or the Black race, as a sign, is one of my many starting points for the social justice work I do, Blackness, by itself, it is not enough.

Over the years, as I have publicly embraced a same-sex identity in White spaces and selective Black spaces, I often feared speaking up and jeopardizing my safety. I have always felt that I had to negotiate my sexuality whenever I was involved in social justice work within Black heterosexual organizations, because I never knew when I would be harassed, shut out or not taken seriously. In the beginning, I was silent on the subject matter of Black same-sex relationships, searching for just the right moment to utter something. But the right time never seemed to materialize, because of the heterosexist regulation of Black communal living and organizing in Toronto. I gave public speeches and addressed Black gatherings but never identified myself as a buller man. I wanted my work and ideas to come first and be accepted as legitimate especially within a hostile environment. Although my work within most or all
Black heterosexual organizations included acts of resistance. I had to ask myself constantly, "When do I come out and to whom?" or "When can I raise issues of Black same-sex relationships?" Notably, as I came to terms with my sexual orientation and risked coming out, this brave act was not met with acceptance. Rather, the struggle was much harder as I attempted to introduce Black same-sex consciousness in organizations.

These encounters have made me and others even more determined to continue the fight against heterosexism in Black communities. In meetings organized by the Nation of Islam, The Biko-Rodney-Malcolm Coalition, the Azania Movement\(^67\) and other Black heterosexual groups, there was always a powerful Black consciousness analysis, that fell short of contextualizing the complex interconnections of race, sexuality, and gender politics. The assumptions, or the logic behind such deliberate omissions, were based on the fear that they may not be perceived as good Black nationalists and would be seen as a threat to the moral stability of Black heterosexual families and their religious beliefs. Good Black nationalists are those who keep bullers and batty bwoys in their place. While they change their slave names (those acquired during the process of slavery), these "nationalists" have not changed their slave mentality, a mentality infested with erroneous ideas and which need to be decolonized if we are to forge a more authentically progressive and inclusive Black nationalist movement.

A political commitment to Black nationalism must also include bullers and zamis. I have refused to be dismissed, ignored or silenced by Black ideologues, activists and intellectuals.

\(^67\)I often attended the meetings organized by these organizations, because they assisted me in the formulation of a Black consciousness and Black nationalistic discourse. I was also a member of the Steve Biko, Walter Rodney and Malcolm X coalition. It was in this organization in the latter days of its survival that I started to challenge and speak out against heterosexism in the movements and the community. I did slowly begin to get the support of some its members, but we never were able to finally organize a public community discussion on the subject matter.
I have always been driven by the desire to be a Black educator, activist, role model and serve my community and believe that those who understand best the problems of the Black community are to be found within. Some of those intelligent, sensitive, understanding and resourceful people are buller men and batty bwoys. I am frequently told that I can be active in the heterosexist Black dominated organizations, attend sit-ins, street demonstrations, fight against police injustice, work with youths and their families, as well as support Black organizations financially and socially; however, I must not flaunt my “sickness,” because it runs counter to Black unity, Black family values and Black collective consciousness. In Stuart Hall’s evaluation, notions of family or “race and gender” as family are “underpinned by a particular sexual economy, a particular figured masculinity [or femininity], a particular class identity,” and so on (Hall, 1992: 31). Othering and exclusionary mechanisms define an “authentic” male Blackness through negation. Thus, the “effeminate” Black man is “not-man,” and the buller is not-Black “enough.” These delineations create a split me/not-me boundary for Black males. This split can be dangerous in that it oversimplifies the complicated and overlapping intersections of masculinity, Whiteness and White supremacy, and indicates an acceptance of the racist stereotyping of the virile Black man, while denying the differences in our various Black communities. As Cornel West concludes in Marlon Riggs documentary film Black Is Black Ain’t “we have got to conceive of new forms of community. We each have multiple identities and we’re moving in and out of various communities at the same time. There is no one grand Black community or Black male identity (Riggs, 1995). Stuart Hall too, has called for a new kind of politics, based on the diversity of the Black experience and recognizing Black people’s historically defined Black experiences. Hence, Hall begs for “a new kind of cultural politics,” arguing that it is necessary now more than ever to “recognize
the other kinds of difference [those of gender, sexuality, racial and class, for example] that place position, and locate Black people” (Hall, 1992, 30).

In summary, the lack of support in the Caribbean context for people engaging in same-sex practices, the violent attacks on people who seek same-sex agency or identities, (from some families and communities) coupled with communal, family and religious oppression made it impossible for people to engage in same-sex practices and be open about it. The Caribbean context policed desire along the lines of good and bad, clean and unclean and imposed very stereotypical roles and expectations on men and women, hence constructing at all times a heterosexual identity. Although I knew I had same-sex desires in the Caribbean, I only acted out the heterosexual identity that the society permitted. We did not have a Stonewall riot in the Caribbean, to give rise to a Black same-sex politic that would create sites and institutions to support bullers and batty bwoys politically, economically and socially. Hence, coming to Canada made it easier to affirm a same-sex identity because of the support systems that existed in predominantly White spaces. Having said this, it does not mean that Canada or White society made me “gay,” rather the support systems that existed for people engaging in same-sex practices in Canada were the systems that I sought support from in order to live out my same-sex identity.
Chapter Three

Methodology and The Men’s Familial Narratives

The Black “homosexual” is hard pressed to gain audiences among his heterosexual brothers; even if he is more talented, he is inhibited by his silence or his admissions. This is what the race has depended on in being able to erase homosexuality from our recorded history. The “chosen” history. But these sacred constructions of silence are futile exercises in denial. We will not go away with our issues of sexuality. We are coming home.

Essex Hemphill

Introduction:

There is a very large population of buller men and batty bwoys living in Toronto and Halifax, despite attempts, on behalf of the Black community leaders to deny the existence of such populations. All one has to do to find us is visit certain “gay” bars or private spaces where Black “gay” men and bullers socialize. Unlike the rich literature on and by African-American and African-British same-sexed men, there is a paucity of literature written on and by bullers and batty bwoys, in Canada. While there may be no empirical studies done in Canada, H. Nigel Thomas novel Spirits In The Dark began to address a discourse of exclusion based on “normative” ways of Black sexuality, by developing a language around anti-imperial discourses, violence, post-coloniality, and sexuality, while critiquing contemporary Caribbean homophobic communal societies.

68What we do have is a few Black identified fictional writers and poets, most of whom are unpublished. Black men known as bullers or batty bwoys, with the exception of H. Nigel Thomas, have published in books not specifically about same-sex issues, but on Black Canadian writers. H. Nigel Thomas Spirits In The Dark fictional narrative stands out as exceptional among all the Canadian published titles on Black men engaging in same sexed practices. Sister Vision Press, has published two edited collections of anthologies one of lesbian writings.
Black same-sexed men need a “voicing” and sharing of our lived experiences. Such work would allow us to see ourselves contributing to a public discussion of the violence of homophobia and how it gets enacted on Black same-sexed bodies in Black communal living, further Black male same-sex history should not be denied especially at a time when we are widening the inclusivity of Black history and culture in Canada. A central component of this dissertation is the presentation of the survival stories of a selected sample of Black men who practice same-sex relations. The primary focus of this presentation is the myriad ways these men negotiate structures of dominance and violence within Black communities. In organizing the interview material presented in this chapter, I have used a framework, derived from the marginalized,69 “biomythography” of my experience as a buller man. hooks calls this “a politicization of memory that distinguishes nostalgia, that longing for something to be as it once was, a kind of useless act, from that remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present” (hooks, 1990: 147). As a product of memory, remembrance is easily warped by trauma, shame, silence, forgetfulness and all-too-human selectiveness. As such, narratives presented in this thesis are organized through the codes of Black communal life. If anything, the men’s narratives inform us that these problems provide a different way of examining the history of the men that this dissertation set out to explore, one that shifts the focus from some of what the men “really experienced” to how people use the past to produce individual or collective meaning and identity. A sense of collective community oral history is central to this

69 Marginalized here refers to my location within a White-dominated society and my everyday experiences of marginality in Black communal living where I must negotiate which parts of my identity should be made public or private. Since I am not recognized by some members of the Black community as a male or man enough hence my marginality is also constructed within a specific form of gender identity that marks my body as weak, sick or feminine.
work. Jennifer Browdy De Hernandez, writing on "The Politicization of Memory and Form in Three American Ethnic Autobiographies" coins the phrase communio-biography, as a way of placing great importance on the memories and experiences of the ethnic group to which one belongs. She was here particularly interested in the works of Audre Lorde, N. Scott Momaday and Gloria Anzaldúa (Jennifer Browdy De Hernandez, 1996). As will become evident in this chapter and those following, there is an urgent need for Black communities to embrace that which is coded as different and deviant, both as a matter of justice and in order to broaden the present theorization of Black life.

Sample Selection

The sample consisted of nineteen men who have same-sex relations who were interviewed specifically for this dissertation. Of these men, five were from Halifax and fourteen from Toronto. They ranged in age from fifteen to sixty-five. For brevity's sake I shall call the two interviewed populations the "Toronto men" and the "Halifax men" though

70The Black population in Halifax was chosen for two obvious reasons: First it was an eye-opener for me discover that there was a shared sense of community that is similar to some Caribbean islands. Secondly, there is a tendency for Caribbean Black nationalist in Toronto to organize in ways that exclude or forget that there were Black populations in Toronto or Canada before they/we arrived. This oversight in organizing Black politics in Toronto reflects a Caribbean domination, missing the many complicated aspects of Black identities and Black politics. This dissertation attempts to correct that historic problem, by adopting an approach that includes Blacks from two different aspects of Black Canadian identities and communities, namely indigenous Blacks from Halifax and African-Caribbean Blacks living in Toronto.

71Some of the men did not share their ages. Hence I did not want to add any more pressure by asking them to tell me their age, rather what they gave me was an indication of an age group that they fell under. For example, they told me their age was between, fifteen and twenty-five, but not their exact age, hence the question of age was an optional one. Also optional was their profession and social class. I had to guarantee the men full privacy and gain their confidence.
this oversimplifies complex identities. Thirteen of the fourteen Toronto men interviewed were born in the Caribbean and migrated to Canada as either young children or teenagers. One of the Toronto men interviewed was born in the city to first-generation Black parents. The Halifax men were all indigenous Black Canadians. All my interviewees had either a university or community college education. As a group of respondents, they were highly-educated and engaged in a variety of occupations and current living arrangements. This rather select sample reflects the intersection of my method of soliciting potential interviewees and my own social location as a university-educated Black male. It also reflects a recognition on the part of those who agreed to participate that this research was important to their lives and to the future of Black communities. As well, the men seemed to possess the confidence to articulate their experiences and attempt to put them in the wider perspective of their own marginalization. Obviously, the sample is not representative of the total population of African-Caribbean and African-Canadian men who engage in same-sex practices. Appendix A provides a tabular summary of the information given above as well as a reference of pseudonyms used in this study. However, it is a particular segment of the group living in Toronto and Halifax that is the focus of this new and emerging field in Canada.

I interviewed all the men who responded to my request for interviews. These solicitations were accomplished through several means. I placed advertisements in local publications that might conceivably be read by Black men who participate in same-sex relationships. The Toronto publications included: Xtra Magazine, a local gay and lesbian community magazine; Share, Pride and Metro Word, all publications of the Toronto Black community; and Word Up, a newsletter from the Toronto Black arts organization: Canadian Arts Black Artists in Action. All advertisements stated “that Black gay and bisexual men from

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Toronto and Halifax are needed for a research project on their life experiences living within Canada’s Black communities. This is the first thesis to be written about Black gay life in Canada and all interviews will be confidential and names will only be used at the request of persons.” The advertisement listed my name, mailing address, telephone number and stated that I was interested in the personal life stories of men of all ages.

I am also a member of a Toronto-based Black male same-sex, bisexual and a transgendered support group. At three of our monthly meetings, I explained my interest in recruiting interview participants and provided interested parties with a copy of a research proposal detailing the goals of the project. While some men volunteered immediately, I gave my telephone number and address to those who wanted to think about it and contact me in a private setting rather than publicly agree to participate at a meeting. I was also able to recruit participants to the study simply by meeting people in Toronto gay clubs, running into them on the streets, from hanging out in coffee shops and informally explaining my intention to write about the lives of Black gay men. I also posted my request for interviewees on a general discussion list on The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education E-mail system. My request for interviews was posted at the offices of Xtra Magazine, the AIDS Committee of Toronto, on college and university campuses in Toronto and at The Glad Day book store.

72 After interviewees responded I explained to them the scope of the work, informing them that I was particularly interested in hearing stories about their life experience as it relates to Black nationalism, community participation, Are they out and what does that mean for them? How they negotiate their everyday lives as Black same-sex identifies men within the oppressive structures of dominance within Black communities? Do they think Black communities are more heterosexist than White communities? Have they ever experienced any communal or family violence that was targeted towards them because they are same-sexed identified? these were some of the questions explained to the men to give them a scope of the project before they agreed to take part in it.
Other sources contacted included, the Black same-sex men’s support group in Halifax; E-mail messages posted on the net for Black men engaging in same-sex relations with other men; gay club visits; and referrals by friends of those interviewed.

In Halifax, I was introduced to men who were affiliated with a Black male same-sex support group. These contacts were primarily facilitated by my ex-lover⁷³ and his friends. An advertisement was placed in The Wave, a Halifax local gay and lesbian magazine. My request was also posted at the Red Herring and Trident bookstores in Halifax. In addition, some men were contacted through personal networks, including those of respondents who referred others for the study. To obtain diversity in my findings on perceptions and experiences of how these men negotiate their lives in the context of various Black communities, I tried not to select too close a network of friends or neighbors.

As mentioned above, I interviewed all men who agree to participate in the study. In doing so, I hoped to find a sample of people who expressed a variety of same-sex experiences: out same-sexed identified men, closeted men, men who engage in same-sex practices but do not label it as buller, batty bwoy or bisexual⁷⁴.

⁷³I am here indebted to my past boy friend and lover Roger Grant for his introduction to some of the Black same-sexed men from Halifax. He is a native Black from Halifax and introduced me to the political and social climate that allowed me to access some of the men I interviewed and to understand their social and political location on the issue of same-sex politics among the Black men in Halifax.

⁷⁴Recent works dealing with identity politics have argued that there is no fixed sexual identity. The men in this project who have sex with men but do not wish to be labeled as bisexual, same-sexed identified, buller man or batty bwoy have deployed the concept of hybridity in an effort to foreground the non-essentiality of composite articulations of a same-sex identity. Identity is performed collectively and individually by the men and may be understood to be shaped by their political, racial and cultural locations (Butler, 1993 and Mercer, 1994).
All the men were given a consent form to sign, agreeing to participate before they were interviewed. All but eight of the men did not sign the consent forms. These men were dismissive of formal research protocol, and made comments such as: "come we trust you, it is just an interview and besides, this, eh no law contract, is just about buller men and batty bwoys' life and besides, me doh like to sign too much papers, leaving paper trails, you know what ah mean." "Do what you want with the information, just doh use meh name and everything go be ok."

**Procedure**

All the participants were asked a series of open-ended, life-history questions, designed to facilitate an exploration of the following: perceptions on the moral regulation of their sexual behavior and sexual desires by Black nationalists, responses and relations with family members and friends, one's choice of partners, opportunities and desires for community participation, the experience of bisexuality, the importance of religion in their lives, their sites of fun and pleasure. The open-ended, relatively unstructured interview included thematic probes and specific questions, regarding the men’s responses to communal and family violence. Interviews were approximately sixty to ninety minutes in length. All names and places have been changed to protect the participants’ anonymity and I have assigned

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75This raised the issue that sometimes the formalized academic procedures for obtaining informed consent, actually create conditions of mistrust for some populations. For these men, their verbal agreement to participate and guaranteed anonymity was all that was needed. Therefore there is a need for ethical review practices to be culturally sensitive to the specificities of the populations one is working with.

76This minimizing of the importance of documenting our history as African-Caribbean and African-Canadian men was captured through the use of humor from some of the men as a way of breaking the ice, to turn the interview into a serious project.
pseudonyms to the men at their request. Therefore, the ways in which I framed the interviews with the men, displayed an attempt to give them an opportunity to talk about and voice the specificities of their lived social locations, without vulnerability and without fear of violence. To paraphrase, the words of Trinh T. Minh-ha, it is voices the men long to hear to gain agency and prominence (Minh-ha, 1989).

Interviews were individually conducted and tape recorded with verbal permission given following the granting of informed consent. For a variety of practical reasons, I did not transcribe complete interviews. Moreover, the narratives provided in this thesis are edited versions of raw transcription of the taped interviews. After several intensive sessions listening to the tapes and taking notes, I decided on selective transcriptions of sections of the tapes. In some accounts, substantial amounts of the original material was deleted in order to reduce unnecessary repetition within and between narratives. Some materials were also rearranged for readability since some themes were constantly revisited at different points in some of the men’s story telling. The decision as to which sections to transcribe was based upon eliminating repetition and choosing material which did not diminish the essential narrative expressions, clearly focusing on the themes which organize the presentation of the data later in this chapter and in the ones which follow.

**Process of Analyzing Transcripts**

Because the questions were organized thematically, much of the conversation naturally addressed this thematic agenda. As well, my initial data analysis was structured along the lines of these terms. I listened to the tapes carefully and noted the data excerpts pertinent to the themes transcribed. A sheet was used for common quotations, themes and
"new" issues, to enable me to revise my questionnaire and develop common areas to which interviewees referred. In order to clarify the manner in which structures of dominance are implicated in the social forms of Black everyday life, I have organized the data presentation as mentioned above in chapter one.

A number of themes derived from the data or questions that I asked the men initially, while some were a product of our conversations. Themes included shame, fear, outing, loneliness, guilt, masculinity, same-sex identification and labeling, femininity, interracial relationships, community participation, suicide, community, family, religion, bisexuality, bisexual men and children, Caribbean dialect/language, Black nationalism, machismo, marriage and fun. The reader will find a discussion of all of these issues and experiences in the pages that follow.

These men (and myself) claim and are claimed by three, four and possibly five communities: Caribbean communities, Black communities; Black buller men, batty bwoy, gay and lesbian communities; bisexual and transgendered communities; and the larger White gay and lesbian communities. Often, no singular community fully respects, appreciates or understands the complexities of buller men and batty bwoys' lives. Thus, every person's story contributes to a new Black Canadian buller man and Black same-sex theoretical discourse.

Finally, I think perhaps my own position as an "insider" is to be credited for the scope of the data collected in this study. As a buller man, I offer a perspective and the views of a population hitherto about from Black Canadian politics and communal living. To some extent the depth and quality of interviews are tied to who I am. When I listened to the men I found many similarities between my life experience as buller man and their own. I have stood where many of them have stood, seen much of what they have seen, felt the degradation and insults
they have felt, and struggled just as they have struggled for respect and acceptance in Black communal settings and families. These situational issues allowed me to interview and work with the men in an atmosphere of trust. Trust was established between the men and myself, due to our shared culture. My knowledge about where to find some of the men, my understanding of their social practices and my identity as a buller man were crucial to the final product: rich informative conversations. My method fits the "heuristic" approach described by Douglas and Moustakas (1985), as "a passionate and discerning personal involvement in problem solving, an effort to know the essence of some aspect of life through internal pathways of self... connected with everyday human experiences" (Douglas and Moustakas 1985: 39).

All of the men requested that their stories be reported as told. The regional forms of English expression used in some of the data excerpts which follow respect the culturally-specific vocabulary and syntax of the interviewees. The argot and cultural dialect of these Black men are maintained to provide a degree of authenticity that respects their localized voices and experiences. However, in other situations this practice would have been counterproductive. Here I am guided by Patricia Tomic and Kathleen Rockhill. Rockhill, (a woman whose first language is English), in correspondence with Tomic, (whose first language is Spanish) wrote that:

Maybe we can't go so far as to fully mix codes, but at the very least, the insertion of a phrase in Spanish every now and then --- alerts the reader that the English text hides far more than it reveals --- Yet this is difficult, when we know that the standards against which our work will be judged. (Rockhill, unpublished paper, 1995).

77Heuristic, according to Douglas and Moustakas (1985) comes from the Greek word "heuretikos" meaning "I find," similar to the familiar "eureka."
The buller men, batty bwoys and same-sexed identified men in this dissertation use and create language as a means of communicating and representing the specificity of their/our experiences and perceptions of self, identities, family, community, Black nationalism, self-worth, joy and oppression.

With respect to the use of male same-sex Caribbean linguistic markers, all the men living in Toronto, who migrated from the Caribbean made reference to the terms buller man and batty bwoy, whether they applied these labels to themselves or not. This reference was a consistently negative one. For example, it was often hinted that “well you know back home they does call yuh buller man, batty bwoy or panty man and they does laugh at you, sometimes stone yuh and beat yuh up as if they want to kill yuh.” In fact, the negative evaluations of these linguistic markers changed the original title of my dissertation. In the original title I used the word gay because I thought this was the only way I could get Black men to take the research project seriously. I did not use the historically negative labels buller man and batty bwoy, because if I had used these words, I doubted that the men, even if they were “out,” would have regarded my project as legitimate research. The degrading connotation is too strong. As I have said earlier, these are not words that have yet been reclaimed. Given that I was intimately aware of the negative history of the terms, I did not use it in my call for life stories from my respondents. However, the more the men used the terms in interviews, the more I felt I had a political and social responsibility to begin a politic of visibility, voice and embracing of these labels in a Black communal Caribbean and academic contexts.

Some of the men interviewed have no problem applying the label to themselves and joking at it, but this were clearly a problem for others. As a strategy of resistance to the
oppressive forms of heterosexism and homophobia rooted in a Black bio-nationalism, I
decided to use this dissertation as an occasion to reclaim the culturally-specific terms which
mark those Black bodies who participate in same-sex relationships as other and deviant. While
some of my interviewees shared my identification as a buller man, there were others who did
not, or may not approve of the title and language of this work. Nevertheless, I have chosen
to risk this disapproval in an attempt to make the hidden visible and initiate a dialogue over
the issue of who is currently being denied full-status in two of Canada's Black communities.

From the following interviews, we learn how Black nationalism and its contingent
ideological constructs seek to regulate Black male same-sex bodily practices. In addition, I
examine how Black men negotiate their everyday lives within Black communal settings, the
techniques they employ to be Black, same-sexed and male, in a context that denies their
reality.

**Summary And Significance Of This Work**

This work is significant in that it develops a:

1) Language in which to begin to talk about the issue of bullers and batty bwoys lives,
   In particular for a group of men who are often cast as the sexualized other;

2) This thesis is meant to be shared and is intended to evoke questions, discussion and
   a re-evaluation of Black communities positions on a variety of social issues and not
   just Black male same-sex oppression; It critiques bio-nationalism, Black families,
   Black religion and Black communities and asks if there are other ways to give
   expression to the lives of those labelled as deviant, sick, traitorous and feminine.

3) It gestures to the importance of hidden history and sociology that is part of the Black
   diasporic experience, whether if it is indigenous to Canada, Africa or Caribbean
   Black communities

   In North America as Bullers and batty Bwoys uncover a dimension of Black existence
   that have not been taken seriously, I am here talking about Black formations where Black
same sex sexuality is not taken seriously as a significant meaning of peoples lives. This thesis rests at the very heart of the sociological imagination, it centres on the importance of the lived experiences, through the use of biographies, played out in relation to the social structure at particular points in culture and history in Black communal living.

My thesis therefore not only attempts to create a vision, but also create a language of inclusion that is collective and communal and not on the terms of a particular biological orientation. This aligns my work with other projects of say Paul Gilroy's the Black Atlantic (1993), as historical, political and cultural formation. I am referring to *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, by alluding to the cultural territory sketched in Paul Gilroy's brilliant study. Gilroy who in the concept *The Black Atlantic* arise the basis for a cultural solidarity among Black folks living in different places.

Gilroy is of course, not the only scholar to have investigated the cultural economy, historical and sociological discovery of the transnational territory. Kobena Mercer and Robert Thompson have also made significant contributions to the study of a cultural expanse which did not vanish with the abolition of this peculiar institution. Gilroy's work however is significant and distinct in the systematic quasi-totalizing cartography. *Mapping out of a space for and within the diaspora*.

Gilroy notions of popular culture as a basis of integration of diverse communities in the diaspora, focuses on historical and sociological discovery of diversity. The interviews provide a unique perspective on an until now, hidden dimension of Black communal life in Canada. Stressed in the analysis of these interviews is how these men negotiate Black bi-nationalism and the heterosexist structure of dominance that define the circumstances of their lives in Black communities. Their narratives enable us to enter imaginatively into their
struggle to negotiate and survive communities that are important for them, but hostile through its exclusionary practices of bio-nationalism. Their stories reveal a common struggle to remain a part of the Black family, community, and religious affiliates, and their lives are a profound expression of human experience and spirit. They demonstrate that sexual identity and lived experiences are complex and filled with ambivalence and ambiguity. It is never neatly situated along the axes of homo and hetero, pleasure or pain, dignity or defeat or good and bad. Therefore this thesis maintains that not only do bullers live lives of value but that denying this premise does violence to our ability to conceptualize the lives of those whom bio-nationalists consider deviant, sick, traitorous or other.

So why should we care about these men and their hidden history?

We should care about what the men say and how they say it because they speak to the terms of a new or alternative discourse for thinking about Black nationalism. This should not be seen as a moralizing discourse that is coming out of the blue, rather as a discourse consistent with an understanding of what we have learned from the interviews.

The men’s lives, the importance of the men’s lives and how it ties to the larger project of this thesis, is what my work is all about. As for my own experience, it locates me in a buller man sub-culture in Trinidad whose presence precedes my existence. While I have not done the historical work to document the lives of bullers in Trinidad and Tobago, my own experience points me in the direction of further investigation which would allow me to uncover that history.

The brilliant stories, painful experiences and joyous moments of the men in this dissertation, will be a historical moment in this project as we hear the men’s stories of family life.
Family Relationships

For most buller men and batty bwoys living in Canada, the family is a particularly important site of potential affirmation and support. This is, in part, enforced by the tensions and hostilities of racism encountered in a dominant White society and the loss of extended familial support that results from communal dislocation and migration. For bullers, the family represents a set of social relations primary to the men's lives. Numerous studies on Black families have focused on a variety of themes such as motherhood patterns and their consequences, extended family relationships and kinship bonds. (R. Hill, 1972; W. Nobles, 1975; J. Benson, 1986; and R. Staples, 1974). For example, it has been suggested by Wade Nobles, "that the task of the Black family has been to prepare its children to live and be among White people without becoming White people"(Nobles, 1975). In addition, Robert Hill and Nobles connected family and the African context, stating that there are two guiding principles "survival of the tribe and oneness of being. A deep sense of family or kinship characterizes African social reality"(R, Hill and Nobles, 1974b: 12). These practices are all too present in the Caribbean, where both blood and non-blood relatives are seen as family and act as support networks for communities of people living in close proximity to one another.

However, family relations are never outside the ideological structures which constitute notions of how to think about and enact sexuality. In this sense, the church, Black nationalism

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Families support each other in the Caribbean by providing services such as baby sitting, meals, lending the neighbor a cup of sugar, flour, or salt for cooking. Neighbors will also support you in times of stress "hard times" and live comfortably with what little they had. This is not called the Black extended family as White anthropologist have deemed our support systems, rather this is seen as communal family support based on economics, love and unity. In some cases poverty necessitated this tight support system, hence racism or colonialism is built into this and, if anything, it should be seen as resistance to the harsh conditions created as a result of colonialism.
and the expressed norms of communal living are all stitched into family relations. Thus, for bullers and batty bwoys, family relations are potential sites of affirmation and support as well as alienation and pain. However, few studies have attempted to address the relationship between Black men who participate in same-sex relationships and their family members. What writing exists on this theme is often homophobic; stressing male same-sex practices as characteristically effeminate, weak, traitorous and resulting from the decadence of European pollution of the race. Black nationalistic heterosexist discourse has set up an ideological construction that regulates same-sex practices, part of what the men in this project must face everyday in trying to negotiate their lives in family and communal settings.

A central theme in the stories you are about to read is the felt interweaving of guilt and shame. At stake for many men is what Sedgewick labels “an experience of the self by the self”; that moment when the self is felt as a sickness within the self (Sedgewick, 1995:136). I will argue this “felt sickness” is often multi-layered and traceable to the norms which regulate participation in family and community. This experience of guilt and shame takes the shape of self-contempt that often leaves these men alienated, weakened, confused and defeated in regard to their participation in Black communal life.

Black families, like other families in the Caribbean and Canada, presuppose a heterosexual orientation and avoid discussion of sexual topics that centers around same-sex practices in particular (hooks, 1992; Mercer, 1994). The overpowering social pressures on Black families from Black religion, diasporic nationalism and norms of communal living at times compel Black men who engage in same-sex practices to marry and procreate. In the narratives that follow, there is a wealth of information about how Black men try to negotiate their lives through a heterosexist front to protect their gender, identity, family and community.
Here Devon, one of the respondents, confirms how this regulatory force works against Black male bodies engaging in same-sex practices in Black communities.

W.C.: Why did you get married?

Devon: Well I couldn’t live in my community and not have a girlfriend and a child: in my community manhood is measured by how many children a man could have. My father had six boys and that was great, so somehow I felt I had to do the same thing, so that they wouldn’t think that I was a buller man. My aunt is always telling me about how many women my father use to have and that I should live up to it too.

Mohammed also echoes the sentiments of marriage as a cure and what it meant for him to be asserting a same-sex identity at the same time.

Mohammed: I got married in the Caribbean where I came from and then moved to Toronto with my wife and three children. Marriage is, if I might add, is “normal” outcome for men and women in the Caribbean regardless of their sexual orientation, in particular when the family, religious and cultural codes of the day warrants it. I also thought that it would cure me from being ah buller man too. I was married for twenty-five years before I came out to my wife and children. When I came out to my wife and children, this was what happened. My wife responded “Almighty Gawd ye have fer pray for this old cursed sick sinner” and she kneeled down and started to pray for me to be saved from the evils of Sodom and Gomorrah. She then proceed to tell me to “seek the kingdom of Heaven and I will be saved”.

What Devon and Mohammed make clear in the statements above is that marriage or having a girlfriend for them was and is a required form of “closet.” Having a girlfriend for Devon, and marriage for Mohammed, are both a social expectation and a protection from violence. In this sense, marriage as a form of closet does not allow Devon and Mohammed to claim or assume a same-sex identity. Rather, it allows them to experience communal connection and avoid communal fear and shame. It is important to grasp, how interlinked the
social forms of family and community are, where certain types of family practices actually enable certain types of community participation. This linkage will be developed more clearly throughout this chapter and the ones that follow.

Given a strong emphasis on the family, some men were concerned with meeting family needs, obligations and expectations with regard to bringing up children and becoming parents. For men like Devon and Mohammed, one is not fully a man until he has become a parent, despite the dishonesty the women may experience in these relationships. Clearly then, coming out in such a context is often experienced by family members as a catastrophe. Mohammed continues describing his wife’s response to his informing her about his same-sexed desires:

Mohammed: The next thing my wife did was to telephone the pastor of the church we attend, asking him to pray for the family and for me. She was hoping that prayers will cure me of being a buller man. She also told me that I will get AIDS, which is God judgment against batty men. She also reminded me that only White people are gay, not Black people and that it hard enough being Black and oppressed, now gay oh god wah we go do.

W.C.: And what did the pastor do?

Mohammed: The pastor was from the Caribbean and he came over to pray with the two of us. (Laughing) I felt that he only came to see who was this buller man.

Mohammed’s wife has recourse to more than one discourse in her understanding the catastrophic nature of his revelation and her subsequent judgment against him. First, she chooses a discourse of religion, then the discourse of Black nationalism. Both view same-sex practices as sinful, immoral and outside the normative framework of Black identity. His wife’s religious remarks reflect and remind us of our cultures’ connection to the Bible and how the Bible constructs same-sex eroticism as sinful, a practice of the damned. Cornell West argues,
with regard to African-Americans use of religion that, there is "theological claim (or faith claim) that African Americans believe in, that God sides with the oppressed and acts on their behalf" (West, 1992: 106). This religious discourse is not just a theological position about divine authority, but also is the vehicle for Mohammed’s wife’s and her family’s connection into the Black community and their avoidance of shame and guilt. For some Black religious families then, the shame felt or brought on by a member of the family who is a buller is a central part of the communal production of public shame. This public shame is in fact produced through Mohammed’s wife calling the pastor, who then pays them a visit. It is also manifested in some rituals of certain Black churches during which sinners are called upon to publicly proclaim their transgressions and pray for forgiveness and redemption. Here the church’s relation to family is embodied through the strong religious and spiritual orientations of Black cultures. In this context, Mohammed’s wife’s selective interpretations of religion or scripture are used to reinforce homophobic attitudes. For Mohammed’s wife (and the pastor) it is assumed that through confession Mohammed’s identity as a Christian, Mohammed can be “cured” by religious commitment. Clearly such public outing would set real limits on the comfortable communal participation of bullers and batty bwoys not yet ready to deal with being “outed,” or reinforce their conviction that must continue to lead double-lives.

For Mohammed, subverting his same-sex desire was not something he could live with any longer. Religious confession was used as a way to solve the contradictions he experienced in being a buller and remaining a part of Black communal families and living. Again, the pastors’ participation is very important, because for many Black religious communities, confession is a public event. This experience with the pastor was not a private communication
between a sinner and a church authority, as in a confession booth, but a family call on the pastor to come and help the family, not just Mohammed, in making a public call to God for help.

Mohammed’s family is not alone with their use of prayer as a means of curing his same-sex desires. Devon too like Mohammed, tells us that he prayed to stay straight but ended up having a wife, boyfriend and children.

Devon: I always wanted children and felt that I was wasting my life because I was getting older and did not have any children. So I got involved with a woman and did not tell my boyfriend nor did I tell my girlfriend and had a baby. After we had the child, I told her I was bisexual because I could not keep up the pressure in my life anymore.

W.C.: How did she react to you telling her this?

Devon: She felt betrayed and told me she hopes that I do not do this to other women, because it is a very serious and painful experience for a woman to have gone through.

W.C.: And what’s your take on it?

Devon: Yeah, maybe she is right, it is a wrong thing to do to people I guess and to yourself!

Devon should be credited for his level of honesty, despite the process he chooses to accomplish it. What Devon is telling us is that same-sex couples are obviously not outside the desire for paternity or maternity, but that desire cannot be pursued openly in Black communities. Devon’s desire for paternity is also problematic. For it raises the question of whether he intends to be part of the family structure (nuclear in Canada) necessary to raise a healthy child. It is important to note that having a girlfriend or using marriage as a cure is not unique to the lives of Black men, but is common to all races, genders and cultures across the globe. But, there is a particularity to Black families, built into a historical social functioning
around slavery and racism that pressures Blacks to marry for the purposes of procreation and the maintenance of family values. These ideas can be found in the works of Black nationalists scholars like Molifi Asante and Frances Cress Welsing who argue that slavery has made it imperative that Blacks go forth and procreate to replace those killed during that era. Shame then teaches bullers how to act, behave and contain their sexuality in the name of heterosexism and communal fear. As Tom’s narration highlights, relations with a woman were necessary to closet his same-sex sexuality, hide communal shame and the maintain his gender and family values.

Tom: I got involved with a woman, did not get formally married and had two children, they are both boys. Because deep down inside I felt that I would free myself from the evils of sin and shame and I also felt that having sex with women and having children I would cure my homosexuality and would no longer have to fight my feelings of guilt, shame, depression and suicidal attempts.

W.C: What are your views on living with women and family now that you have been there?

Tom: I see having a girlfriend as something I did only to maintain a heterosexual front. But family I see very much as a support system.

Tom’s reasons for having a girlfriend raise a fundamental question: how do the interconnections of Black communities and Black families reinforce the normative expectation to live a “normal” stable, supportive, heterosexual, family life? For Tom, family and having a girlfriend serves his desire for community as well. In family life, Tom was able to get support, while feeling connected to the community. In part, this was (and was expected to be experienced through) the various events and occasions families attended in the community.
This indicates how much the men may be connected to Black communities through activities within which families participate together. Much of Black communal life is lived in families, as an extension of Black solidarity and Black unity. Here Tom tells us that he felt very much a part of the Black community through his girlfriend, but when that relationship ended he did not feel a sense of connection, because he did not attend events traditionally organized by Black organizations and individuals which focused on family participation.

**Tom:** When I was living with my girlfriend I felt very much a part of the Black community in Toronto, but when my marriage ended I felt as though I no longer had a community to call my own. Because we did things together in the Black community and that was a very pleasing thing on many occasions. It ended because I started to feel ashamed to be seen in the community after.

*Tom* makes a very important connection with *Mohammed*’s life experiences, because he begins to clarify the way families and communities are intertwined, so that being a buller is not just a “private” issue. This is a key point theoretically, because sexuality in Black life is not a private affair. The publicality of Black sexuality is regulated around regimented constructions of masculinity and the participation of heterosexual families in community events organized through community organizations or individuals.

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*Within Black communities there tends to be a great emphasis on heterosexual family events organized through community organizations or individuals. For example, Kwanzaa is celebrated as a community event every December 26th to January 1st. Caribana is known, not only as celebration of steel pan and calypso, but the coming together of family and friends, that folks have not seen for the whole year or longer. Caribbean plays tend to center on the notion of family, culture and the longing to return home. In the summer, Black organizations such as the Harriet Tubman Association and The Jamaican Canadian Association are known for their family picnics and community fairs. The celebration of independence day for most Caribbean islands also is focused along the notion of family and nationalism as two commitments for a communal and family celebration. Through the creation of, and attendance at, these events one is connected to larger communities of Black people and family.*
events that stress the importance of heterosexuality and marriage. The interlinking of family and community underscores the fact that Black sexuality is community regulated.

The whole notion of social policy is often directed toward protecting individual rights - my sex is my business - but any real change for Black men engaging in same-sex practices must address the question of the constitution of differences in Black families and communities. The interlinkages among Black diasporic nationalism, Black religious life, Black family and communal solidarity are so omnipresent that issues of sexuality are never simply personal. Here, publicly accepting one's same-sex identity also means one's leaving the community, the cost of which is alienation, guilt, shame and being the target of oppressive communal views on same-sex practices. Feeling ashamed and guilty can also lead to some men telling the female partners in their lives about their sexual identity. Mohammed tells us that the reason he told his wife about his same-sex desires is because he felt ashamed of them and had no other choice but to inform her:

W.C. What led you into telling her?

Mohammed: I was tired of living an unhappy life and felt that at age sixty I had nothing to lose and felt that I wanted to live the rest of my life with some truth and honesty.

W.C. And what did you do?

Mohammed: Nothing. But cried and left the house in shame because she was very religious and felt that I had brought public shame on her and the family. So I left the house.

Here Mohammed is clearly demonstrating to us that structures of communal activity require family participation. The issue of "public shame" is not just one of individual guilt and shame, but the real possibility of bringing shame on the family. The family also exists, in part, through its participation in community life, where its members socialize, work, play and shop.
But how does this public outing affect or not affect the remaining family members? Mohammed tells us that his children were not happy with the public shame they said he brought on them and the family.

W.C: How did the rest of your family respond to you coming out?

Mohammed: Well I have children and they weren’t happy.

W.C: How many children do you have?

Mohammed: I have three children, two boys and one girl, all of them are university educated and I love them, because they have always been supportive of me and were always there for me. But this was before they found out about me.

W.C: So how did your children react to all of this?

Mohammed: My children told me to get out of the house, “because I was ah blight and ah curse to the family and that the plants in the house will soon die, if I stayed around any longer.

Mohammed’s children’s concern is how having a buller as a father would affect them and the family as a whole. Their focus was on themselves and how Mohammed affects them publicly and not on how they might relate to or support him. The impact of the Black buller on the identities of those around him, in part, via public shame, is so crucial that it must be thought through if there is to be a transformation in Black communities’ understanding of differences.

Family circumstances and dynamics are important for Black men, as is the case for Mohammed. When the family is seen as a site of desire, support and an integral part of life, an experience similar to Mohammed’s makes family a site of loss. The influences of marriage, Black diasporic nationalism and nuclear family values can also be seen as regulators of “normalcy”, a normalcy that results in the extreme pain and alienation that some of the men are experiencing in their daily lives. Mohammed attests to this.
Mohammed: Well just before I left my family I started to become addicted to alcohol and non-prescribed drugs. Today I am fighting very hard not to abuse alcohol and other non prescribed drugs. I am also sixty-five and live a very lonely life. The apartment building which I live in has a seniors club and I try to keep myself occupied with the club as much as possible. But there are times I wish my children would surprise me and visit me one day, I know they will, they cannot forget me completely.

Many bullers and batty bwoys are left alone, the choice of having a girlfriend or marriage was intended as a solution to what they perceived to be a disease; however, this often did not work. Support for bullers is a major problem within Black communities. Black communities in Toronto and Halifax seem to be in a crisis as regards their coming to grips with whether and how to acknowledge the problems of same-sex men and provide them with needed support. Both communities, although they have different histories of migration, settlement and cultural practices, still view same-sex practices as outside the normative framework of Black communal living.

George: I often felt that I was the only batty bwoy in town, so to hide it I went quick and got involved with a woman and had two children. I also went to church every Sunday. That hasn’t changed me. You see I am forty-seven right now and I do not want to continue living like this. I was tired of walking with my head down and hiding my face sometimes in front of Black people who I feel might suspect that I was ah batty man. So I felt that if I got involved with a woman people wouldn’t think of me that way. I also use to feel guilt or bad if I look at men in ways that they might think ah want to make ah pass at them. I always felt that my mother knew that I was different but she never asked me. So marriage was my solution to Sodom and Gomorrah. Many times I wanted to kill myself, feeling very depressed.

Note George, like Mohammed, Tom and Devon, gets involved with women or marries to stay in the communal closet. But, as all the men relate in one form or another,
being a buller man in Black communities is psychologically tormenting. George expresses this pain quite strongly.

Central to the narratives of the men in this project who have tried to cure their same-sex eroticism through having girlfriends or marriage was the belief that same-sex desires were morally wrong. Most were willing to run the high risk of serious damage to themselves to destroy these aspects of their identities. Many men who felt that they were morally or biblically sinning, shared a common experience of extreme depression, withdrawal, confusion, drug abuse and suicide attempts. Some bullers learned to respond with survival techniques, creating their own mythologies, especially when desire, joy, pleasure, fantasy and eroticism created moral panic and it conflicted with their religious traditional family values. What is at issue here is uncovering the manifold layers of guilt and shame which are a result of attempts to accommodate the structures of domination which normalize Black communal and family relations. We have seen in the data so far a triple layering: (1) same-sex as morally religiously wrong; (2) the wrong of leaving family and community no matter how tough it is to stay within them, because of issues of loyalty to the race, family and community; (3) it is wrong to live a lie, letting others believe that one is something one is not. Below George relates an incident which clearly expresses such feelings of guilt and shame.

George: One Christmas I bought a book as a gift for my boyfriend and hid it from my girlfriend.

W.C: Which book was it that you bought for your boyfriend?

George: Before I get to the book let me tell you I was nervous like hell to enter the gay book store on Yonge Street. Anyway the book was James Baldwin Another Country and Essex Hemphill Brother to Brother.

W.C: Why these two books?
George: I thought that these two books were very important gifts because it was the first time any one of us was going to read any form of gay literature. So on Christmas day I lied to my girlfriend telling her I was going to visit some friends and I went to get the books and deliver them to my boyfriend.

W.C: How did that make you feel?

George: Guilty, dirty and ashamed of myself after I did it. I also saw my mother that day and she was not very happy because I felt deep down inside that she knew that I was doing something wrong but she avoided asking me about the men who I would often visit... Because I use to tell her that they were my work friends.

W.C: What advice do you have for Black men who are going to try marriage or living with women as a way to conceal their same-sex practices, eroticisms and desires?

George: They shouldn’t try it because it does not work. But the Black family needs to be more supportive of people who do that. And they need to take some pressure off Black men’s back around this marriage thing forced upon us from young.

George’s plea is for Black communities to be more supportive of men who are engaging in or seeking to embrace same-sex relations. He feels that the pressure from within Black communities contributes to the added lie carried by some men that live with women. He is working toward Black communities redefining Black family life and communal support systems that are more inclusive of same-sex identities. As Devon reminds us, having a girlfriend meant being a complete man:

Devon: I thought that it would make me a complete person having a heterosexual front and family. The family picnics, Christmas dinners, traveling, picnics and stuff like that I enjoy. It also takes all the pressure of people asking when are you going to get married. You please your parents, your community and everyone else who is expecting you to be heterosexual. At that point in my life I swear I would kill myself before I let anybody know.
The closet was the desired place for many of the men who chose marriage or living with their girlfriends. Additionally for George, having a girlfriend was also seen as a response to family pressure and community expectations as well as a means of curing his same-sex attractions.

Older Black same-sex men, bisexual, buller men and batty bwoys are alienated from the larger Black community and the wider White gay and lesbian community. Some, because of the period in which they were raised, 40's, 50's, and 60s tend to emphasize race as a primary indicator. The alienation also comes from the social locations that some of them hold on the new wider White gay and lesbian movement, where they were involved and implicated in same-sex politics. This form of organizing is not what the older generations of Black men are used to. Instead they were more focused on race politics, family and communal living. Black power movements, Black nationalism and Black consciousness did affect the consciousness of many Blacks during that era, both in the North and in the South. Their views, as experienced through the harsh realities of poverty and racism, may be one of the reasons why some of them stress race over sexual identity. The following account from George illustrates how, at sixty, he is still living out the Black structures of dominance, an indication of how powerful they are. He is discussing how his mother is traditional:

W.C: What do you mean by traditional?

George: Well traditional in the sense that she is always talking about marriage and having children, religion, sin, moral and ethical issues around the home. Believe it or not, although I am sixty I don't feel safe to tell any of my relatives that I am sleeping with men. I have also tried to get help from Black social service agencies but they are not ready, every time I call them and ask questions around counseling for gay people they say they have no counselors and would often tell me to seek out
White gay groups. So I never had any professional help or anyone to talk to about coming out or being gay and confused. But I am ok now, but back then when I wanted to talk to someone there was no help and as far as I know there is still no help in Black agencies still.

W.C: Why?

George: Because they don’t want to hear about these things, it is very taboo. Black social workers and Black agencies’ doh want to hear about gay issues, they only want to hear about racism. And for them Black people there are no Black gay people. You know what I am talking about?

The denial of same-sex relationships and the maintenance of traditional values within Black families make it difficult for some Black men to publicly announce their same-sex erotic desires and relationships, forcing them to stay in the closet. Many Black men are uncomfortable coming out in the White gay community and Black community at large, due to the stress of racism and homophobia. But coming out of the closet for most of these Black men does not have the same political significance as it does in North America as it does for White gays. The literature that supports White gays coming out, glorifies coming out as a memorable point of departure from heterosexism, into a personal and political development of a gay identification. (Warner, 19). White gay and lesbian activism has been very limited by its failure to take into account racial and cultural differences and the impact that coming out and the breakaway from family community have or minority communities. Consequently, some men were forced into heterosexual marriages as a way of concealing their true sexual identity, before revealing their same-sex desires to their female partners, as can be attested from Bill’s narrative, where he underscores the consequences for men who have lived marriage as a closet when they are “outed.”

Bill: When my girlfriend found out that I was sleeping with other men, she asked me to try having sex with other women to be
sure that I knew I was gay. My children told me that I couldn’t be their father simply because I was taking it up the ass and only women get “fucked.”

W.C: What have you done with your life since?

Bill: I was also very involved with the Black community in Halifax and was a strong religious person. I felt that being involved with the church and the Black community would help me erase some of my personal guilt. But it never stopped and I became angry and unhappy with myself, my family and started to self-destruct.

W.C: What do you mean by self-destruct?

Bill: I started to take drugs and then got involved in a rehabilitation program. Then one of the counselors put me onto a White gay group and from there I started to deal with my sexuality and leave the Black community and the church behind.

W.C: Why did you leave the church and Black community behind?

Bill: Because they were the two things in my life that made my family and sexual life unhappy.

Unquestionably, Black religious belief has had a profound impact on the lives of some of the men in this project. Many of the Black men who had a religious upbringing and who believed in religion as a means to cure them from their perceived sins, ended up worrying about the exposure of their same-sex desires to family, community and church. The Black church and the Black family supported the continued suppression and alienation in the lives of some Black men. This will be elaborated upon more in the section that deals specifically with religion.

Family-Based Violence

For some Black men, rather than being a supportive network of personal relationships, the family can be a collective of hostile and violent relationships. Most Black families have
memberships in community organizations, support groups, share family networks, belong to church groups and clubs where they socialize, which makes Black families by extension synonymous with community. Therefore, the first battle bullers, batty bwoys and Black same-sex men have to fight is against family and community. What the family and community think is important to them and one does not necessarily have to have any affinity with the community to worry about what the community thinks about them. The violence some of the men experienced had wider implications and was not restricted to the private domains of the home. This violence may be understood as a response to buller men enacting a transgression of the “normative” social form of the family. This transgression of the buller’s sex, is, in some cases, a threat to the identities of the people surrounding the buller man, not just communal associates, but extended and nuclear family members: fathers, mothers, uncles, aunts, cousins, sisters, brothers, children. In a sense, their identities as family members and as members of Black communities, are seen as compromised by their link to being a buller. Buller’s, then, are a threat under these circumstances and this threat can often be met with violence.

Desmond, a young Black male unable to provide for himself, was a victim of heterosexist family violence and neglect. Desmond recounts how he experienced physical violence at the age of fifteen from his parents, which finally resulted in his being homeless.

Desmond: I was only fifteen when I told my mother that I have an attraction for men and I don’t know what to do about it. I said to her one day, ma, I doh feel right and I doh know how to explain it, but I think I like boys. She said, “lord what the hell you telling me you is ah batty man, look doh joke here to me nah”.

W.C: And did you tell her that you were serious?

Desmond: Yes and she tell me to leave the house immediately and doh come back into her life and that I am sick and she cannot help me. She also said to me if she wanted a girl child, or a sick
child she would ah make one. Then she went on to say it is a sickness and a sin to be ah batty man so I shouldn’t be joking about stuff like that. Then she raise she hand in the air and she begin to perspire, hit she chest and say “Almighty God” help this sinful child of mine, he fer get AIDS them buller man sickness. Then the next thing ah feel was ah good blow behind my head and was told at that point if I don’t cure it I will have to leave the house.

Here Desmond’s mother defines her worth, herself, in relation to the type of child she has produced. She also warns him in a very superstitious way that one should not make jokes about what she perceives to be a sin or curse on her mothering qualities, observing “old wives’ tales” or sayings that people often are afraid to say things for the fear that by saying them that they’ll come true. A classic example is children who are born with “Downes Syndrome”. Community legend has it that the parent was cursed by the “Obeah man” or the “Jumbie.”

W.C: And what did you tell her at this point, when she was asking you to cure it?

Desmond: I said ma, you cannot cure it, it is either you this way or that way. And she got more and more angry and started to hit me again and again. It was at this point my stepfather came into the scene and he started to shout and ask me if I am serious. Then he said to my mother, “ah tell you he wasn’t normal he use to spend too much time in the bathroom and with makeup and all them girl things like that. Ah tell you, you, caar say I didn’t tell you”. Then he hit me behind my head, it was hard. Ah remember meh head spinning.

W.C: And what happened next?

Desmond: I had to leave the house and find somewhere else to live.
What is devastating about this situation is how some Black parents are willing to disown their children because it threatens their identities and has the potential to bring on public and familial sexual shame.

W.C: Where did you go to live?

Desmond: I spent one week on the street, then I went to a friend for help and he took me in and helped me find a job at McDonalds. And while in school I spoke with the welfare worker who put me on student welfare and she helped me to find ah apartment. Yeh my coming out was rough.

W.C: Have you and your family reconcile the situation?

Desmond: No, we still do not talk with each other. But I told my father in Jamaica and he is ok with it, as long as I doh come back home with it.

Desmond’s father reinforces traditionally-held Caribbean values regarding same-sex practices as taboo and wrong, although not clearly articulated. He fears that his son’s presence back in Jamaica, will bring shame on the family and would seriously question his masculinity.

Tom, another respondent, also recounts acts of physical violence in his narrative.

Tom: I was beaten by my father when I was much younger. I was about sixteen or seventeen when I tried to tell my father I was ah batty man but that was in Jamaica and I still have memories of it. When I told him he said, “I doh want no batty man for ah son, so you better straighten out”.

Tom’s father, like Desmond’s mother, is very quick to threaten to disown him because his identity is also under threat from the social transgression of being a buller. Tom reports the larger set of historical and social dynamics behind the father’s emphatic assertion.

W.C: What did you do?
Tom: I went to see a priest because my father told me I could repent to the priest and ask for forgiveness. And I also went to see a psychiatrist.

W.C: How old were you when you went to see the priest and psychiatrist?

Tom: I was about sixteen or seventeen. But I was also confused because I also had a girlfriend and wasn't too sure what I was. So really I felt like I needed help to know myself better so I thought it was a good idea to go and talk to some professionals.

W.C: And how was it for you visiting these two professionals?

Tom: It did nothing for me because I never lost my attraction for men and I never was convinced in what they were saying to me and my father. But I still went and got married to please my family.

Religion and the church play a special role in healing the transgression of being a buller, a transgression which has caused threats of rejection and violence. Tom's parents request that he seek a priest, to ask for forgiveness and be forgiven is not just because "one is doing a sinful act" but because in asking for forgiveness and repenting, the transgressed family form can be "healed over." This wound cannot be healed by just anybody. One needs a community agency with the legitimacy to certify acts of restoration and pronounce that the chaos of sin has been resolved. This is something the church has done for centuries and is one reason why it is so central to many diverse communities. In modern terms, the medical profession has served the same function, pronouncing what one must do to be healed and certifying when that healing has occurred. Thus, the psychiatrist and the priest seek a cure not only for individual, but implicitly for families and communities as well. The two operate in perfect tandem. This is not to dismiss the function of the church in the lives of Black folks. Rather, the fact that the church can effect a communal healing is very important to the maintenance of the continuity of
community. Also, the church has been a source of inspiration for and material base within which resistance to slavery and racism has been fought. The importance of the church within Black communities is, in fact, why there is an urgent need for a reexamination of Black theology, not its elimination.

For some men like Bill and Mohammed, who have been deeply affected by their families religious beliefs and internalized homophobia, coming out has left them without immediate family support and networks. Mohammed tells us that after physical and verbal fights, he and his family do not communicate with each other.

Mohammed: My family and I, after having several physical, religious and verbal fights, still do not speak to date, they have completely disowned me and argue that they are ashamed of me.

W.C: Why couldn’t you face them anymore?

Mohammed: Because I was very angry inside and I felt guilty and ashamed for being gay, because that was how they made me feel.

The hostility that Black men engaging in same-sex practices experience at home or in the community obviously often leads to estrangement from their families and communities. Same-sex hatred and violence in Black families against buller men are common themes for men in most of the interviews. The family acts as an agent of heterosexist Black policing which regulates Black sexuality. When considering the reactions of family members to bullers and batty bwoys, to speak of Black families as unitary entities neglects the multiple interconnections that make up family networks, the fact of the family’s existence in communal living.
Positive Family Reinforcement

Not all coming out stories are filled with violence and fear. For some black men, the family has been a very strong source of support and positive reinforcement. Here some of my respondents recount what they experienced as positive within their families.

W.C: Are you out to your family and do they accept your partner?

Andy: Yes. When I told my mother and father that I felt as though I had sexual attraction for men and not women, my mother said, well you sure that is what you feel? And I said yes. And she said well I can’t do anything about that, you are still my son. My father who I was expecting to blow up said we love you the same way.

As we have seen in the previous section, the first response of many parents to their son’s attempt to “come out to them” has been to respond to this information as a source of personal threat and shame. Andy, however, reports a completely different parental reaction. Andy’s parents focus on their son’s feelings and thoughts, not their own. Their son’s sexuality is not taken as a referent for their own qualities as parents. This has enabled Andy to experience family support through relationships of continued emotional and physical caring. Likewise, Chris also receives support from his family and this, for him, is crucial to preserving his connection to the Black community.

W.C: Are you out to your family?

Chris: Yes, I am out to my family and they know of Junior [his boy friend]. I think my parents also like us too because we have been together for seven years now so they see love and stability in us. I also feel being out to my family has made it easier for me stand up for gay issues in Black communities whenever the issue gets discussed.
For Chris and Andy, public outing was made more possible by positive family support, an experience not shared by most of the men in this study. For Chris, family support also enabled him to be involved within Black communities, speaking out against heterosexism.

When we contrast Chris' experience with some of the respondents who are in the closet, there is a clear indication of their lack of participation both in the Black and gay community. Their community involvement is limited to a heterosexist front. No doubt the degree of Black communal participation of bullers is interlinked to the degree of positive affirmation they receive in their families. At times this may be solely tacit. For some men, the issue of sexual identity never came up with family members it was assumed that it was accepted, as long as the buller did not flaunt it. Take for instance, Carl's relationship with his family.

Carl: I never told my family anything about me. But they do come over to visit me and my lover, they have met him. We celebrate Christmas and have lots of family get together's and they never once ask me anything about being ah buller man. You know it is like they know and it is ok with them so I never had to tell them. And when it is meh little nieces' them birthdays, me and my boyfriend do go over and take them presents and little gifts and things like that, but nobody does say anything.

W.C: How does that make you feel and have you ever tried having a conversation with them about buller men's issues?

Carl: Well I think that means they know and they accept it because if they didn't like me and it, they would ah tell me already. But I never tried having any discussion with them bout buller men and batty bwoys because I never once hear them say nothing negative.

Another interviewee, Laqueshia who lives with his parents, also informed me about the positive family support he has received.

Laqueshia: My parents goes with me to gay plays and my mother will joke with me about other gay men She does not have a problem at all; I does even wear some of her clothes. As a matter of fact one day she said to me, as a mother I will always feel the pain
you feel, so I just want you to know that I am there with you all the way and no one is going to hurt you. The problem is only with Black folks out in the community who does harass you in Black spaces.

Laqueshia’s mother’s positive affirmation, like, Carl’s and Chris’ is focused on her son’s identity. The language she uses demonstrates a connection with the degree of her son’s pain. If Laqueshia should feel pain, she informs him that, as a mother, she will feel it, too. Her identity is secured through Laqueshia’s and Laqueshia’s through her, as mother and son affirming each other. Other respondents, like Brian, also inform us of their families’ positive support, this time through a sibling, his sister.

Brian: My sister knows that I am gay, but my mother does not know and my father is dead. But I have a very good and supportive relationship with my sister.

Brian acknowledges a form of outing and knowing by one of his siblings, but this “outing” does not appear to have much of a public discussion on the issue. What this means is that there are forms of outing and acceptance of same-sex practices within Black communal living as long as community and family do not feel compromised.

It is important to ask ourselves why these Black families are resisting the heterosexist bio-nationalist discourse. The answers of course will come when we interview the parents of these same-sex Black men, work that must be left for another time. However, in the absence of such data, I will attempt to speculate on this pressing question. The families of these Black men, must be contextualized in terms of their geographical location. These families might not have accepted their sons’ same-sex sexuality as easily had they been living in the Caribbean, where same-sex practices are looked down upon and families protect their image by conformist. In Canada, their sons do not have to live with them Black families through
migration to Canada lose notions of the extended support family system. Their sons do not always necessarily live close to other Black neighbors that will make them want to hide their dirty laundry. In essence, communal structures are different, explaining why some Black families of Caribbean origin may accept their sons’ same-sex identity. Neighbors are usually White; Black families often have very little contact with them and no formal relationships of behavioral accountability. I am not implying that these parents may not be genuinely accepting their sons’s same-sex sexuality, rather I am arguing that the lack of community visibility, reduces communal accountability and erases some public shame, that they might have experienced had they been in the Caribbean. Given also, that same-sex practices are a criminal offence in the Caribbean, many bullers, batty bwoys and their families keep the public unaware that they or their relatives engage in same-sex practices. In Canada however, Black men engaging in same-sex practices are aware that same-sex practices are decriminalized with some Human Rights protection, giving them a little more assurance that they can be safe within the confines of the law, even if they find that family environments are unsafe.

Suicidal Attempts

Because some Black men engaging in same-sex relationships encounter harsh, hostile, condemning environments, including the problematizing of Black masculinity and verbal, physical, economic violence, bullers are more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual Black men. In addition, they experience great difficulty in the areas of unemployment and experience high rates of school push out (George Dei, 1996). The added pressures of coping with sexuality pushes them further to the margin (hooks, 1983). The stereotypical gender expectations for Black men generally are to be macho and uphold certain heterosexist African-
Caribbean and African-Canadian gender-specific roles. There is tremendous pressure to perform within these gender boundaries. In addition, because Black families and the community and religious organizations do not, as a rule, offer support for same-sexed people working out their sexual concerns most Black same-sex men seek alternative ways of coping with their sexual identity. Desmond recounts that when he was thrown out on the streets he attempted suicide.

**Desmond:** When I was thrown out of my home and I attempted suicide because I had no where to go and I felt very depressed and emotionally drained. I felt like a piece of shit and that no one love me. So I attempted to kill myself, by trying to overdose myself with cocaine. A friend found me frothing in the bathroom of a burger place and rushed me to the hospital.

**Mohammed** also shares his suicidal attempts, which occurred following his family's discovering his same-sex identity.

**Mohammed:** When my wife and children found out, the first thing that came to my mind was to kill myself. I went to the kitchen and drank kerosene oil from the lamp and as much pills that I could find in the house. But I think I also more than anything else wanted them to love me so I showed them what they were doing to me but it did not change their mind. Because after I came out of hospital one of my sons said, “You should have died.”

Others who did not attempt to commit suicide, talked about wanting to. George tells us that his age and loneliness often makes him think about killing himself.

**George:** I consider myself to be as senior citizen by this society’s definition of what a senior is. I often feel very lonely, rejected and suicidal.

**W.C.:** Why?

**George:** Because when you are old in a society that values youth you are not accepted and valued. You are made to feel less than a human being, especially in gay culture. I have tried going to
Black gay clubs for support but none of that worked. As a matter of fact I find I get more support from White gays and lesbians than Black people. *That is why when I saw your ad in Xtra looking for Black gay and bisexual with Caribbean and African Canadian backgrounds I had to respond to tell my story before I kill myself or die. Because I always wanted to write about the turmoil in my life, but now it is for you to do.*

The emotional and physical family rejection resulting in isolation, the lack of counseling services and economical turmoil often associated with same-sex erotic desires seem to be at the core of suicide attempts for these Black men. George knows his voice has been disqualified as a legitimate segment of African-Caribbean and African-Canadian history. Yet he clearly sees his testament as important both to give and for us to hear. My interview with George described’s his hardships, but it also demonstrates how he found the dignity, compassion and self worth to live to tell his story.

**Professional Help**

The life experiences of Black men who engage in same-sex practices and who are also racial minorities place them in a double bind. The pressure to maintain two, possibly three or four identities brought on by racism in the majority culture and the heterosexist structure of dominance in Black communities, has resulted in a unique form of marginalization. As a Black man, the buller must constantly face the question of his primary identification: does he primarily identify as buller man, batty bwoy, same-sexed or Black male? All these questions lead to mass confusion and alienation for Black men engaging in same-sex relations.
In spite of the increasing emphasis on same-sex issues, relatively little attention and professional help has been given to Black men \(^8\) who engage in same-sex relations. This section calls attention to the need for Black communities to respond to the needs of Black men who engage in same-sex practices and have no institutional or communal support systems to assist them in working through the complex issue of sexual identity. Michelle informs us that he has never found any help in Black counseling agencies.

W.C: Have you tried looking for help in any other Black agencies or other agencies in general?

Michelle: Yes. I did not come across any. I also do not feel that I could talk with White counselors or therapists about my issues and I know for sure that there are no Black agencies that is willing to help buller men and batty bwoys.

When he was thrown out of his parents home, Desmond sought help from Black agencies and community organizations but did not come across any that could assist him.

W.C: Did you seek support from any Black service agencies?

Desmond: Yes.

W.C: And how was it for you?

Desmond: It was a total disaster, no one wanted to help me because they all said I was too young to be gay and that they do not provide services to gay youth. And they referred me this White agency for gay and lesbian youth.

W.C: So other than your friend you had no support?

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\(^8\) Professional help refers to both institutional and communal efforts to assist individuals with working through social issues affecting them daily. I am not assuming that Black women receive more help than Black men, but it is important to remember that my project investigates the life experiences of Black men who engage in same-sex practices, and not Black women.
Desmond: Yes, I literally had to suffer through this trauma of coming out and not getting support from Black agencies, my family, or friends. It is one of the biggest problems in our community. We have no support systems for buller man dem. I went to a social worker who said I did not have enough experience with women, so I do not know what I am talking about. He told me to go try sleeping with women first and to go back to my parents home and tell them I would change my life style.

W.C: Was the social worker Black?

Desmond: Yes and he was working with Catholic Children’s Aid. You know I felt I had someone to talk to when the school had referred me to him, but it was a disaster for me. I will never go back to a Black social worker again, to go through this stuff again.

The failure of Black communities’ professional counselors and social workers to adequately address Desmond’s needs resulted in him having negative views of the profession and the community. The social worker was insensitive to the violence that Desmond was experiencing, charging that Desmond was too young to understand what he was experiencing sexually. Viewing heterosexuality as normal, as argued by Warner, Sedgewick, and Lorde, was strongly reflected in the social workers counseling advice to Desmond. The process of intervention by the social worker for Desmond was a disempowering experience that is all too common to Black men who engage in same-sex relationships, that end up not trusting Black professionals despite their good intentions.

Being able to feel comfortable and trust someone were key issues for Michelle and Desmond when they sought professional help from within Black agencies. They strongly identify with the Black community, recognizing their culture as very important in the delivery
of service to them. But they found no\textsuperscript{81} Black community telephone hotline services or organizations where a Black person in difficulty with same-sex issues would discuss his sexuality and receive help coming to terms with it. They found no newspapers, publications, or pamphlets that advertise the names of counselors, or discussions group for Black men to come out to. The only positive channel for Black men engaging in same-sex relations was to seek out other men through informal networks. In Toronto, a Black men’s group called AYA attempts to serve as this link, but is not known or mentioned by any of the Black mainstream social services organizations. This group meets once a month and is located within the larger White gay and lesbian community; its appeal is therefore to the more out and seasoned Black same-sex men.

**George** tells us he negotiates between two spaces for social support and outings.

**George:** I belong to a Black gay group and a seniors group, so I can still enjoy the pleasures of two worlds. You see I am almost sixty, so I am no little spring chicken child. The senior’s group is predominantly White and the other group as I said is Black.

**W.C:** And does that work for you in meeting your needs?

**George:** Yes because it gives me options in my life.

Social institutions within the Black same-sex community also act as a site of exclusion for older Black men like **George**, who must turn to a White seniors group to meet some of his needs. Black same-sex groups like AYA, made up of primarily young Black men, are implicated within age discrimination barriers for socialization and acceptance. Most social support systems that exist for Blacks, are geared towards the younger population. Very little is done in the field of Black same-sex identities and relationships, so issues on how these men

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\textsuperscript{81}The lack of Black same-sex support groups is partly a result of our population size. Black support same-sex groups are found in most major British and U.S. cities.
age, the problems they encounter aside from the obvious age discrimination, alienation and loneliness I mentioned, are not known.

Another respondent, Bonte, went to a parish priest for professional help, an occurrence that is common for many in the Caribbean, who think that there are links between sin, normality, evil spirits and same-sex identities. Bonte also went to a psychiatrist. Psychiatry has been one of the traditional professions in which the term "homosexuality" was described as a medical and deviant problem. Bonte recounts his experience with the parish priest.

W.C: Who did you go to for help and what were the professionals saying to you?

Bonte: Well the priest said that it was evil temptations for the flesh and that Satan was controlling my life and I need to read the new and old testament and read especially the verses on Sodom and Gomorrah. The psychiatrist said that I was still developing sexually and was going through a phase and would grow out of it. He then put on some pornography for me to look at to see if I would get aroused and he wanted to know how I felt watching the pornography. I thought it was a sick test, if you ask me, especially now that I look back at it.

W.C: Did this change anything for you or did it help you in any way?

Bonte: No! If anything I became more depressed and very angry towards my parents and towards psychiatry.

Neither of these professionals posed the appropriate questions to Bonte, the questions that would have aided him to understand his sexual orientation. Instead, these two professionals were not able to respond to his needs. The failure to assist him in working through his sexual difficulties left him very angry towards his parents, psychiatry and religion. As is common in oppression, Bonte developed a sense of anger and frustration because he was denied a healthy environment for himself. Desmond was also taken to see a psychiatrist, which resulted in his attempting suicide.
Desmond: When I told my parents that I was attracted to men, they never wanted to accept it; instead they took me to a psychiatrist to get cured. The psychiatrist was a big fool and all he did was give drugs to take my mind off of been sexually active and then he would literally side with my parents every time we had a family group session. I got fed up of this and one day after we had gone to the psychiatrist I went home and took a full bottle of medication pills and slashed my wrist. My father caught me just in time and called the ambulance to take me to the hospital. It was after this incident that they started to back off and I ended up leaving home because I couldn’t face them anymore. But I also missed the family support when I first left home.

W.C: What did you miss?

Desmond: I missed what I perceived to be love at the time, a place to live, economic support and all the things that parents provide for their children. Because it was not easy living on the streets in Toronto before I was able to pull myself together. But now I am ok, not very happy, but surviving.

The use of religious and medical counseling was also evident in another respondent’s story. Neil another respondent when he was eighteen years old attempted to share his same-sex desires with his parents.

Neil: When I told my parents I was attracted to men, I was eighteen and they felt that they could cure me because they said I was too young to know if I could be a batty bwoy. So my parents recommended a psychiatrist and a priest to speak with me.

W.C: Did you visit the psychiatrist and the priest they recommended?

Neil: Yes! But then I stop going to see them because I felt it was doing no good to me. It was at that point that my father felt that he had the right to beat it out of me. So he beat me one day and told me that a couple more beatings would cure me.

W.C: How did you react to the beatings?

Neil: After he had beaten me up the second time I left the home and went to live on the streets, because I couldn’t take the beatings anymore.
W.C: What was life like for you on the streets and did you have any family contact while on the streets?

Neil: I met other young gay men through youth serving agencies and got advice from them about where to go for food, welfare money and shelter. As for family I had no contact with them and I am now twenty-five and still does not have any contact with them. I also do not go to places or events where I think I might run into my family because I feel I could kill them if I see them.

Mohammed, who also talked about killing himself, said that where he came from in the Caribbean, in his time, there were no social workers, psychologists, or counselors, pastors were the only people to turn to.

Mohammed: I am from the Caribbean and when I was growing up the only thing I used to hear about buller men was that they were sick and that they were a cursed people and that religion was the only way they could be cured. So I never talked about my feelings with anybody, because I automatically decided to pray a lot and then get married to cure myself from all this sin and evilness. Because I know they would have sent me to a priest oh put a good beating on me, so I kept my mouth shut and lived as though I was heterosexual. I am over sixty now and cannot be bothered with looking for help.

W.C: Why did you keep your mouth shut?

Mohammed: Because family is very important to me and when I left the Caribbean I always went back to Trinidad to visit family. I got married in Trinidad but living in Canada, I also kept in touch with my family as a support thing. Especially after my divorce I tried to keep in touch with my brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles.

Black communities can and do offer a nurturing environment, as attested by Mohammed. They, can facilitate the development of a positive sense of self and offer the possibility for a healthy identity, personality sense of family and community values. When, responding to same-sex practices and identity, Black communities appear to be steeped in
oppressive discourses. Black men are expected to be heterosexual, stereotypically masculine, procreate the race and follow heterosexual cultural norms.

Clearly, our communities need to develop institutional responses to support men and women who are working out their same-sex identities. Black heterosexual organizations and agencies can build on Black same-sex men’s attachment to Black communities in an effort to render support services. This strategy can only succeed if Black agencies and organizations develop same-sex positive environments for Black men working out their sexual issues. But if these Black men have weak attachments to Black families and Black communities, particularly where a heterosexist structure of dominance is and Black nationalism is prevalent, Black communities will lose most of its same-sex Black members to other communities, creating more distance between Black heterosexuals and same-sex Blacks. This can be bridged through the delivery of services, and on-going community discussions on the issue of support for same-sex practices as well as the broader definitions of Black families, Black community life, Black diasporic nationalism and sexual identities.

Conclusion

The Black heterosexual family is very much a building block of Black community life. Sole-support parents and single men are not vilified in the same manner as men engaging in same-sex practices or attempting to create their own distinct types of family and community. The latter is evident in the above narratives. In addition, the degree to which parents are willing to disown their children is cause for worry in the building of strong Black inclusive communities. Family influence is not free from the teachings of the Black church. A legacy of sexual exclusion sanctioned by the church ends up being coercive to alternative types of sexuality in Black communities, which view same-sex practices as immoral, sinful and deviant.
The Black communities’ embrace of the church as resistance to White domination and as central to community creation conversely inculcates hatred in their members for same-sex practices; these they see as diseased and threatening. The community created through the church is a heterosexist one that rejects same-sex bodily practices. Black identity is based on the creation of a *who-is-in and a who-is-out*, paradigm not as a site of fluid possibilities but, as a site of Black communal bio-nationalistic family solidarity. The who-is-in and who-is-out paradigm can be put into some form of justifiable historical anger that Blacks hold today against Whites, that forces them to exercise some of that historic oppression on their own in contemporary Black culture and Black family values.

As Jewelle Gomez, in an interview with Barbara Smith in *Feminist Review* (no.34), eloquently stated, “it’s even more dangerous for people of color to embrace homophobia than it is for Whites to embrace racism, simply because we’re embattled psychologically and emotionally as an ethnic group. Thus leaving ourselves in a weakened position . . .” (Gomez, 1990). In the absence of Black family support systems many bullers seek support in White, Asian, Hispanic, transgendered and bisexual communities, initiating new and broader definitions of family. This was echoed by Desmond and a few other men who said that in the absence of Black positive support for their same-sex eroticism and desires that they went to White spaces, created White friendships and felt welcomed to express themselves.

**Desmond:** I think some of my confidence about being a gay Black man came from some of the white spaces I use to visit. Some of the men who I met were open and out about their sexual orientation and I after leaving my home, I felt I had nothing to lose but to do the same. So I went to some of the same clubs and meetings with them. They exposed me to some aspects of gay culture that I did not know. So I do not think I can say the White community was hostile to me.
The buller men a batty bwoys finding support in “White spaces” only reconfirms in the
mind of the dogmatic Black nationalist the presumption that “homosexuality” is a “White
disease.” Thus, we have the makings of a self-fulfilling prophecy. The discourse itself creates
practices of exclusion which encourages behaviors that are then referenced as proof of the
discourse, that Whites infect Blacks with “homosexuality”.

In the absence of Black communal same-sex support, the creation of a new family or
support systems cuts across all lines of race and color. Clearly, within Black communities and
in most Black families, there is no room for sexual difference that embraces same-sex
eroticism. The recognition of sexual difference within our families and communities are two
sites upon which Black communities can begin to discuss same-sex eroticism. Yet the denial
of such difference continues to divide us. Lorde, in an essay on exploitation and Marxism in
Sister Outsider wrote:

Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit
economy which needs outsiders as surplus people. As members of such an
economy, we have all been programmed to respond to human differences
between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three
ways: ignore it and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or
destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating
across our human differences as equals. As a result, those differences have
been misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion (Lorde,
1984:115).

The Black family trope needs to restructure difference in the family as a formative
dimension of Black nationalism and Black communal solidarity, recognizing that there is no
single blueprint for what constitutes Black families. Here we will do well to learn from
Laquesha’s mother who informed him that “as a mother I will always feel the pain you feel,
so I just want you to know that I am there with you all the way and no one is going to hurt
you. The problem is only with Black folks out in the community who does harass you in Black spaces” (Laqueshia’s mother, 1996).

Same-sex Black families and children identifying as bullers or gay need to be seen as part of the home, community and family without marginalizing their sexual differences as problematic. The respect and recognition of sexual difference need to be an integral part of Black diasporic bio-nationalism, Black families and Black communal living. Any autonomous Black group that is going to “represent” the interests of African-Canadians/Blacks needs to include Blacks from different social class positions, sexual identities and cultures. Black nationalists and Black families who regard sexual identity as a static given and construct racial identity as a polar opposite of same-sex identity need to recognize that most, if not all, bullers and batty bwoys do not see their sexual identity as separate from their racial identity. It seems obvious that groups will have differences, ambiguities and tensions among their members. Yet, Black heterosexist families and Black diasporic nationalism fail to take into account the under-representation and oppression of Black bullers and batty bwoys. Working together across differences is a political project, as Lorde has so eloquently reminded us, that we must take up in a racist, capitalist and patriarchal society.

In summary, positive family reinforcement for some of the men’s coming out stories can be seen as a counter-hegemonic discourse and an example of some Black communities moving slowly from the negative construction of same-sex practices, to a positive view on Black same-sex relations. While, admittedly, there is always room for improvement, and change is too slow. Embracing as a base to grow from the few examples of positive reinforcement in Black communities same-sex relations and practices, would probably be a good starting point.
Chapter Four
Community Belonging & Identification

Introduction:

The complicated phenomenon known as “the Black community,” is often put forward as a homogenous space within which to identify with a common culture, language and history. For many members of the African diaspora “the Black community” signifies as home, a space where they feel they belong and where they can be themselves. However, in my interviews, I found the opposite to be true for many Black men engaging in same-sex relationships. In the context of their community involvement, these men have witnessed and experienced the pain of heterosexism and homophobia. As the following material illustrates, this has resulted in a range of varying commitments to and identifications with Black communal life.

**Devon:** I have gone to things like Black community meetings and speeches and heard them say the most insensitive things about gay people, an they expect us to sit there and take it all. That is one thing I have observed here in Toronto. But I am a Black man so I will always be a part of the Black community. So they could say what they want to say about me I will always be here in the community. So they better get use to it, I ain’t flaunting it but they better doh touch me either.

**Devon** understands the positioning that “the community” offers the buller, that they must be passive in the face of humiliation or absent themselves from community events. **Devon**, however, of all the men I talked to, was the most aggressive in resisting this position. He threatens to retaliate with violence as a means of protecting himself from any form of physical abuse that may be directed toward him because of his sexual orientation. He is
adamant that he will not be made invisible or physically restricted from the Black community by any form of violence.

W.C: Can you explain to me what you mean by you will always be a part of the community and they better don't touch you?

Devon: I am a Black man and that automatically puts me in the community, I might not be out there demonstrating and attending rallies, but I am still a Black member of the community. And when ah say they better doh touch me all ah mean is they shouldn't gay bash me because I am going to fight back. I will not be silenced at any cost, I will fight back, I have a mouth and am quite able-bodied.

For Devon, his identification is tied to his race and his commitment to Black communal living. He is willing to attend any event and be supportive of the Black community but will not submit to harassment. Needless to say, while Devon continues to embrace his place in the Black community, he is forced into a position of constantly contesting others for the right to do so, rather than simply assume what is his rightful place. It is conditions like these that as bullers and batty bwoys men have to work toward eradicating.

Audre Lorde writes about the effects of silencing, violence and fear in her essay, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action" (Lorde, 1984). She recounts a story about a conversation she had with her daughter it captures the essence of silencing as a forced self-destructive compartmentalization. Her daughter said:

Tell them about how you’re never really a whole person if you remain silent because there’s always that one little piece inside you that wants to be spoken out and if you keep ignoring it, it gets madder and hotter and hotter and if you don’t speak it out one day it will just up and punch you in the mouth from the inside (Lorde, 1984: 42).

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Devon's views and expressions are very much part of what Lorde expresses about the effects of silence caused by fear of others in Black communities.

Like Devon, Wayne too sees his life as very much a part of the Black community. Wayne clearly defines this in both personal and professional terms. For example, when I asked him how he has kept in touch with the Black community, he replied:

Wayne: Well you know you cannot buy hard-dough bread, Ackee, Roti, Dasheen & Yams, you know what ah mean nuh, from Loblaws, Dominion and Mr. Grocer and feel the same way or get the real thing. So I still shop in West Indian spaces for food, culture and music. It is ah special feeling of being back home, when you buy you yams and the woman behind the counter tell you God Bless, have ah good weekend. It is not the same thing like buying from the big grocery stores. It is also ah very nice feeling to be among Black people, to hear them talk, watch them behave and hear community gossip. These are some of the things that reminds you of your culture, home and Black people. I am in touch with the Black community through my parents and their history of that culture that is passed on from generation to generation.

It is clear here that Wayne greatly enjoys the texture of everyday Black communal life. There is a sense of being at home in Wayne's comments. He clearly recognizes his need to be in Black spaces as this daily texture dominantly exists there. Wayne wants to be included in Black spaces, it would be injurious for him if he wasn't. Wayne ascribes a key importance to everyday life:

Wayne: Things like cooking, the way we talk, the places we shop, the cultural artifacts that they pass on to us. The way we celebrate and prepare for Christmas, Easter, Caribana and other related
Caribbean holidays. And I still go to the same barber shop that my father use to take me to when I was a child.

Men such as Wayne or Devon cannot step out of, or remove themselves from, the Black community. However, this investment turns against itself when they are confronted by narrow and oppressive positions enforced against men engaging in same-sex relations. Unlike Devon, Wayne is more cautious about taking an aggressive stance in publicly affirming his sexual preferences. Wayne works with Black youths and expresses some fears about the youths knowing about his same-sex identity.

W.C: What type of work do you do in the Black community?

Wayne: I work with Black youths and they do not know that I am a batty bwoy. (Laughter as he runs his hands through his hair)

W.C: Would you tell them that you are a batty bwoy?

Wayne: I think I might tell them if they ask. But I am also afraid to let them know because I do not want my job to be affected by my sexuality, I also need the money. Because after you let the cat out of the bag, people tend to judge your whole life around gay issues, so I do not want that kind of thing to happen to me.

W.C: So tell me a little bit about your work with the youths.

Wayne: I do life skills, Black consciousness building, help them with school work, basic counseling and referral, HIV/AIDS related work, immigration and refugee you know, that type of advocacy work.

W.C: Do you like what you do and who you work with?

Wayne: Yes. And sometimes I wish I could tell them about myself and other bullers and batty bwoys, but do not have the courage nor support. So it is this kind of fear that makes me angry with the community and sometimes myself, because we are so caught up in being afraid of gay people, I doh know.

W.C: Do you feel that you or other bullers get recognized for their work in the Black community?
Wayne: Recognized, what is that! We are doubly invisible, from the white community and the Black heterosexual community. So there is no recognition and no respect I feel that is given to us, because many of us work very silently and we are never seen as having same-sex identities and eroticism within us.

Lorde comments on isolation, rejection and constant struggle as a lesbian, working for the Black community and how her sexuality was always erased or made invisible in the process. Her experience parallels Wayne’s. Lorde writes:

When I picketed for welfare mothers rights and against the enforced sterilization of young Black girls, when I fought institutionalized racism in New York City Schools, I was a lesbian. But you did not know it because we did not identify ourselves, so now you can say that Black lesbians and gay men have nothing to do with the struggles of the Black Nation (Lorde, 1988: 23).

This is precisely Wayne’s dilemma. Wayne puts many hours into community work, struggling for Black communities’ survival and their collective good. However, when it comes to providing the much needed supports for Black same-sex people, he feels unable to raise the issue. Given the difficulty of being accepted in the Black community on his own terms, Wayne feels that his contribution as a buller man to his community must be recognized before he is able to speak to the issue of same-sex practices within Black communal living and organizing.

Wayne: You know another thing that does get me very mad?

W.C: No, what is that?

Wayne: When ah hear Black people say you carr be Black and be ah buller man at the same time, despite all the hard work I thus put into the community.

Wayne is implicitly raising crucial issues that bear on the future of Black communities. Who is allowed to be Black? Who defines normative notions of Blackness and maleness for us? Essentialist and reductionist notions of Blackness must themselves be open for interrogation, because they posit fixed notions of Black identity which only serve the privileged
self-defined ideologues and leaders. Patricia Williams summarizes the effects of this marginalization with the following words:

disregard for other people’s lives qualitatively . . . Is a system of formalized distortions of thought. It produces social structures centered around fear and hate; it provides a tumorous outlet for feelings elsewhere (Williams, 1987: 151-52).

Many Black same-sex men in Toronto and Halifax are made to feel they cannot find a home within Black communities, because of Black communities’ policing of Black same-sex practices. As the previous chapter showed, they may also be alienated within their families. Community isolation only compounds the feeling of being forced into an “elsewhereness” as a result of being bullies.

**Bonte’s** position on being a same-sex man within the Black community resembles Devon’s assertion of his rightful place and Wayne’s desire for such a place but his reluctance to battle for it. In the following conversational excerpt, Bonte starts off quite confident of a certain degree of sympathetic understanding for gays among Black community members. However, he moves from the possibility of understanding to the terms on which disapproval is constituted.

**Bonte:** I think it is O.K. to be gay within the Black community that is my opinion today anyway.

**W.C:** How so?

**Bonte:** Because I think every Black heterosexual person know a gay person or have a gay family or friend, so I think they are sympathetic. *But it is the male sexual act I think that they have a hard time with, because of their religious and moral upbringing* (my emphasis). Also too, I think when they think of sex, I think they see man and woman. So when two men make love automatically one ah them go be seen as the woman and one the man. And ah think they have ah hard time with Black males being feminine.
There is an apologetic tone here. He seems to suggest that same-sex male practices are accepted as long as they are not openly discussed and acknowledged. Furthermore, he expresses a degree of Black solidarity in his gentle characterization of dominance “ah think they have ah hard time with Black males being feminine”. He traces this to both religious and nationalistic origins neither of which he would disavow.

**Bonte:** Black nationalist will tell you that if the Black man is weak then the white man will take control of our women and our lives, so Black homosexuality I think is a big threat to masculinity and racism. This is why I think we appear to have more homophobia than white society. We are overburdened with hierarchies of oppression and protecting Black males. So you know when white people say we (Black people) have more homophobia and hatred toward Black gay people, I think they overlook how we laugh at all types of difference and prioritize oppression because of racism.

**W.C:** What do you mean by that?

**Bonte:** Well we would laugh at you if you have freckles, or a twist mouth, if you fat, too Black looking, or you have ah big mouth, you know what ah mean. I know right here in Toronto where some Black women know that the men are gay and they have them as friends, because they find them funny and compassionate. Because these men does help them baby sit and they thus keep their company. So I do think that we gay men play a role in Black women’s lives, but not in Black men lives in the Black community.

**Bonte** wants to be optimistic about the future structure of Black communal life. He is suggesting that Black women are more progressive than Black men, but that Black men are coming around. However, note that he personally maintains his own invisibility, in a sense, waiting for other Black men to “do the right thing.”

**W.C:** And is that acceptable?
Bonte: Well yes it is fun and part of our culture, we laugh a lot, but I think Black women are also very quick to accept sexual differences much faster than Black men. But you know what Black men will soon get over all this shit and we will be doing more supporting of gay issues soon in the Black community.

W.C: Are you active within the Black community?

Bonte: Yes I do a great deal of work with organizations, youths and seniors within the Black community. But I do not like the invisibility to my work and that of other gays and lesbians in our community.

What we see in the comments of the three men presented above (Bonte, Wayne and Devon) is a contradictory positioning, a push-me/pull-you, of the affirmation of one’s communal membership and the recognition that in some moments that membership can be quite fragile or nonexistent. This leads to alternating statements that reflect deep contradictions. In the following excerpt, one must not simply assume that Brian is confused because he seems to say two different things. Rather what is cogently representational is a contradictory subjectivity arising out of the very real tensions in Black communities.

Brian: Sometimes I am made to feel very “out of order” and as if I don’t belong by my own Black community.

W.C: Why?

Brian: Because I do not feel that I can go to spaces that are Black dominated or organized and be comfortable with my sexuality. I have never attended a Black event where they were willing to address gay and lesbian issues. I am very tired of being straight for my Black community and gay for the white community. It makes me very angry inside. I feel also too over the years I have drifted completely from the Black community here in Halifax, because of the homophobia.

W.C: So what do you do?

Brian: I still support stuff whenever I can. I support Black education and Black economics like buying from Black stores and stuff like that. I also attend Black theater and Black comedy. I buy
books written by Black authors and stuff like that. You know like it or not we cannot be separated from what is a part of us as much I am angry and do not attend the political discussions.

The insistence here by Brian, Bonte, Wayne and Devon, despite the oppression and violence experienced in their Black communities, is that they continue to relate to their Blackness and cultural history as elements that could never set them apart from the Black community. They are determined, as agents for social change, members of Black communities, members of buller men communities to shape their own destiny despite the Black heterosexist communities refusal to deal honestly with the issues of Black same-sex desires. Michel Foucault, writing on same-sex practices and identity offers an important reminder to us all:

Another thing we must be aware of is the tendency to reduce being gay to the questions: “Who am I?” and “What is the secret of my desire?” Might it not be better if we asked ourselves what sorts of relationships we can set up, invent, multiply or modify through homosexuality? The problem is not trying to find out the truth about one’s sexuality within oneself, but rather, nowadays, trying to use our sexuality to achieve a variety of different types of relationships. And this is why homosexuality is probably not a form of desire, but something to be desired. (Foucault, 1982: 4).

Common complaints and/or concerns for some of the men were the policing of Black masculinity and the narrow social constructs of Black masculinity, gender and sexuality. These they see as self-limiting and acting as a disciplining process that works to secure male heterosexuality as the only permissible form of male sexuality in the community.

In some of the men’s narratives discussed thus far we have been informed of moments of communal negotiations around their desires for same-sex practices that construct them as outsiders. This outsider status sometimes results in these men living lives of shame and contradiction. However, there are others who cannot tolerate such contradictions. For them,
the alienation and pain outweigh whatever affirmations might still be available. A clear example of this is seen in the following remarks by Neil:

Neil: I do not go to events, spaces or places in the Black community because of the Black communities view on homosexuality which remains largely a taboo subject by definition.

Neil goes on to say that he does not feel that he holds the views of many in the Black community. Elaborating on this, he begins to identify the norms implicit in the social forms of communal interaction which he cannot and will not abide by. In particular, he focuses on the way he views constructions of Black masculinity as fixed, expected and giving necessary definition to “proper” ways of relating to others. Neil expanded on the views and social constructs into which he feels he has to fit.

W.C: What are these views and why do you feel this way?

Neil: As a Black man you are expected to behave in and dress in a particular way.

W.C: What way is that?

Neil: Well you see how them rappers and basketball players thus dress, with hoods and caps and how they thus throw their body around searching for some kind of proper masculinity as to erase all questions about their soft masculinity or homosexuality suspicions.

Neil knows quite well what the consequences are if one fails to exhibit an “appropriately” masculine demeanor. Note below his mention that having a white boyfriend might be seen as both a provocation and a response to the forms of dominance in the community. Clearly, if one cannot inhabit - bodily - the community’s required social forms, one’s sexual partner is likely to be from outside the community.
W.C: So how do you carry yourself?

Neil: Well if we don’t fit the masculine strong Black stereotype for the most part, so they suspect that I and meh friends are batty bwoys so they thus harass us very quickly. It is these kind ah things that thus make me say that I doh belong to the community. And I think having a white boyfriend makes you also feel like a outsider.

W.C: Who does the harassing and how does this harassment make you feel?

Neil: It is mostly Black men acting macho, butch and tough who I find does do the harassing. It turns me off from the community, the people and thus make me feel I shouldn’t go to anything they organizing and not to support any more Black events.

Neil’s view informs us how one aspect of the hegemonic structure of dominance is maintained and articulated. Carole-Ann Tyler, writing on masculinity, noted that “the hypermasculinity of males . . . is meant to allay the castration anxiety evoked by the spectacle of the man as the spectacle, like a woman” (Tyler, 1991: 36). Overcompensation by acting hypermasculine, or cool, reflects the cultural values inscribed for “real” Black men to perform while constantly being watched by the Black nationalist “hetero-police.” The Black nationalist hetero-police, in their ambivalent and contradictory dynamics, prescribe rigid gender prescriptions for Black nationalism and construct Black bullers and batty bwoys as “the enemy within,” all the while, bearing a fantasy of sexual intoxication as the “other.” Black nationalists and Black heterosexist academic writers arrive at a loose conclusion that there is no dialogic relationship to be had between those constructed as bullers and those constructed as heterosexual. This truncated view protects the legitimacy of the claim that Black bullers are non-productive, weak, emasculated sissies, and traitors to the race. For Blacks not knowledgeable about the fears that bullers live under in Black communities, this absence of dialogue reinforces the myth that there is a reticence on behalf of bullers to engage with
members of Black communities. Black communal settings, in particular, are shaped by a particular Black popular cultural expression. This Black popular culture expression, in its painful and insensitive approach, further reinforces the ambivalent and contradictory notions of Black sexuality. It implies that there is some "perfect identity" for Black masculinity and sexuality and all that Black males must get up every morning and put it on. Black nationalists, functioning under the fixed construct of Black masculinity and sexual identity, would do well to listen to the voices articulated in *A Black Feminist Statement* by the Combahee River Collective in 1977. It states that, "the notion of identity politics implies that neither politics nor identities is singular or fixed. Identity and the practices engendered in its name are constituted along multiple axes - social and discursive - which often appear contested and in contradiction" (Collective, 1977: 365). Black masculinity and identity politics, as prescribed by Black nationalists, mirror that of white patriarchal racist males, the erasing the possibility for multiple forms of Black maleness, demanding instead a racist, fixed Black persona. Judith Butler's insights on gender imitation are clearly relevant here:

> gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original; in fact it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an effect and consequence of the imitation itself. In other words what they imitate . . . is a phantasmic ideal of heterosexual identity, one that is produced by the imitation as its effect (Butler, 1985: 21).

The phantasmatic construction of the authentic Black male, the purity of Black nationalism and its regulated effects on bodies constructed as bullers and batty bwoys, evoked the following response from *Brian*.

*Brian:* Lawd me, I stay far from them Black people work here in Halifax, especially, the Black religious and nationalistic ones. I fear that one day, I might flaunt the buller man thing in front ah them and they go kick the shit out ah me.
W.C: Why?

Brian: Because they Gawd dam homophobic and they hate bullers. And me is one ah them bullers they hate. So me! Hold on, I doh want none ah them to beat me and bust my head. I doh ever want my family to know I am ah batty man. So the further I stay away from them Black people the better it is for me. Because you see my mother and them doh know I am sleeping with men and I doh want them to know so I thus stay far from all Black people. I doh act manly enough for most ah them and ah doh ever want to flaunt me buller man style in front ah them.

W.C: Why?

Brian: Because I doh feel strong and good enough to come out to everyone yet and the more Black people ah hang with the chances of my family knowing is higher. I am not sure if my grandmother and parents will react positively to me sleeping with men. So the fear is real and I will not want my grandmother to get ah heart attack in she old age. I also do not want my family to disown me, it is only my sister who knows. They are very important to my survival and I have a lot of fun with them. So there is all these things I do not want to lose so those are some of my real fears.

W.C: Are you comfortable being a buller man?

Brian: Yes! But leh me tell you something again. If yo’ fo’ have to hide because unno ah batty man, or gay man, you saying something wrong with it and yourself. Buh dread, me parents and grandmother do see it that way and I love them very much, to the point that I will do anything for them. That may mean not telling them about my sex life. I doh feel I have to act like what them call Black male masculinity, I does just do whatever I want to do and sometimes I like to dress up in bright colourful pieces of clothing and walk around the street. So I know it is very hard for me to fit the Black male stereotype. You know the big, Black rough neck look that the media portrays and the image that some Black men like to internalize. I am not into that all.

The construction of Black male masculinity continues to be a conflict for bullers who see it as a construction they must reject in order to be who they want to be. As Robert Connell informs us;
Masculinity is a structured practice which exists at a number of different levels: which exists in political relations (institutional); which exists within economic relations (i.e. as the work place or division of labor); and in sexual emotional relations, too (Connell, 1992: 65).

The embracing of homophobia and fixed forms of masculinity by the Black heterosexist nationalists and the internalizing of its effects that Devon, Neil and other respondents outlined above have broader implications than simply the rejection of same-sex practices in Black communities. It creates a situation where Black communities lose the creativity and labour of Black people and hence potential and cultural economic resources needed for Black collective solidarity. Due to the isolation and oppression Neil has felt, he now has a very negative view of Black communal living. When asked if he does any work in the Black community, especially challenging homophobia, his reply demonstrates rejection.

Neil: You crazy! I love myself and do not want these Black men to beat me up and kill me. I had my bad experience two times: one in school and one in the Black community while walking with my boyfriend. So I have a chosen not to attend events or support the Black community, because it is too frustrating and painful; I do not have the energy to fight my brothers and sisters and to fight the white man at the same time. So I will keep to myself and go to the white gay bars when I want to go to gay places and do stuff like that. You know I do not feel I belong and I feel very out of the Black community. And as a male you have to act as if you are inarticulate and talk like yoh boy and stuff like that, I think that is what they call masculinity in our community. So no I am not masculine enough to work in the Black community.

It is crucial to underscore in Neil’s comments the particular type of masculinity he ascribes to community norms. In fact Neil uses racist constructions of the Black male body to characterize the normative Black masculinity he perceives as well as his self-positioning (or lack thereof), within its form. But this construction is not the only version of racist and heterosexist configurations of Black masculinity that circulate among communal forms. This
is made evident in the following incident reported by Michael. He recalls his experience of marginalization at a Kwanzaa celebration.

**Michael:** I remember being to a Kwanzaa celebration and at this Kwanzaa celebration we were asked to join a circle with men holding hands forming an outer circle. While the women in the room were asked to hold hands forming the inner circle. You get it men outer, women inner. So I remember saying no I want to hold hands with the women in the inner circle and not with the men in the outer circle.

**W.C:** And what was your rationale for holding hands with the women?

**Michael:** For me it was about attempting to break away some of the sexism, patriarchy and perceived homophobia I sensed from these male protectors in the room. But the men in the room objected to me doing that and I was made to feel as though I had betrayed Black masculinity and was not down with the brothers in the room, who were protecting the women.

**W.C:** So what did you do next?

**Michael:** Oh nothing I did not feel that I could talk with any of the men in the room, because they had already made up their minds about the role of men and women in this celebration like in society. And you have to choose your battles sometimes and I felt that my very resistance to holding hands with the men was a major accomplishment and I got my point across still.

Kwanzaa is a family event where members celebrate the first gathering of fruits and share their food and drink with other members of Black communities. At Kwanzaa celebrations, community tends to suggest a more permanent population, aligned to a cultural celebration of family, togetherness, love and respect. However, these concepts tend to be constructed around principles and beliefs that uphold heterosexism as the absolute norm. In challenging the form of a Kwanza ritual, Michael was attempting to challenge a notion of Black masculinity, that positions and stereotypically limits the significance of Black women.
While he recognized the difficulties of challenging male/female gender roles, Michael, argued that he will never leave the Black community because the community is where he belongs.

Deciding to exclude oneself from events in the Black community is something Brian discusses. He traces the reasons for this to his experiences of verbal harassment and subsequent feelings of deep embarrassment.

Brian: I will never attend any event put on by the Black community here in Halifax again, but as I told you earlier I will still support Black business and stuff like that. I have experienced on two occasions verbal harassment that made me feel very embarrassed, because they suspect that I was gay. On these two occasions there was no support for me from other people who watched it happen while I had to stand by myself and take it all. If this was a white person telling them off, the whole community would be up in arms supporting them. But it is the gay issues so they are afraid to support me. I am suppose to leave my gay identity by the church door, Black organizations' door, the Black family door and not be who I am, in order, to please Black folks.

Brian gestures toward of a double life, in which he must leave his same-sex identity at various doors. He contrasts Black solidarity and racial harassment and underscores the lack of support he received from community members when he was harassed. Clearly this is a comment on the realities of community as a source of support. Black men engaging in same-sex relations who participate in Black community events are expected to support the events, take on stereotypical roles83 and keep silent on the issue of heterosexism. They are expected

83 There have been occasions where bullers, batty bwoys or transvestites are welcomed as long as they could be laughed at by some segments of the Black community. In other words we will tolerate you but on our terms. This is especially true of Black men who do drag or Black men who are stereotypically constructed as feminine. They get asked to do baby sitting, help women with their grocery shopping and are allowed to keep the company of some men’s wives because it is a safe thing to do. This same-sexed man does not threaten the Black women’s husband’s masculinity.
to take verbal and physical abuse because “they look for it” by having a lifestyle that disrupts a system of beliefs that legitimizes heterosexual roles, values and functions and demonizes same-sex desires as deviant and destructive of Black identity. This moral regulation of Black same-sex practices also creates a double invisibility for some men. Insofar as bullers and batty bwoys experience the racism all Blacks face, their marginalization by the Black community cuts them off from a valuable form of support against racism.

Black men who engage in same-sex relations are not free from the evils of racism, high unemployment, police harassment, misnaming and racist stereotyping. Bullers and batty bwoys live in a hostile environment, like their heterosexual counterparts. Yet, as bullers and batty bwoys, they are often made to feel that they are not oppressed, or not as oppressed as their heterosexual counterparts, who say bullers and batty bwoys are free of responsibility and that moreover some of them sleep with the enemy. However, they remain excluded from housing opportunities and political participation that most white citizens take for granted and are often constrained to neighborhoods where crime, poverty and police harassments are rampant. In this regard, Neil shared a story of what it means to him to live in a racist society.

Neil: Being stopped by the police is not restricted to Black heterosexual males, is an act I am also familiar with. And it is these experiences sometimes that is the motivating factor for me attending Black community events. The way we dress, walk and talk gets targeted by the white racist cops and white society. We cannot wear hoods, sunglasses and be seen alone or in a group because we are a gang or up to no good. I get stopped and questioned many nights on my way home by police and it fucking upsets me. You know the things we share in common.

However visible one’s Black body is to state agencies like the police, the most invisible visible Blacks in Black communities are bullers and batty bwoys. By definition, Black
communities are spaces which produce contradictory experiences for bullers, because they are sites of contestation cris-crossed by the tensions of race and sexuality. Bullers are relegated to invisibility by their community but remain visible to the white racist.

Neil: We still get constructed as the Black rapist, thief and criminal when whites and other people look at us. The stereotype for heterosexual Blacks is the same for bullers too, because sexuality is not seen but race is. So when I go into Eatons and the Bay they see me first as a thief and I think that is where they stop.

Neil's in/visibility is shaped by the same racism, that is applied to his heterosexual Black brothers. He is caught in a double subjection. His same-sex eroticism is looked down upon in the Black community and his Blackness is criminalized in the white community.

Neil: The gay white community sees itself as a white male middle-class enclave that writes us Black men out of its existence.

W.C: How is this so?

Neil: Well when one turns the pages of Xtra, Icon and Fab gay magazines in Toronto, all one sees is white male pretty boys posing and occupying ninety percent of the pages - thus representing the entire community. You doh even see white women.

W.C: So do you think they have a responsibility to think of Black people especially Black gay men?

Neil: Well I am not sure if they should think about us but at least acknowledge that we exist. But you know what?

W.C: What?

Neil: They have no problem when it comes to sex, lust, fear, stereotyping and them wanting to explore something different sexually. The Black heterosexual community should become more sensitive to these issues and recognize that we experience the same pain, misnaming and misrepresentation, but on different sexual and community lines, that is all.
Neil hints at something here that was absent in most of my interviews. Much of what I reported from these conversations at least implicitly, if not explicitly, suggests same-sexed Black men are simply accepted as bullers in gay white communal spaces. While numerous Black men do find support and relationships in white gay communities, this is not to suggest that there are no racist dimensions to the forms of sexuality enacted therein. Neil suggests a racist phantasmatic desire is enacted by white men on Black bodies. These Black bodies literally can become a sign of sex. The danger for the buller in this situation is the internalization of the sign and a reduction of himself to “super stud”.

There is another form of dissociation from the Black community that is based on a very different semiotic. Brian, because of his education and social class, felt that he was immune from racism. Indeed it appears that Brian has a difficult time conceiving himself as Black.

Brian: I think white society respect you when you are educated and have degrees in law, medicine and other big paying professions. So, I never saw the need to be around the Black community, most of my friends have always been white and the Black community is a very new concept for me to conceptualize and start thinking of. But the little experience I have had with them and from what I have heard people say about the Black community is that it does not like gay people. I have this vision of them as being very homophobic and I am not sure as a gay man I want to be around them (my emphasis).

Brian perceives education and his social class as two factors that have protected him from the evils of racism in a white dominated society and the effects of heterosexism in Black communal settings. (Education and his social class = Whiteness) Brian’s failure to see the world from the standpoint of being Black and same-sexed reflects his denial of racism, associating racism with poverty and low education is another way for him to say, ‘I am educated therefore I am white.’
Brian, however, remains the exception. Despite the acknowledged heterosexism and homophobia in Black communities, Black same-sex men dependent on their Black identity still desire an attachment to the living texture of their culture. Another example of this is the connection that a number of the men interviewed had with the Black church. As I will show in the following section, the heterosexist orientation of the church creates conflict in those same-sex men who need to belong to it, but whose sexuality it rejects.

Community Affiliation Through the Black Church

As discussed in chapter four, the church has historically been and continues to be an important institution in the lives of many people living in Black communities. There is a veritable commitment to religion and spirituality in Black communities which can be witnessed at most or all community events. A religious sensibility infuses most activities that Blacks engage in whether it is shopping at West Indian grocery stores \(^{84}\) or merely greeting one another on the streets. A religious sensibility can therefore be seen as one of the strengths that bind the community together. At some Black community events there are organizers who will take the time out to recognize our spiritual ancestors and thank God for giving us the strength to be present together. There are those who at the closing of events, will also say to the audience, “God bless” and thank God for allowing them to undertake the event, or would thank God for giving them the talent (singing, reading, drumming, writing) and spiritual guidance. Religion and the church are woven into everyday Black life.

\(^{84}\)One of the closest feelings of home (Caribbean) living in Canada is going to the West Indian grocery store to hear Saturday morning gossip, meet other Black folks from home who you haven’t seen all week and to have the owner say, "God bless you. Have ah good day see you next week."
The importance of religion and the church in Black communities has been the source of much confusion and pain for bullers. Consider first Neil’s comments on his experiences as a church member. In the excerpt below, he seems to suggest the church’s tacit acceptance of same-sex practices as long as these practices are not explicitly mentioned.

Neil: There were other gay deacons and choir boys, some very, very, very effeminate and I was close to many of them. But I think the pastor and church denied it because no one made it public, or complained. We were good Christian men, something I think the church respected.

W.C: What was your church position on same-sex relationships?

Neil: Abomination, sick, sinful, unclean and not worthy of trying.

The church’s explicit abhorrence of same-sex practices and the doctrine that such practices are sinful have often led to confusion and alienation. Randall Kenan’s biography of James Baldwin illustrates how religion can negatively affect the life of a same-sexed Black Christian. He argues that Baldwin was raised in a household headed by a very religious and traditional step-father. It was his stepfather’s influence that led him to become a preacher and a devoted Christian. But the ambivalence and anxiety in Baldwin’s life around his same-sex desires made him very confused and angry, because these desires contravened the teachings of Christianity. (Kenan, 1994: 33). Baldwin, like some of the men in the project, referred to these feelings as “the evil within”. In Down At The Cross, Kenan describes Baldwin’s anger:

Due to the way I had been raised, the abrupt discomfort that all this aroused in me and the fact that I had no idea what my voice or mind or body was likely to do next caused me to consider myself one of the most depraved people on earth . . . I surrender myself to a spiritual seduction long before I came to any knowledge . . . Everything inflamed me and that was bad enough. (Kenan, 1994: 34)
Baldwin’s anger is also echoed by Neil. I asked Neil about the racial composition of his church’s congregation.

W.C: Was your church mainly a Black congregation?

Neil: Yes! But I had enough of the pastor and congregation homophobia. I am very angry with how the church preaches love and practice hate against us bullers.

W.C: Why do you think the Black church has such a hard time with seeing same-sex relations as O.K.?

Neil: I think because they use Christian teachings. I have even heard my father quote Leviticus 20, verse 13 which is “the lord tell [sic] us: If a man lie with mankind as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.” I am also reminded of my Sunday School days, when the teacher will talk to us about heterosexual marriage. These discussions only caused confusion in my mind and I felt very guilty deep inside because so much of my life at the time was built around family and church which both condemned same-sex relations.

Neil’s confusion and guilt have led to a reduction in his participation in church life and a consequent feeling of loss of communal attachment that was clearly central to him and his family. While Neil was the only Toronto resident who spoke explicitly about church affiliation, three of the five Halifax residents interviewed stressed the importance of the church in their lives. Donald H. Clairmont and Dennis William Magill, writing on the liberatory role of Black churches in Halifax Black communities, have argued that the church:

provided throughout the history of Black settlements in Nova Scotia, the basis for whatever genuine Black subculture developed. Black leaders and spokesmen vis-a-vis the wider society were usually the religious leaders and the Association was the base for unity and contact among the isolated Black communities (Donald H. Clairmont and Dennis William Magill, 1987: 68).

From the Black Church’s inception in 1784 to the 1940’s, it has been, in the words of a respondent in Bernice Moreau’s (1996) dissertation, “the lighthouse of our community.” Its
function was holistic and all inclusive. It was the center of the lives of Black people from the womb to the tomb (Moreau, 1996: 154). There is no doubt that the Black church’s economic and political leadership has provided the Black community in Halifax with a sense of collective identity, fostering sentiments of solidarity, irrespective of sexual orientation (Clairmont & Magill, 1987: 49). Black churches have provided, throughout the history of Black settlements in North America, the matrix for whatever genuine Black subculture and communal living developed. Within Black communities, the church has provided a variety of social services and has been the foundation for many organizations; with social status was, closely linked to participation in the congregation. However, benefitting from the richness of the church (its spiritual, and social meaning, support and relief from daily suffering, and its organized resistance to racism), come with a price for Black same-sex men. This price is the moral regulation or the Black bio-nationalist marking of their bodies and its sexual desires.

*Joseph* is very reticent to criticize the Black community, he is somewhat positive about the Black community’s acceptance of his sexuality but remains invisible. He indicates that the church is of real importance to him, but he lives in the “closet”. The following comments, express variously his affirmation of the importance of the church in his own and the community likes.

**W.C:** What are some of the issues that Black men are dealing with within Halifax?

**Joseph:** Well I find that the church and religion to be very important for us, especially in places like North Preston and Truro. You will always find us doing something in the church, singing and healing each other out, you know what I mean, you have to see it to understand it.

**W.C:** You talk about the church ah lot, how important is the church for you in Halifax?
Joseph: Well I go to church quite a bit, my family and friends also go very often, so I guess it is a very important thing in my life and my community life. You see we Black folks have always used the church to talk with each other and to meet each other. The church has always been very supportive here in Halifax and has I think been quite liberating for most of us. So it is a very good thing I guess.

The idea that religion can be either an opiate or a source of struggle for liberation is well-documented (e.g. see West, 1992). In the above excerpt, we see the church in Halifax's Black community being experienced as a liberating institution and as a source of material and emotional support. The church in Halifax, according to Joseph, holds a unique place in the lives of Black folks. It is through the church that many Black people were able to meet communal needs. Terrance, for example, told me he gained skills in the Black church that are often denied to Black men in white society.

Terrance: I was the treasurer and secretary at one time in the church and was able to gain skills that I need to help me find work. I also know of other gay people who held positions like president, treasurer, secretary, volunteer co-coordinator, but all with a great degree of secrecy, privacy, denial of their sexual orientation.

The church has also been seen as a site of socialization for other Black folks and a major focus of communal life. Lennox describes a double life while stressing the importance of church.

Lennox: I went to an all-Black congregation in Halifax, where I met many other Black men who I knew were engaging in sex with other men. Many of them were also married and had sex in public places that I know of, but we never talked about it. I think we never talked about it because our Black community is so close knit and religious that we never wanted to be embarrassed in front of other Black people. Some of us had children and were really mixed up around community, family and religious values.
W.C.: Have you or do you know of anyone, group or organization that has tried to tell the Black church that it is ok to have same-sex relationships?

Lennox: No! You see in Halifax, the church is very important in our lives. In North Preston, Truro and Beachville, you could always find us Black folks in the church doing political work, providing support services, or simply socializing. We are also very respectful of the older people in the church, I think we see them as providing very important advice for our survival. We may not always agree with them but they are also the backbone of our community.

W.C.: How so?

Lennox: Well what I find very interesting about Halifax is how people in the church and community identifies you by your parents, name, especially your father’s name. So when I go to church I am not Lennox, but the son of Mr..... People also relate to us like that so you have no other choice but to have respect for the older people and the church.

The extension of family and communal living through religious socialization creates added pressures for men like Lennox. Community here is synonymous with church socialization, which identifies him through his father; therefore should be “outed,” he may cause shame on two front: shame to family and shame to community. On the one hand, he is identified through his father and on the other hand he is identified as part of the church community.

Lennox: Because of this there was even more pressure for me to confront my being a gay man and to be honest with those whom I love and respect. Denial and repression of my same-sex attraction for men led me into having a girlfriend and children. I was convinced that, having a girlfriend and being a good Christian would help cure me of my sexual temptations for men, I grew up believing in that.

It is interesting that Lennox’s psychic investment in the church leads to his desire for openness about his sexual practices. This view is not shared by others whose investment
requires they leave these at the church door. But despite his feelings that he should be more open about his sexual preferences, Lennox doesn’t come out publicly. Instead he turns to procreation and common-law communal living, hoping for a cure for his sexual desires. Clearly, what we are seeing here is the tremendous impact of church on the ways in which many Black men understand themselves and their sexuality.

Among Black men in some church congregations same-sex is common. However when these men gather in church on a Sunday morning they meet as if they were total strangers.

Lennox: There are a few men who I had encounters with outside of church but we do not communicate that in public to other people, nor do we talk about what it is we are doing with our lives, families or communities. For us it is a private matter, because all church and family discussions on the matter were negative. People in my community I felt became more negative towards gay people after they heard about AIDS and linking it to gay people, the way the media did it.

Many Christians insist that God can change or cure their same-sex desires. Many men in this research project said that they spent a great deal of time, trying with no success, to persuade God to change them.

Lennox: I have been told that they can’t be gay and be Christians. So acting as if you are straight and very macho is the best way to hide it publicly, or laughing at other gay or feminine men is another way I gained or at least felt that I gained heterosexual privilege.

But some men are happy with leaving their same-sex attractions at the doorstep of the church. As Joseph tells us, discussions of homosexuality are not appropriate for church.

Joseph: I think of church as the place where we should never discuss gay and lesbian issues, because of Gods’ view on the subject matter. When I go to church I, go to hear the word of God, not about gay people and who is sleeping with who. Now that does not stop me from having fun with other men sexually, but church is not the place for it. The church is to unify, uplift us spiritually, mentally emotionally and unify us as Christians, I am
a Christian and do not care what other people think. You see the history of Black Nova Scotians goes back to the church, so I cannot leave it that easy.

Joseph's sexual practice is compromised at the expense of Christianity and the church's view on same-sex practices. In order for him to feel spiritually and religiously satisfied, in order to appreciate "the word of God," he must disavow himself of a same-sex identity.

Brian, on the other hand, while expressing similar deep attachments to the church, offers a much more conflicted position.

Brian: I really wish my family and the church would allow us to be whatever we want to be without forcing the word of God on us. I feel if the word of God is about love then they should not use it to talk about hating us. This is what really gets me angry. You see I go to church every Sunday, but I could never let them know that I am gay.

W.C: Who are they?

Brian: The priest, community members in the church and my family. And another thing I like but at the same time hate is when they call us brothers and sisters. You know I don't feel you should call me brother if you do not mean it. But I like it when they say "hi brother" and "hi sister" I feel that it is a Black thing. Outside of the church on the streets and in the community, that kind of greeting is great, you know what I mean? We Black people in Halifax always greet each other.

Others, like Chris, find a conflicted position too difficult to sustain and no longer attempt to go to church.

Chris: I don't even bother to go to church because I don't have the energy to fight with the priest and other people who believe in god that at the same time espouses hate towards gay men. I will not want to leave that part of me outside of the church and pick it back up when I am leaving the church. I don't think we will ever respect gay men in our community and as long as we hang on to this old age religious line we will not have respect from some gays towards the church also.
According to George Mosse:

respectability emerged in alliance with sexuality and helped to shape Black middle-class beliefs about the body, sexual (mis)conduct, normal notions of virility and manly bearing. The control over sexuality evidenced in the triumph of the nuclear family was vital to respectability (Mosse, 1985: 2-10).

This control clearly enacts the marginalization of bullers and batty bwoys from a Black spiritual and religious culture. A challenge for Black churches is to confront this exclusion and begin to respond to men such as Brian:

Brian: I have never felt that I was a part of the Black community and would love to be more involved but I am not going to let the church and the Black heterosexuals control my life, because they hate gay people...As Black gay people we need a safe place to express our spirituality, religious beliefs and we need to know that those places exist within the Black community and their churches. You know what?

W.C: What?

Brian: I would love to see the day when our Black ministers here in Canada, follow some of the Black ministers in the US who perform same-sex commitment ceremonies.

Conclusion:

The men in this section, and others with similar life situations, pose a question around the issue of belonging and identification. Is it possible for Black identified same-sex men to step outside of the Black communities' religious orientation, when the church is the center of social intercourse in the Black community? Church membership and culture are not limited to the “word of God” or Sunday and Saturday morning mass. Its socializing gives some Black
folks the valorization that the wider society denies them. The church is the site where many
Blacks have leadership roles and wield power and control denied them elsewhere.

Given that the Black church plays a critical role in the lives of many Black people
irrespective of their sexual preferences, it is incumbent on Black churches to (re)negotiate their
position on same-sex relationships in order to live up to claims of communal inclusiveness and
love. Until now inclusiveness and love have been premised on the exclusion of bullers and
batty bwoys. A challenge for the Black church is a redefinition of the terms inclusiveness, love
and their associated practices to embrace those who have historically been excluded. Some
respondents have shown us that modern churches have reduced the love ideal to procreation,
and have thereby instituted traditional intolerance.

Finally, given the dual rejection, felt by many of the men in this project, it is hoped that
today the Black heterosexual community will start to change its exclusionary attitudes. We
need to address these issues in order to talk about the politics of location, everyday traumas
for bullers and their experiences in Black communal living, Black religion and the Black family.
In the final analysis, Black churches which embrace same-sex spirituality can gain legitimacy,
not by resembling every other Black church in someone’s mind, but by daring to combine the
best of the Black tradition with inclusion. The church has the unique opportunity, privilege and
duty to “reprove, rebuke and exhort,” and bring healing and power to each person within its
reach.
Chapter Five

Fear and Discourses of Black Heterosexism

Introduction:

The purpose of this chapter is to make clear the violent character of Black heterosexism as articulated by the discourse of Black nationalism, in order to understand the roots of the heterosexual structure of dominance within Black communities. I will elaborate on the sets of commitments and investments that such discourse mobilizes and link them to the experiences of the Black men in my study. In doing so, I attempt to make clear why same-sex practices remain outside the “normative framework” of Black identity and Black nationalism. Specifically, I am interested in understanding the many ways in which Black intellectual discourse contributes to the formation of a Black consciousness which includes exclusionary practices -- practices that fuel an ever-present tension in the communal and familial structures within which most buller men attempt to live their lives.

Black Nationalism and the Social Construction of Violent Heterosexism

The socially constructed terms “Black male” and “Black masculinity”, as racialized and gendered categories, are highly charged concepts that evoke a great deal of emotion, not only in Black communities but also in the wider society. Ed Guerrero writes that:

When we view Black men in our media, their representations generally fall into two reductive, disparate categories. On the one hand, we are treated to the grand celebrity spectacle of Black male athletes, movie stars and pop entertainers . . . Yet in simultaneous contrast to this steady stream of glamour and glitz, from the vast pop empire . . . we are also subjected to the real-time devastation, slaughter and body count of a steady stream of faceless Black males on the six and 11 o’clock news (Guerrero, 1984: 183).
As Black men, our starting point is indecision about our sexuality, look and representation, because images of Black male representation inscribe and subscribe to the stereotypical notions of who or what the Black male is in North America. The construction of Black “heterosexual masculinity,” as a set of practices through which people signify “Black masculinity,” only serves to further reify the sexuality of Black men as heterosexual.

This reification of masculinity has created a regime within Black communities that constructs the “normative” discourse, a discourse that attempts to define the conduct of most Black males. Even more problematic is that some Black people (mostly heterosexuals) employ this subjugating discourse in their use of the “normative” construction of Black male, and thereby perpetuate their own brand of “subjugation” on bullers. This complicity is rampant within contemporary discourses of Black nationalism. Perhaps there is no one more graphic in displaying this complicity than Eldridge Cleaver. While I will have more to say about Cleaver’s writings later in this chapter, it will suffice for the moment to provide a brief citation.

Black homosexuality is a racial death wish and a frustrating experience because in their sickness Black men who practice homosexuality are unable to have a baby by a white man (Cleaver, 1968: 65).

In Cleaver’s polemical condemnation, the Black body -- gendered as male and in the throes of a wrongly-constructed desire necessarily marked “homosexual” -- is made to enact an entire script of internalized, violently genocidal values. The buller becomes the locus for anxiety around not only sexuality, family values, spirituality, communal living, but more specifically around a fundamental notion of identity and Black masculinity in crisis.

As Paul Gilroy asserts, the figure of “Black masculinity” marks the racial, gendered and cultural boundaries of counter-hegemonic Blackness; a counter-hegemonic discourse within which the Black Nation, the Black family and the “authentic” Black (male) self is constructed
(Gilroy, 1992). It is the ideal of the strong, uncompromising, new and authentic Black man which anchors the affirmative representation of a “Black racial and sexualized masculinity” within the cultural formation of a Black consciousness and collective struggle. This racialized positioning of the Black male body enacts a structure of dominance, wherein those Black men who are not able to identify and/or perform within the codes of a Black racialized hegemonic masculinity especially, are viewed as race traitors. This identity and its concomitant forms of representation are fully implicated in the structures of heterosexual social power manifest in the ideological construction of Black “heteronormativity”(Warner, 1993: vii-xxviii) -- a heteronormativity which “polices” Black sexuality, masculinity, subjectivity and identity and results in very specific identity politics. The assertion of Black manhood, argues Lyne Segal, is both macho and largely heterosexist. Such machismo enforces a form of policing on the performative of the Black male body, in ways that construct a normative discourse for all Black men (Segal, 1987). This policing is often experienced as a threat of violence and is built into the ways many bullers and batty bwoys negotiate their everyday existence within Black communal living. An example of how this threat is felt is given by Devon.

Devon: I find them [Black nationalists] to be the kind of guys that is always demonstrating against police and racism. Sometimes they have good things to say, but for me I have never gone to any of the demonstrations, because I do not feel the issues are that important.

W.C: Why?

Devon: You know because I just simply think that they wouldn’t like me as ah buller and I doh feel that I could let them know that I sleeping with men. I feel too that they have to put some importance to me as a buller in the work they thus do too.
For Devon, in order to participate in the social activism around him it is imperative that the Black activists agenda include issues pertinent to bullers and batty bwoys, issues of self-validation.

W.C: Have you ever tried telling other Black folks that sleeping with men is an acceptable act?

Devon: No! But from what I have read from some of the works by Molefi Asante, Farrakhan and Eldridge Cleaver is that they doh like bullers. So I feel that if these guys [local nationalist leaders] are anything like them Black nationalist then they would take the same position on bullers and Black masculinity.

W.C: Why would you take this position without talking to them?

Devon: Because I have read the works of these people and when I see these Black nationalists in Toronto on TV they sound the same way, and besides I never see any bullers and batty bwoys around them and if they are there they are in the closet. Come on man, you know what I mean, what kind of question you asking me? I does still go to Black barbers to cut my hair and I thus take my little son with me because I don’t want no white boy to touch our hair. And when I go to the Black barber shop on Bathurst or sometimes up on Eglinton Avenue, all I does hear coming from these barbers mouth and their clients whenever they talk about bullers and batty bwoys is negative.

One of Devon’s connection’s to the community is through his barber. In the barbershop he comes in contact with the community. But Devon is not “out” to these men and fears that if he comes “out” he will lose the connection to community that is important to him.

W.C: What are some of the negative things they have to say in the barber shop?

Devon: For one they all talk about killing them, because they make them sick to watch them. They also make lots of Vaseline jokes about putting pepper in the Vaseline to burn batty man arse and cock. I even heard a few men at the barber shop say, that they would go out and try to act like one ah them panty man so that they could get pick up by ah buller man. Then they would take the buller man an alley and kill him.
As previously mentioned, *Pepper in your Vaseline*, was a calypso song from Trinidad that ridiculed buller men in the 1970's, it depicts the type of violence, punishment and pain that are inflicted upon buller men. It is worth nothing that while calypsos have the potential to be subversive, here the “verbal performance” of heterosexism and misogyny by the Calypsonian emphatically tells us that he is not a buller man or batty bwoy (Smitherman, 1977). His scornful language debasing bullers only adds immensely to his popularity.

Despite the verbal violence and often dehumanizing effects of the barber shop on Devon, he also argues that the Black barber shop is a place of Black consciousness.

Devon: But you know the Black barber shop was also a place where I also got a street education.

W.C: How so?

Devon: Well, they taught me a great deal about Malcolm, Garvey and other great Black people. They also use to talk about drugs and police and who not to trust in the community and stuff like that. Yeah I think it was also a place of education; you know I also like the guys because I feel at home with them culturally. So it is a hard one. I wish they could be a little bit nicer to us, because I like to hang with them and I do really like some of them and the discussions they have about Malcolm X and other Black issues in the community and the Caribbean.

W.C: Why Malcolm X?

Devon: Because Malcolm was assassinated and most people came to know it after that and what some of his views was, so I think in that respect he was popular. He also represented, I think, for many young Black men true manhood.

W.C: What do you mean by true manhood?

Devon: Well he wasn’t afraid of the white man and he stood up for Black people rights, he fought harder than King and Jessie and all they rest of people from the Civil Rights movement. You know, I think King was much too soft for fighting the white man, but Malcolm was always a righteous strong Black man. You know King was a weak man basically.
While Devon displays a legitimate fear of Black nationalists because their stated positions on Black same-sex practices, he recognizes the importance of an assertive nationalism and its contribution to Black liberation. Many of us, like Devon, remain ambivalent about the Black nationalist project, at least as currently defined in contemporary liberation discourse. This ambivalence is clearly structured in the exclusions this discourse encourages, exclusions which are based on the intersection of nationalism and the body. It is interesting to note that this form of Black heteronormativity can be found in the early developments of Black nationalism. For example, in 1924, in a position statement entitled “What We Believe,” Marcus Garvey, then the President of the United Negro Improvement Association - the most successful Pan-African movement to date - stated, unequivocally that “the U.N.I.A. is against miscegenation and race suicide . . . It is against rich Blacks marrying poor whites. It is against rich or poor whites taking advantage of Negro women” (Garvey, 1924: 81). The building of a Black nation within a diaspora context has always been contingent on the maintenance of a biologically determined, gender-specific and genetically-maintained racial purity, inscribing the individual Black body with the investments of a nation.

This nationalism consistently implied the construction of a manhood which emphasizes strength and aggressiveness. Perhaps the classic statement of this form of heteronormativity is Ossie Davis’ description of Malcolm X, in the eulogy he gave at Malcolm ‘s funeral. In it Davis defines exemplary Black manhood through the well understood popular images and emotional resonances of Malcolm (similar images are evoked and resonances echoed in Devon’s statement above).

If you knew him, you would know why we must honor him: Malcolm was our manhood, our living, Black manhood! This was his meaning to his people. And, in honoring him, we honor the best in ourselves (66: 1992).
The implications of such constructions of Black manhood are well understood by bell hooks. In her critique of Black masculinity in the contemporary Black power movement she wrote:

The contemporary Black power movement made synonymous Black liberation and the effort to create a social structure wherein Black men could assert themselves as patriarchs, controlling community, family and kin. On the one hand, Black men expressed contempt for white men yet they also envied their access to patriarchal power (hooks, 1992: 98).

As previously stated, if we want to understand the depth of Black nationalist anger implicit in the forms of heteronormativity they express, we can do no better than turn to the writing of Eldridge Cleaver. Nearly half of a century after Garvey’s previously cited U.N.I.A. statement, Eldridge Cleaver in his famous text *Soul On ice (1969)* defined “Black homosexuality” as the “extreme embodiment,” of a “racial death-wish”; moreover he equates homosexual sexual desire with a literal desire for whiteness:

The white man has deprived him of his masculinity, castrated him in the center of his burning skull and when he submits to this change and takes the white man for his lover as well as big daddy, he forces on “whiteness” all the love in his pent up soul and turns the razor edge of hatred against “Blackness” -- upon himself, and all those who look like him, remind him of himself. He may even hate the darkness of the night (Cleaver, 1969: 103).

Cleaver, in his attack on same-sex practices chose to address these practices in the figure of James Baldwin. Cleaver wrote that “Baldwin cannot confront the stud in others - except that he must either submit to it or destroy it.” (Cleaver, 1969: 106). *In Soul On Ice*, Cleaver condemns Baldwin’s work, not because Baldwin refuses to address Black issues but because he is same-sexed. In Cleaver’s text, the Black body -- gendered as male and in the throes of a wrongly constructed desire marked “homosexual” -- is made to enact internally script of violent, genocidal impulses. The Black male homosexual becomes the locus for anxiety around, not only sexuality, but more specifically, a Black masculinity in crisis. In
addition, Cleaver interprets homosexuality as a sickness and he implicitly contrasts it with the image of a Black male boxer in excellent form - a phantasmatic image through which he displays his own vision of a perfect model of African-American masculinity (Cleaver, 1969: 103). Cleaver’s critique of gender, sexuality and same-sex practices, in particular, attempts to establish various dialects and dichotomies, most of which are contradictory and complex, including for example, Cleaver’s own love and hate for white women and white society. Cleaver wrote *Soul on Ice* while in prison; his meditations on heterosexual miscegenation as well as homosexual desire reveal profound levels of anxiety around sexual bodily desires whose fulfillment could lead to imprisonment and even to death as well.

In the opening essay in *Soul on Ice*, “On Becoming,” Cleaver articulates how the consciousness of his desire for white women and the gratification of that desire have been as carefully planned and orchestrated acts of rape that led to his eventual imprisonment and shaping of a self-consciousness, driven by an urge for power and a militaristic un-contradictory reconstructive vision of Black masculinity. This vision incorporates the acts of terror employed against those Black men, excluded from Cleaver’s constructs of Black masculinity (as raced and gendered subjects). This entire process begins in an uncomfortable moment of realization that precedes the complete dissolution of self that Cleaver terms “a nervous breakdown” (Cleaver, 1969: 11). For Mercer, Cleaver’s contradiction in his masculinity (and in that of other Black misogynists), “occurs when Black men subjectively internalize and incorporate aspects of the dominant definitions of masculinity in order to contest the definitions of dependency and powerlessness which racism and racial oppression enforce” (Mercer, 1994: 139). Cleaver further wrote, in his narrative on the death of Emmett Till, a
young Black man killed allegedly for whistling at a white woman in Mississippi in August, 1955:

An event took place in Mississippi which turned me inside out: Emmet Till, a young Negro down from Chicago on a visit, was murdered allegedly for flirting with a white woman. He has been shot, his head crushed from repeated blows with a blunt instrument and his badly decomposed body was recovered from the river with a heavy weight on it. I was, of course, angry over the whole bit, but one day I saw in a magazine a picture of the white woman with whom Emmet Till was said to have flirted. While looking at the picture, I felt that little tension in the center of my chest I experience when a woman appeals to me. I was disgusted and angry with myself. Here was a woman who had caused the death of a Black, possibly because, when he looked at her, he also felt the same tensions of lusts and desire in his chest -- and probably for the same general reasons I felt them. It was all unacceptable to me. I looked at the picture again and again and in spite of everything and against my will and hate I felt more for the woman and all she represented, she appealed to me (Cleaver, 1955: 10-11).

It is not surprising that same-sex relations and miscegenation become negatively conflated in Cleaver’s account, since both are acts that seem to challenge easily scripted notions of desire and set boundaries of the self. Biographical information on Cleaver, reveals that he was in love with Beverly Axelrod a (white) woman, but he hid it from the general public (Elaine Brown, 1992). His desire for the white female body must be seen as a point of contestation within his own Black consciousness and decolonization. It also cannot be denied that the dissolution of what Cleaver worked to combat is quite literal. There is much evidence that the decomposing body of Emmett Till played a formative role in the developing consciousness of an entire nation of Black people. James Baldwin wrote about Emmett’s death as emblematic of the stereotyping and sexualization of racism that has been so traumatic for Black people. He eloquently argued that:

the only reason, after all, that we have heard of Emmett Till is that he happened to come whistling down the road - an obscure country road - at the very moment the road found itself most threatened: at the beginning of segregation - desegregation - not yet integration - crisis, under the knell of the Supreme
Court's all deliberate speed, when various moderate Southern governors were asking Black people to segregate themselves, for the good of both races . . . (Baldwin, 1985: 40 - 41).

Ms. Bradely, Emmett's mother, insisted, against the explicit instructions of the sheriff's department, that the badly mutilated and decomposed body of her son not be buried in Mississippi and that it be returned to Chicago and she be allowed to conduct an open casket funeral. The figure of Emmett Till's visibly tortured and badly disfigured fourteen-year-old body would then symbolically stand for an entire spectrum of abuses inflicted on the bodies of Black American males throughout the United States history. Thus Emmett's body served to remind Black men of the various methods of containment and control that white society has over the Black body. Shelby Steele, wrote:

The single story that sat atop the pinnacle of racial victimization for us was that Emmett Till, the Northern Black teenager who, on a visit to the South in 1955, was killed and grotesquely mutilated for supposedly looking at or whistling at (we were never sure which, though we argued the point endlessly) a white woman. Oh, how we probed his story, finding in his youth and the Northern upbringing the quintessential embodiment of Black innocence, brought down by a white evil so portentous and apocalyctical, so gnarled and hideous, that it left us with a feeling not far from awe. By telling his story and others like it, we came to feel the immutability of our victimization, its utter indigenousness, as a thing on this earth like dirt, sand or water (Steele, 1988: 116-17).

For Cleaver, the dismemberment of Emmett Till's body (so badly disfigured that it had to be identified by an initialed ring he wore), prefigures the symbolic dismemberment of Cleaver's psyche. In the attempt to resist that dissolution and symbolically rebuild that sense of self, it is not surprising that Cleaver attempts to isolate the white woman whom Emmett supposedly whistled at and Emmett's body as "obvious" disruptions in the maintenance of boundaries of a raced and masculinized self. In Cleaver's account, miscegenation represents a potentially dangerous disruption of the reproductive order, but same-sex practice, (read as
the complete, passive capitulation to white masculinities), represents the potential for a complete dissolution of a resistant Black self.

Cleaver's position was not unique. At the time Cleaver wrote his book, Lionel Ovesey identified a pseudo homosexual syndrome among men who showed no signs of homoeroticism, yet feared they must be homosexual (Ovesey, 1969: 57). The equation is as follows: I am a failure, therefore I am not a man; I am castrated, therefore, I am a woman and I am a homosexual (Ovesey, 1969: 57). This equation works because, as Jonathan Dolliore stated, "the negation of homosexuality has been in direct proportion to its actual centrality, its cultural marginality in direct proportion to its cultural significance"(Dolliore, 1986: 5). There is no surprise here. The notion that to be masculine is to be dominant and that masculinity equates heterosexuality support the many ways in which Black heterosexuals see same-sex practices as weakening Black communities and the very possibilities of racial uplift.

The equation of homosexuality and castration prevalent in Black communal discourse, other Black writers have joined the homophobic chorus. Soul on Ice is not the only cultural nationalist work in which miscegenation, heteronormativity and male same-sex practices become the locus of anxiety over the possibilities for a cohesive narrative of the Black nation which could be scripted onto Black bodies. This form of reasoning resonates in works of many Black nationalists who posit a Black heteronormativity which results in a pathologization of bullers and a rendering of them as a threat to the Black nation. One must then, be interested in the operative fantasy of Black consciousness as it is expressed by in writers and community leaders examining how they engage issues of sexuality and more specifically, same-sex practices. If, as Toni Morrison (1993) stated, "that the nature (subject) of the dream is the dreamer," then we must ask if there is a phantasmatic dimension in the work of Black writers.
such as Farrakhan, Jones, Asante, Buju Banton and Madhubuti, particularly when the subject
of their concern is the buller man or batty bwoy. These intellectuals have all constructed
frameworks which position bullers as outside of the “normative” framework of Black identity.
In the process of developing Black consciousness and collective struggle through a regulatory
cultural formation, they have created a hegemonic canon of Black bio-nationalism. Here bio-
nationalism refers to a Black nationalism that attempts to define a corporate entity, through
the normative prescription inscription and proscription of bodily practices. Within this
nationalism, being Black is narrowly defined as a certain performance; a specific way of
talking, of dressing, of eating, and of course engaging in sexual relations. In this view, same-
sex practices are deviant, and corrupting. 85 Practices that are deviant corrupt an authentic
Blackness. In essence, a Black bio-nationalism can be viewed as a particular kind of
“normalized” notion of the true nature of Black women and men. One could argue that these
views appeal to white supremacist corporate structures and right-wing fundamentalist values.
As argued by Kobena Mercer, “one can see the sexual politics of, say, Minister Farrakhan and
the Nation of Islam as a ghostly photographic negative of the embattled, siege-mentality that
drives the fundamentalist offensive against liberal and radical democratic values” (Mercer,
1996: 121).

Nathan and Julia Hare also argue that “homosexuality, is a white liberal plot
masterminded to kill Black families and wipe out the entire race”(Hare and Hare, 1986: 65).
In addition, they believe that Black boys become gay because of the preponderance of white

85 The logic that tends to resonate with the above line of thinking is that if same-sex
practices are not "natural" to the Black race, that it was brought onto Blacks by whites, then
it can only be the lighter skin, ( Toni Morrison, 1970) Blacks that can be bullers, or batty
bwoys, because it is caused by the corruption and pollution of whites (Haki Madhubuti
1978).
female school teachers. White teachers, they argue, infiltrate Black day care centers, nurseries and primary schools, compelling Black boys to play with blond dolls in the name of progress (Hare and Hare, 1986: 66).

Haki Madhubuti, in *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous? The African American in Transition,* also adopts the “White Oppression Model” of Black men:

The U.S. White supremacy system’s aim is to disrupt Black families and neutralize “Black men,” and he states that one tactic is to make Black men into “so-called Women,” in which case the homosexual and bisexual activity becomes the “norm” rather than the exception. Men of other cultures do not fear the so-called “Womanlike” men of any race (Madhubuti, 1990:73-74).

Madhubuti’s stridently nationalist agenda can also be found in his poem “Don’t Cry, Scream.” He wrote:

“swung on a faggot who politely scratched his ass in my presence. He smiled broken teeth stained from his overused tongue, fisted-face. Teeth dropped in tunes with Ray Charles singing yesterday” (Madhubuti, 1969: 31).

The influential Afrocentricity of Molefi Asante blames the disintegration of the Black nuclear family on “an outburst of homosexuality among Black men, fed by the prison breeding system, which threatens to distort the relationship between friends and strong family bonds” (Asante, 1988: 57). Asante warns that “we can no longer allow our social lives to be controlled by European decadence.” He suggests that the time has come for us to redeem our manhood through planned Afrocentric action (57-8) modeled after ancient African warriors. Asante’s goal is to recover ancient African ideals and habits which he regarded as unpolluted by European decadence and to be relevant to the challenge of Black male heterosexual nationalism and Black diasporic nationalism. He also proposes a new canon of “academic” or Black consciousness heroes such as Shango, Ogotommeli, Nzingha, Obatala, Legba, Asantewa
and Ptahhotep (Asante, 1988: 57-8). Yet, he fails\textsuperscript{86} to make mention of the complexity of gender, sexuality and sexual practices between the Ashanti and Dahomey people of ancient West Africa, where same-sex practices occurred and were not viewed as a crime or as a “result” of the pollution by European decadence (Conner, 1993).

In the equally influential ISIS\textsuperscript{87} papers, Dr. Frances Cress Welsing attributes the entire disintegration of the Black community to “Black male passivity, efferminization, bisexuality and homosexuality” (Welsing, 1991: 81). This is achieved, according to Welsing, through repeated literal, ritual and symbolic castration. Dr. Welsing, in her therapy with Black male patients, argues that she uses the following method to assist weak Black men:

One method I have been using with all Black male patients-whether their particular disorders be passivity, efferminization bisexuality, homosexuality or other is to have them relax and envision themselves approaching and opposing in actual combat, the collective of white males and females (without an apology or giving up in the crunch). The fear of such a confrontation is at the basis of most Black male pathology. (Welsing 1991: 91-2).

This approach is interesting in that she assumes that same-sex practices make Black men weak sissies and nothing more than oppressed men.

Alvin Poussaint, the noted Harvard psychiatrist and adviser to the Cosby television show, state in an Ebony article that, “some Black men adopt homosexuality as a manoeuver

\textsuperscript{86}I am tempted to argue that Asante may not have been knowledgeable about the Ashanti and Dahomey people, hence his failure to introduce these complicated concepts into his theory of Afrocentricism.

Dr. Frances Cress Welsing (1991), in unveiling what she terms the true nature of white supremacy (racism) titled her book, "The ISIS (YSSIS) Papers: The Keys to Colors," after the most important Goddess of ancient Africa (specifically, Egypt). ISIS was the sister/wife of the most important Egyptian god, Osiris (Lord of the perfect Black) and the mother of Horus. In the astral interpretation of the Egyptian gods, ISIS was equated with the dog star Sirius (Sothis). According to legend, ISIS admired truth and justice and made justice stronger than gold and silver (Welsing, 1991: vii).
to help avoid the increasing tension developing between Black men and women” (Poussaint, 1987: 79). He also argue that the development of homosexuality among Black men makes them weak, emasculated and failing (Poussaint, 1987: 79).

The attack on Black masculinity as failing and conforming to a white male masculinity as effeminate and weak continues to dominate the agendas of most who critique or reject Black male homosexuality and espouse the argument of Black emasculation. The concept of Black male emasculation and the notion that new Black men are becoming an “endangered species” (Hare and Hare, 1986 and Madhubuti 1990) are being echoed by almost every Black nationalist in speeches and written messages to Black diasporic communities.

Pulitzer prize winner Toni Morrison also seems to believe that homosexuality was forced upon Blacks by the Europeans and that it is alien to African culture. In her novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), she scripted the stereotype of the “light - skinned” Black man as weak, effeminate and sexually impotent. Sopehead Church, “a Cinnamon-eyed West Indian with lightly browned skin, limited his sexual interests to little girls”. Morrison wrote this was so, “because he was too diffident to confront homosexuality and found little boys insulting, scary and stubborn.” (Morrison, 1970). In *Tar Baby*, Morrison wrote that “Black homosexual men were self-mutilating transvestites who had dumped their masculinity because they found the whole business of being Black and men at the same time too difficult” (Morrison, 1981). Morrison’s anxiety with same-sex eroticism parallels that of Frantz Fanon theorizing on the same subject matter.

Let me observe at once that I had the opportunity to establish the overt presence of homosexuality in Martinique. This must be viewed as the result of the absence of the Oedipus complex in the Antilles. The schema of homosexuality is well enough known. We should not overlook, however, the existence of what are called their ‘men dressed like women’ or ‘god-mothers’. Generally they wear shirts and skirts. But I am convinced that they lead normal
sex lives. They can take a punch like any 'he-man' and they are not impervious to the allures of women - fish and vegetable merchants. In Europe, on the other hand, I have known several Martincians who became homosexuals, always passive . . . (Fanon, 1967: 180).

Both Fanon's and Morrison's constructions of men who engage in same-sex practices seem to not only reflect their limited understanding of same-sex practices and gender relations, but support the Black nationalist and Black power rhetoric that if a man is a buller or batty bwoy he is effeminate, weak, sick and an enemy within. Likewise, Black consciousness cum activist Imamu Amiri Baraka argues that, “homosexuality is the most extreme form of alienation acknowledged within white society and it occurs among a people who lose their self-sufficiency because they depend on their subjects to do the world's work, thus rendering them effeminate and perverted.” (Baraka, 1966: 94).

Haki Madhubuti, in his book, *Enemies: the Clash of Races*, argues that there is a preponderance of Black homosexuals in the higher socioeconomic groups. As a result, it is a profound comment on the power of the system that [it] is able to transform Black men into sexual lovers of each other . . . On many Black college campuses [and in] the Black church, homosexuality and bisexuality have become an accepted norm (Madhubuti, 1978: 148).

An oxymoron in psychoanalytic theory, is that the existence of strong taboos against certain behaviors implies a strong tendency or desire of a people to perform that behavior. (Adam, 1978: 46) Maybe, deep inside the phantasmatic imaginary of Farrakhan, Cleaver, Staples, Welsing, Morrison, Poussaint and others there is a desire not to just explore but come to terms with their homosociality and homo-eroticism, that which is policed by a Black nationalist politic that hinders the full potential of their sexuality.
On the other hand, Black same-sex liberation, with its diffuse articulations of both place and power, would seek to be free of certain deterministic traps of identity politics. It is impossible for Black liberation to move beyond the simple play of these new and emerging differences, written as binary oppositions. Stuart Hall, for example, argues that there might be no difference at all (Hall 1993). The newness, Dent argues, “in any cultural politics of difference also depends on our being able to distinguish between these habits of difference, read through the mythic realm of culture and the emerging differences we must learn to read” (Dent, 1993: 6). Emphasis seems to be on maintaining only a heterosexist patriarchal institution and movement, even though there are challenges by bullers (among others) to transform it. Black diasporic communities should ask the fundamental question whose agendas are served by a Black bio-nationalistic discourse which sets up a regulatory politic that excludes buller men?

**Fear: Black Nationalist Discourse and Black Masculinity**

While Black activists, intellectuals and academics are not cited in everyday kitchen table discussions, their importance should not be underestimated. The approaches of Black nationalism are symbolic of the historical legacy of Black nationalist resistance to racialized domination, and in this respect, have wide popular resonance. Even if a person is unfamiliar with the details of nationalist policies, the nationalist agenda has been written into slogans such as “Black power,” “No justice no peace,” “Say it loud, I am Black and I am proud,” “Black is beautiful,” “Tall dark and handsome,” and “Young gifted and Black”. These cannot be dismissed as simply cliches. They signify a much desired, much needed agency. If the writing of Black intellectuals continues both to structure and be structured by the discourses of
communal life, a bionationalist agenda remains very much a priority and, hence in my view, a problem for Black liberation. This agenda asserts that same-sex desires and white racist domination continue to be attacks on the Black family. Given as we have already seen in thesis, the centrality of Black family values to notions of Black communal solidarity, it is no wonder that homophobia is so common.

The men I interviewed were asked about their understanding of Black nationalism and whether they were familiar with the literary works of Black nationalists. Most men knew very little of Black nationalist ideological, political or philosophical positions on people engaged in same sex practices. However, many of the men did acknowledge a clear awareness of the importance of Black nationalism, an importance fostered by informal popular culture and media representation.

Devon: I knew of these people [Black nationalist] from hearing my parents talk about them; watching television documentaries on Blacks in the U.S., Civil Rights Struggle, or from attending Black community events where they were guest speakers during Black History month, or the very Black activist might be here in Toronto to speak. I have also seen books written by these men in book stores, at display tables and at book fairs, Kwanzaa events and other small community gatherings.

A major symbolic locus for the expression of homophobic hatred in Black communities, it Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam. In response to my question regarding what an interviewee knew of Black nationalism, Andy was quick to cite the Nation of Islam as his point of reference.

Andy: You mean them people who does wear them funny clothes and hats and they hate us buller men with a passion and the men dress like they in the army and the women hide their face... their (the Nation of Islam) views on bullers is one of great hostility. One that is non accepting, religiously and morally wrong and they see it as a white man’s sickness and a threat to
their masculinity. You know, I do not think they see us as real men, we are feminine, sick people, who could never grow to become “real Men” because we have no positive Black male role models in our lives.

Similarly, Devon identified Farrakhan as a key Black nationalist figure. Not unsurprisingly, he expresses a measure of ambivalence about Farrakan since the Minister frequently addresses Black desires for empowerment and racial uplift, yet he understands fully-well the real threat inherent in Farrakan’s views.

Devon: I have always read Louis Farrakhan because I can identify with some of the things he is talking about that affect us as Black people. But he gets me mad when he starts to talk about buller men and batty bwoys and sissies.

W.C: Can you tell me a story of when you heard Farrakhan talk about bullers?

Devon: Yeah! I have gone to hear the Nation of Islam and Farrakhan talk. Every time they come to Toronto or I have even gone to Buffalo to hear them. And there haven’t been one talk that I went to where they didn’t find ah way to diss us bullers and batty bwoys.

W.C: Can you recall any thing that they have said about bullers and batty bwoys?

Devon: Yeah! They does always say and you young men who are sleeping with other men and feel that it is right, I tell you God almighty or Jah say it is not right. Another time Farrakhan started to walk feminine, flip his wrist and shake his arse and say those guys who are sleeping with men, I tell you it is a white man’s disease and that they are putting you into prisons and turning you out into sissies. You are the back bone of your family, don’t forget that: be a man, stand up and take responsibility.

Devon is here referring to a 1990 speech given by Minister Louis Farrakhan. This speech was videotaped and I cite here from this tape:
Now brothers in the Holy world you can't switch. [Farrakhan walks across the stage like an effeminate man] No, no no ... in the Holy world you better hide that stuff' cause if God made you for a woman, you can't go with a man......Sister get going with another sister - the penalty for that is death.... (Louis Farrakhan. The Time and What Must Be Done (videotape of a speech given on May 20th 1990, in Oakland, California, Produced by The Final Call, Inc., Chicago, Illinois).

Because of the homophobic violence expressed in the works by Farrakhan, Devon must turn to the works of Black same-sex writers whom he is not afraid of and whom he can relate to.

**Devon:** Yo see, lemme explain it to you. I read books and watch movies and documentaries by Black gays and lesbians like Audre Lorde, Essex Hemphill and Isaac Julien and them.

Because I do not like to read all them negative things from Black people. Ah think I could say I am afraid of Farrakhan and other people who think like him.

**W.C:** So why these Black writers and academics?

**Devon:** Because I can identify with them, I also think most of them are gay, and their work makes me feel good and proud to be a buller man and cock sucker and that there are some of us who are brave enough to write and say gay things that some of us Black bullers are not able to write and say.

The question of intentional addresses is important it highlights a process of identification for the Black men reading the works of Black same-sex writers who affirm their identity, while giving bullers an option to ignore the heterosexist writings of Black heterosexual academic writers.

The fear, of speaking out against heterosexism, homophobia and misogyny stems from the fact that some Black men fear that if they address these issues with too much empathy, their Black brothers will not accept them into the ranks of Black manhood, an it will increase the possibility of marked suspicion on their same-sex identity. Andy was quite clear on this point.
W.C: So are you afraid of the men from the Nation of Islam and those who support their views?

Andy: Quite frankly, yes!

W.C: What exactly are you afraid of?

Andy: Well I have attended lots of their talks and have read about them and quite frankly I think it is all violence they are expressing towards us gay people. And when I run into the brothers on the street, they are always talking about our Black women and how Black men are not living up to their responsibility. Because so many of us brothers are on drugs and how much we are losing to the prison system and homosexuality. Once I said to one of the guys from the nation of Islam, I do not see anything wrong with homosexuality and he almost eat off my head on the street corner. It is a good thing it was in public because I would have certainly feared for my life.

Minister Louis Farrakhan, in one of his most recent visits to Toronto prescribed “death” or “stoning” for homosexuality and he is not the only activist to do so. He further warned on October 15, 1996, "that the world is very short and that with Sodom & Gomorrah, God is displeased with the sinful state that the planet is in." (Farrakhan, October 15: 1996). I have personally heard Farrakhan theatrically exclaim: “Those of you homosexuals88, (as he walks flips his wrist and laugh) you weren’t born [that] way brother. You just never had a strong male image or role model” (Farrakhan, 1990). By not making reference to any other “biblical sin or gender,” and restricting the discussion to same-sex sexuality, Farrakhan polices the buller body and codes it as unclean, sinful, immoral and uncommitted to the Black cause.

88There is a certain amount of disdain in Black heterosexism towards Black men in ways that is not vocalized towards Black women who engage in same sex relationships. Hence the threat to his masculinity and to those he sees as the protector of women, leaders of the revolution, the home and community he addressed his fears towards. There is also the age old Black nationalist argument that the white racist fears the Black male more than another group of people on the face of the earth hence the Black male is an endangered species. (Hakim, Hare, Molifi, Farrakhan).
His address is a reminder of what Blacks should do to the bodies marked same-sex. The community must find them out and ostracize them. And he is not alone. Buja Banton (1991), a well-known “dance-hall\textsuperscript{89}” singer said, “shoot them,” referring to buller men, batty bwoys and sodomites and argues his case for making same-sex relationships and acts a criminal or deviant act punishable by death in Jamaica (Buja Banton, 1991). Recently, in Toronto, a contributor to the Rastafarian newspaper \textit{Uprising}, called upon batty bwoys and faggots “kill themselves and be eternally forgotten”\textit{(Uprising, 1996).} He further wrote, “any person with locks upon their heads and professing to be Rasta, while being participants in the ungodly crime of same-sex copulation, are wolves in sheep clothing . . . plain frauds”\textit{(Uprising, 1996).} This logic resonates with the fact that Blackness, and in this case “Rasta Blackness,” equates heterosexuality with a strong Black masculinity. The contributor further wrote, with bitter venom and authority, a message to all homosexuals, batty bwoys, lesbians and bisexuals, “we Rastifarians reaffirm our inalienable rights not to accept nor sympathize with your morally corroding lifestyle. Not caught, you can’t corrupt . . . your end will be abrupt. Believe it or not your time is up”\textit{(Uprising, 1996).}

Minister Louis Farrakhan’s and other Black academics’ public denunciations of same-sex relationships seem to be gender specific. Their heterosexism is almost always directed at men, less often at women. It would appear that the heterosexist perpetrator wants the buller, already invisible, to be a marked person, so that he can be punished or publicly embarrassed and so that the unmarked male heterosexist will not be mistaken for a buller man. Black

\textsuperscript{89}A type of reggae music marked by electronically produced based rhythms, but without the message-carrying lyrics characteristic of reggae; it is heavily influenced by pop-music themes but maintains the popularity of the reggae beat in dance-hall, hence the name.\textit{(Allsopp, 1996: 187).}
heterosexist nationalists and activists view same-sex relationships as a male’s debasement into femaleness and femininity. Richard Isay argued “that the fear of humanity per se is secondary in homophobic men to their fear and hatred as what they perceive as feminine in other men and in themselves” (Isay, 1989: 78). Heterosexism helps these Black men maintain the stereotypically constructed, masculinized persona. For them, the feminization of Black male culture is occurring. Consequently, most heterosexuals have a responsibility to stop any or all forms of intimacy or relationships that appear soft or feminine between men. Because of this perceived threat to Black manhood, some bullers felt it was much easier to be a woman who engages in same-sex relationships than to be a buller in Toronto Black communities.

**Carl:** I can recall walking up on Eglinton and Vaughan with two ah me lesbian friend them. And them was holding hands in front ah all these Black people and them ah get in no trouble. Also too, for most Black heterosexual brothers I think they feel that they could cure these two women men by simply having sex with them. So it is less threatening because they feel they could cure it, and for gay men, heterosexual brothers have to kill us because for them to have sex with us is to make them gay.

**W.C.:** Why do you think they did not get harassed?

**Carl:** Because I think they surprise the hell out of everyone and the people them was shock to see two man royals. And I strongly feel two men would get them arse bust because they would have been threatening the men them. And besides I think my girlfriends them might of fought back. They are big tough looking women.

Generally, bullers, especially stereotypically-constructed bullers, are seen as gender-benders, because they challenge or shakes up rigid gender boundaries within Black communities. Gender boundaries in Black communities are very rigid and the presence of stereotypically feminine bullers alone can be seen as a challenge to the traditional Black masculinized construction of Black manhood and Black masculinity. The idea that women
engaging in same-sex relationships are less of a threat to Black heterosexual men also reinforces and supports the patriarchal element of society, whereby men see themselves as superior to women, while the Black buller man embarrasses the Black community and threatens masculinity. I will now look at how all this affects the everyday lives of the men interviewed.

**Effects of Nationalists’ Hypermasculinity**

The fear and violence experienced by some men has forced them into acting straight and staying in the closet, as Neil tells us in his narrative.

Neil: Because I am in the closet I am afraid to support other Black bullers and batty bwoys when my friends or family are talking about them in a negative way. Because I also do not want to bring any shame on myself or suspicions from people who I respect and enjoy being around or where I work.

Some men see “acting heterosexual” staying in the closet and internalizing heterosexism as a process for the negotiation of their everyday survival. It might be that for some Black men coming out is unnecessary, or not an option, because it threatens their individual family, economic, psychological and communal ties. Some of these Black men may see themselves as bread-winners in society, hence coming to terms with a same-sex identity may effeminize them, serving to distract them from fundamental issues of survival and earning a living in a racist and sexist society.卡尔 explains this strategy in his daily encounters:

Carl: Them think me ah straight and ah go leave it like that, because I could fool them easier that way, act like ah man and provide all the information they need in my family and community to see me as a real man.

W.C: Why do you think they see you as “straight”? 
Carl: Because I do act cool and I am with them all the way, when they making jokes at batty bwoy and man-royals. I join in and sometimes my girl friends does call me at the barber shop or if I go to visit some of them. I does also act and dress very masculine, straight and macho in front of them. You know things like that I do around them so they always see me “straight.” I do not have the time to waste with “coming out” and all the problems that go with it, my life is hard enough being Black and poor. I need a good job and money; that is more important for me, not “coming out” and making a political statement.

Carl’s identity, at work as a heterosexual masculinist construction with family, is more important than coming out and making public his sexuality. The community is experienced through family ties and a network of other social investments and social locations.

Carl, like other Black men in this project, seems to genuinely enjoy family and community and therefore suppresses all aspects of same-sex that will jeopardize his community likes. Carl acts in a hypermasculine manner to camouflage his same-sex identity. He enacts personal protection against being accused of participating in the feminization of Black maleness.

W.C: Why do you feel you have to act in a hypermasculine, macho and straight way, when you are in the presence of heterosexual Black people?

Carl: Well if I do not do that, they would call me buller man, batty bwoy, faggot, sissy, sick and I also might be physically beaten up by them. So I avoid all unnecessary problems by fitting in, acting super macho, or hyper masculine as you said.

Acting macho and hypermasculine is central to the lives of many men as a means of mastery and autonomy over one’s environment and a way of projecting to others images which can be constructed as appropriately male. Neil, who was beaten up and harassed, explains that his hyper-masculine behavior arose after his negative experiences with fights and verbal harassment from Black men. He argues that today he is forced into acting macho to protect himself.
Neil: I was beaten up in school by a group of four Black boys when I was in high school.

W.C: What started the fight?

Neil: They called me batty bwoy when I was walking along the hallway. They were hanging in the hall way and I was walking down the hall going to my class. When they called me batty bwoys I said and ah dam proud to be one. Then one of the boys came from behind and kick me, then the three other guys jump on and beat the shit out of me.

W.C: Did anyone come to your rescue?

Neil: Yes the principal came to my rescue and he called the police and the boys were given assault charges.

W.C: How has this affected your life as a buller/gay man?

Neil: Well I think if anything I started to become very angry inside myself for being gay. So one day I saw one of the boys alone who had beaten me up in school and I kicked the shit out of him and cut him with a knife and I was charged later.

W.C: What happened when you went to court?

Neil: When I went to court the crown decided to drop my charges because she argued it was a rare circumstance, because I was reacting to gay bashing from a group of homophobic macho young men. But this violence was used only as my defense to the hatred and anger I have inside me for men or people who are homophobic and especially those who are violent towards me. I do not like anyone abusing me.

W.C: Why did the crown drop the charges?

Neil: She said they were flexing their macho muscles on the wrong person.

Another respondent, who labels himself a transsexual, shared with me his experiences of violence. Unable to adopt hypermasculinity as a negotiating survival mechanism within Black structures of dominance. This may be in part due to his parents support of him being a
buller. However, his choosing not to adopt a hypermasculine front for survival has led to the following:

**Laqueshia:** I live in Scarborough and one of the things I like to do is drag performance and I leave home in dresses most times. You know what happened to my grandmother house? Well they throw eggs at it and if that wasn’t enough the next thing they did was beat me up one day and tell me to leave the community. And they were all young Black men.

**W.C.:** Who are they?

**Laqueshia:** It was young Black men very macho acting and very, very homophobic. Another time I went to the community center to play and I had make up on and ah group of ruf neck Black boys kick the shit out of me.

**W.C.:** And what did you do?

**Laqueshia:** Well the worker at the community center call the cops and the boys got charged, but I did not go to court to follow up on the charges, because I just couldn’t be bothered with the hassles. I was also afraid of what might happen to me again if the boys were charged, so I just dropped the whole thing. I also know of lesbians who were beaten up by their brothers and fathers when they found out that they were lesbians. When I found out about these two women who were friends of mine I felt that I wasn’t alone and just moved on with my life.

**W.C.:** So this must be very painful for you and others who have had to experience this violence?

**Laqueshia:** Well yes, but what can we do, the community I think encourages homophobic violence and the police does not really seem interested in helping. So you do feel alone and it is worst when your family is telling stop dressing that way and all the violence will go away.

**Laqueshia’s** narrative informs us that “she” has lost hope in the Black community and in law enforcement for same-sexed people. His exposure to violence reinforces the views expressed by some Black nationalists and institutions embracing violent views against same-sexed people.
Conclusion:

The above narratives lays out a number of challenges, beginning with a historical view that examines Black nationalist contributions from the 1960s to the present. The Black same-sex epistemology that is expressed in the above narratives sees Black masculinity as a complex mapping of desires and is challenged and criticized by the men whom this dissertation is primarily about. Baldwin wrote in Notes Of a Native Son (1984) that because he loved America "more than any other country in the world," he insisted on the right to "criticize her perpetually," (Baldwin, 1984: 9). Our love for Black men demands no less. Constructions of Black heteronomative identity that served as an indispensable tool for Black militant nationalist at one point in the struggle for Black liberation and Black solidarity have become an unwitting trap. Black same-sexed Canadians have borne the heavy costs exacted by the rigid adherence to the illusory oppressive ideal of a unitary Black identity and Black masculinity. The exclusion of these men from full participation in Black communal life has provided an epistemological standpoint for understanding and intervening in the politics of life and death.

In the spirit of James Baldwin, bullers and batty bwoys have as their challenge to continue to argue clearly and without compromise that they have nothing to apologize for nor feel guilty about. On the contrary, the burden of shame should be shifted onto Black bio-nationalists and those who instituted the hegemonic discourse of Black authenticity which continues to sow violence in Black communities. Recognizing this shame requires accepting the responsibility to critically and constructively work for the transformation of the basis for communal solidarity. Critical here for Black nationalists is not simply a question of the arbitrary and coercive espousal of premises, percepts and categories, but rests instead on the kinds of coherent thought that can actually lead to the eradicating of the policing of the Black
same-sexed body and greater participation of bullers and batty bwoys. A critical appraisal of Black nationalism will therefore seek to address the injustices and violence of Black nationalists and institutions embracing hegemonic views against bullers.

Teaching a critique of Black heteronormativity which generates the terms of oppression in the lives of bullers, will not itself bring about a transformation in communal practices. Hopefully, however, it will enable heterosexual bio-nationalists to travel with a different consciousness of their world and our place as bullers within it. What we are still seeking is a collective power to transform what is humane and unjust within our/their current circumstances.
Chapter Six

The Struggle for Fun and Love

Introduction:

Buller men's lives are not only about oppression, pain and suffering. Despite the oppressiveness of mainstream white racist society and the threat and exclusion of heterosexist Black communities, buller men nevertheless do negotiate connections of passion, joy and intimacy. In my conversations with the men interviewed for this study, many of them spoke about the things they like to do for pleasure and the satisfaction they derive from loving relationships. To present an adequately textured understanding of the lives of buller men living in Black communities, it is necessary to state these facts. Yet, as is shown below, the possibilities and opportunities for pleasure - both interpersonal and aesthetic - are also subject to the constraining influence of the structures of dominance explored in this thesis. Pleasure, too, is an experience that must be negotiated within the normative structures of Black communal living.

Geographies of Pleasure

I start this exploration of the struggle for fun and love with an excerpt from George discussing his geography of pleasure.

George: I belong to a Black men's group which I think is about six years old and a group for older men, mostly white. From within these two groups I have created a network of friends whom I hang with.

W.C: What are some of the things you do and places you socialize in?
George: We go to the opera, ballet, live plays, theaters, gay pride, summer picnics, clubs, traveling, parks, socials at friends’ homes the regular stuff that heterosexuals do.

The fact that a Black same-sex men’s group was not able to emerge until roughly six years ago indicates the degree of erasure of same-sex experience in Black communities, confirming the analysis suggested above. However, the activities listed by George produce their own geographies of resistance and pleasure.

W.C: What are some of the things you do with family?

George: Well it is hard to have the same kind of fun with family, especially in my old age.

W.C: Why?

George: Because not all my family knows about me. They all do not know that I fool around with men, so there are places I do not go with them. You see some of them know I had a girlfriend and they know of my children, but they do not know the rest of the story. So I reserve gay things for my gay friends only.

W.C: What are some of the fun things you do with family?

George: Christmas dinners, birthday parties, backyard bar-b-ques, Sunday dinner, very mundane things. But when I am with my gay friends I would go to drag shows, gay clubs and do gay things that we need to do in order to remind ourselves that we are human beings.

George distinguishes between the different types of activities he considers pleasurable, noting that Black communal norms of heterosexuality enforce a disarticulation of his social life. Lennox and Devon, as discussed earlier, reiterate this theme of a necessary, and perhaps desirable, split in their geography of pleasures. What is interesting about these Black gay men’s geographies of resistance is that they also happen in the midst of other hegemonic practices. These men make these spaces same-sexed or homoerotic, by their very presence, by claiming
their right to be there in sometimes flamboyant and obvious ways. While the notion of geography suggests a static location, the lives of these men suggest that urban spaces dominated by hegemonic discourses can be infiltrated and contested at multiple levels, as Lennox's narrative suggests.

Lennox: I think it is fun to dress in hot GQ labels, the trend for the month, or the season and I like to watch fashion television and buy the wear they suggest. I go to public events like Ballet, live theater and even Caribana.

W.C: Are there any other things you do for fun?

Lennox: I love reading, going to the movies and cooking, with family and friends whenever it is possible.

Family and friends seem omnipresent in most of the men’s narratives indicating how close most of the men are to their families and communities. Socialization with family also secures one's heterosexuality or helps camouflage one's same-sex practices. Devon makes the link between family and geographies of pleasure quite effectively.

Devon: I like Caribbean plays, comedies and stuff like that; it part of me and my culture. My family also like it, so I always go out with my family to see Caribbean plays, comedies and attend Caribbean-style events and shows. For me, enjoying culture is a big thing and my family is a big part of my life, so I always do things with them that I do not think I will enjoy in the same way with other gay people. I also take my children to things that I think might interest them, that is also lots of fun.

Devon's socialization with his immediate family is limited to heterosexual events, suggesting that he is uncomfortable about going to same-sex spaces with them. But he also says that he enjoys his culture very much and that his culture is maintained through constant contact with his family.
Devon: I find that a lot of gay men do not like to go to straight Black spaces so it is hard, I think, for them to have a good time, so I like to just go with my family and enjoy myself.

Devon clarifies why the geography of pleasures is split for many buller men. Remember that Devon is “not out.” The consequence of this is that it would be dangerous for him to attend “Caribbean style events” with same-sex friends. It is not just a matter of one group of associates having a preference for particular activities over others, bullers like to do this, straights don’t, but also that the structures of dominance that regulate Black communal life enforce the realities that certain types of pleasures cannot be experienced by bullers and batty bwoys together with other heterosexuals present. For example, if a Black man brings his male partner, regardless of race, to a communal event, both men will be subject to various forms of policing and violence. In communal settings, Black men cannot easily embrace their identifications as bullers and participants in Caribbean culture, except for when it is hidden. Because the identification for Black men is tied into a form of public masculinity that makes problematic all forms of male to male bonding, such bonding always marked by the suspicion it may be same-sexed.

For some men, this splitting leads to the construction of alternative family forms which, depending on whether one is or isn’t estranged one is from one’s biological family, can be either a substitute or complement. Here two men with very different relations to their biological families - Michelle is estranged, Laqueshia has family acceptance - express the

90 Black men who engage in same-sex relations do have access to forms of Black homosocial bonding, however these forms of homosocial bonding are limited to activities and sports constructed as masculine. No where is this clearer than in dominoes, cricket, soccer and card games that are limited to male participation.
importance of close geographical social relations. Both are “out” bullers, who do drag performances.

Michelle: I like to go to things like gay pride day and watch people and I like to go to warehouse parties and coffee shops and shop for expensive things. I find I get more fun with my boy friend and his friends, who we call one big happy family. Traveling is also a big part of my life and that is always done with my gay friends.

W.C: Any fun things within the Black heterosexual community?

Michelle: No, I cannot be bothered, it is too much stress.

W.C: What do you mean by too much stress?

Michelle: I do not like being harassed when I go out to have a good time, so I avoid all Black spaces as much as possible to have a good time.

Michelle’s struggle to socialize in Black communal space without being harassed is also echoed by Laqueshia, who informs us that he does not like socializing within Black heterosexual community events. Both Laqueshia and Michelle are “drag queens,” which might suggest that their flamboyant dispositions may also make heterosexual community members uncomfortable.

Laqueshia: I do not like to go to Black heterosexual spaces or attend their events because I get laughed at and harassed all the time, because of my feminine side. But I do things with my family because they give me a sense of belonging and community which is very important for me. So if I do socialize in the community it is only with my family.

For Laqueshia, relation to his family is crucial in the development of his social life because he is also “out” to them. Being “out” makes his socialization with family much easier.
For men not “out” to their immediate families creating a geography of difference for socialization is crucial. Sometimes bullish men actively construct social geographies of difference, an activity which, in itself, is experienced as pleasurable. One example of this construction is found in a very particular gestural language of “finger snapping,” as is evident in Lennox’s narrative.

Lennox: I like to . . . do the finger snapping and reading of people especially when I am in straight social settings. I saw it in Marlon Riggs film and really fell in love with the idea.

Marlon Riggs, in his documentary Tongues Untied, demonstrates the use of snapping or snapology as a nonverbal means of communicating among Black same-sex men in urban American culture. As Lennox explains, this practice makes possible a separate social space defined on a bullish’s terms.

W.C: Why is this so important to have a language different from other Blacks?

Lennox: Well it does two things for me.

W.C: What is that?

Lennox: First it creates a social space for me and my friends among people who we are afraid of, and two, it is just plain fun to be able to communicate without other people knowing what you are talking about I love it.

In essence, this practice allows Lennox and his friends the possibility of laughing at people who usually laugh at them by creating a counter-hegemonic discourse of exclusion.

On the other hand, respondents like Michael, who at times attend Black communal events, speak more often of humiliation than pleasure. Michael’s narrative below informs us how he has been “othered” through practices that others experience as popular comedy.

W.C: Can you tell me a bit about that experience?
Michael: My self and a group of friends went to a fundraiser, no, correction! We were actually invited to this fundraiser for a Black organization called "Each-One Teach-One."91

W.C: Can you tell me what took place at the function?

Michael: Well a group of us went to this comedy night fundraiser function for "Each-One Teach-One" thinking we should support this organization because of some of the people in the organization and their commitment to working with disenfranchised youth. At this fund-raiser they had a stand up comedian who started to make his buller-man and batty-bwoy jokes. So there I was sitting with my other friends and we started to look at each other while the crowd laughed and he continued his buller man and batty bwoy jokes. Now at this time I am fuming inside, my friends and I are getting angry. Here we are saying we came out to support an organization and have a good time. Instead it was a big smack in the face.

W.C: So what did you or you all did next?

Michael: I went up on the stage and looked him right in his face and said "I am one of those batty bwoys you are talking about, I do not think it is funny and you should stop making those jokes right now." Then my other friends joined in and confronted him too.

W.C: What happened next?

Michael: Well the organizers said we could have handled it differently, but they also got him to stop. But it did not end there.

W.C: What do you mean?

Michael: The comedy is now over and the dance part to the function starts. The first song the disc jockey started to play was "Boom Bye Bye," by Buju Banton92. I felt as though it was a direct

91"Each One, Teach One, promotes achievement, excellence, success, unity, awareness, pride, identity, self-esteem and self-reliance accomplished through volunteers who act as role models to the youths who need help." (Excerpt from Each One, Teach One pamphlet).

92Buju Banton, is a Jamaican dance hall Reggae singer. In his 1993 hit "Boom Bye Bye," Banton sings "in a batty bwoy head . . . two men hug up and kiss up and lay up and ah lay down in a bed. Shoot them now come mek we shoot them pow! (1993).
stab at us, but at this point we thought that it was hopeless and left the event, so much for our fun evening.

Here, previously muffled voices and people are com out to support a Black heterosexual mainstream organization, but met with humiliation, verbal attacks and an unwelcoming, hostile environment for bullers. The geographies of pleasure are radically contained. Michael and his friends willingness to support Black institutions and claim a space in the community is challenged by members affiliated with Each One, Teach One. Their right to participate is hindered by the ridiculing of their sexual practices by those who perceive them to be less human or insignificant. In their struggle to contest these practices, Black men experience what bell hooks terms the dual nature of marginality, where marginality is a site of alienation and deprivation as well a site of resistance (hooks, 1984/90). When bullers and batty bwoys move from the oppressive margins of heterosexism in Black communities to disrupt narratives of Black diasporic heterosexual domination, their actions of support for institutions like Each One, Teach One become transformed into political activism. But this is neither fun nor necessarily productive on an individual basis. Here the marginalization of the men who are marked bullers sustains the conflict and division within Black diasporic communities.

Same-sex issues continue to pose a major challenge to the construction of Black heterosexist diasporic communities, to the latter’s assimilation and acceptance of Black people engaging in same-sex practices. Bullers are constantly negotiating their survival as they struggle with different forms of Black communal and solidarity movements and organizations. Their struggle is enhanced when they attempt to create their own sites of pleasure and negotiate their position on same-sex practices within Black communities. Michael’s struggle against Each One, Teach One find a parallel in the words of Lorde;
it is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled . . . how to make common causes with those identified as outside the structures . . . and learning how to take our differences and make them our strengths . . . (Lorde, 1984: 112).

As bullers slowly become visible their presence creates moments disruptive to Black heterosexist and Black nationalistic views and institutions. This disruption is not, however, unredeemingly negative, for it at least sets in motion the project of reviewing communal positions on same-sex practices and relationships. What was initially defined as a public space of celebration, becomes a public space of contestation for fun and enjoyment. The possibility of fun is displaced into political work involving confrontation with homophobic structures of dominance.

**The Struggle For Black Love**

For most of the Black men interviewed, having a relationship with a Black partner was very important. But for some bullers, relationships referenced practices and not necessarily a same-sex or bisexual identity; others felt it was necessary to define or label their practices around a politics of identity. The following narratives capture the complex issues of naming practiced in some of the men’s relationships.

**W.C.** Are you currently in a relationship?

**Lennox:** Yes.

**W.C:** Can you tell me a tell me about your partner and the relationship you share with him?

**Lennox:** Well his name is Junior and he is Black and comes from the Caribbean, his family does not know that he sleeps with men. Our relationship has struggles around public affection because he is not out, he fears we will be beaten up by Black folks and he is not as conscious as he should be around Black gay politics and the Black community. I also think politically, culturally and socially my life would be much easier being with a Black person.
On the one hand, *Lennox* explicitly acknowledges that there is a problem of being “out” publicly between two bullers. He asserts a need to stand up and contest the erasure and violence against bullers in Black communities. There is an implication here that violence is a political issue to be struggled with, for bullers and batty bwoys in Black communal settings who wants to make their same-sex identities public. What this means for *Lennox* and his lover Junior is that they must negotiate how public they want to be in the presence of Black folks, or risk the violence that may be directed towards them.

It is also important to examine what is at stake in Black men loving or not loving Black men. *Lennox reflects on* this:

**W.C:** How does being with a Black partner make your life easier politically, culturally and socially?

**Lennox:** Well first I think that we share a common history and identity around what it means to live in a racist society. The other thing is we also are from the Caribbean and eat the same food and understand family and community in ways that we do not have to explain to each other. Also being with a Black man is a very powerful statement in this era of Black self-hatred, racial oppression and all the shit that is going on in Black communities. Then there is the issue of food, as simple as it might sound when I feel to eat some good spicy, hot Caribbean food I do not have to worry about if he go like it or not. To eat that food with someone who share your cultural background makes the food tastier. No white man could relate to me on these levels and this is important for me to have in a relationship.

There is some tension in *Lennox*’s position, for while he argues that “being with a Black person will make it easier for him politically, socially and culturally,” he explicitly refers to social terms only. He does not address the political implications of Black male same-sex relationships in relationship to the communal violence directed towards bullers generally, nor
does he talk about the role of the church and family in their lives. Rather he seeks to engage in a discussion that suggests he has a relationship that is free from communal harassment.

W.C: How would you best describe the relationship between you and Junior?

Lennox: Very open, honest, loving and supportive. We are not into the role playing shit that some Black men get into and we are also both very independent. We also attend lots of Black community events together here in Halifax, something I don’t feel I could have done with a white man. To walk with a white person into Black events just does not feel right. I feel as though he is taking up the space of a Black person and that he will bring onto me unnecessary problems and questions that I do not want to deal with from other Black folks.

W.C: Do you have any opinions on interracial relationships?

Lennox: You know, each to his own.

W.C: What are some of the issues that Black men are dealing with in Halifax?

Lennox: Well we are, I find it to be a very religious community. There are high rates of unemployment, high school dropouts, police violence, poverty, bisexuality and homophobia in our communities for Black men to confront all these issues, still do community activism and deal with each other. I think they have to be strong. And I am yet to hear of any discussions in our community or the church about gay men and AIDS, homophobia or lesbianism, so we are far from close to making gay people feel welcomed in the Black community. We are silenced as Black gay people. So just put all of this together and you will understand why some of us may have white boyfriends, feel so silenced, not come out or take political positions on gay and lesbian issues. So these are some of the things that I think leads to us being silenced and self-hating.

Lennox highlights the importance of church, community and activism for Black Nova Scotians in addressing some of the communal needs he experiences on a daily basis. He also speaks to the issues of silencing, marginality and oppression that Black communities face and how these issues make it harder for men engaging in same-sex practices to be out publicly. He
argues that the lack of actual positive support for men engaging in same-sex practices, contributes to silencing and self-hatred. Lorde asked, “What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence?” (Lorde, 1984: 41). Silencing buller voices by bio-nationalists, presents a barrier to Black communal solidarity, which Lennox seems to identify with, but is not given the opportunity to voice. His desire for dialogue is met by impenetrable barriers between Black heterosexual communities and Black same-sex men. Black solidarity is weakened through a sexual politic of difference that silences and marginalizes gay men. The resultant division among Blacks is multilayered and profound. What lies at the heart of this division, I believe, is a communal heterosexism fueled by a desperate need for a convenient “other” within Black communities. This is an “other” whom Black nationalists, church leaders and activists can blame for the disintegration of Black family values and mores an “other” who is not truly living up to their expectations of Black manhood, who could be blamed for the identity crisis afflicting the Black male psyche.

But this is not the only division heteronormativity enacts. For Devon, Black solidarity cuts across all sexual lines and differences.

Devon: Well the brothers will come in the club and pass in front of you and not see you. You should try talking to them and see how they avoid talking to you or they thus play head games with you. Like I will be back in a minute, just going to use the bathroom and never return. You know it is stuff like that I am talking about. Most brothers do not understand that if we love another that we could only have a special thing between ourselves that helps to build something empowering for our community.

Devon’s thoughts on Black solidarity, Black love and Black consciousness resonate with those of Ron Simmonds. Simmonds advocates a form of Black same-sex consciousness
among Black men in the United States (Simmonds, 1991). His philosophy as a Black same-sex man leaves much for Black bio-nationalists to consider in their doctrines of Black emancipation and Black liberation. He tells us that:

We should acknowledge the “sensitivities” and “talents” within us, the root of which is Black gay genius . . . As we balance and synthesize the male and female energy within our souls, we come closer to the Supreme Being. The inner voice tells us that our feelings of love are righteous. Black men loving Black men is indeed a sacred act (Ron Simmonds, 1991: 214).

Simmons argues that we should acknowledge the “sensitivities”, and acknowledgment that Devon finds lacking in the Black men he encounters in clubs. Devon’s narrative of Black love expresses a great deal of anger and frustration.

W.C: How does this make you feel, being ignored by Black men in clubs?

Devon: Well I get very angry when I am treated like that by Black men because I expect it from white men, not from my kind. Even more disturbing is how they like to talk about love, respect and support for each other. Oh we must love one another and we must support each other whenever we can and stuff like that, it means nothing. Because none of them practice it, most of them have white boyfriends so in the end they are all for themselves.

Interracial relationships signal a pressing question within buller man politics. Devon presents us with the question: What influence does interracial relationships have on the development of a Black male same-sex politic? In Marlon Riggs film, Tongues Untied, Riggs revitalized Black male same-sex cultural politics by declaring that “Black men loving Black men is the revolutionary act of our times.” The power of this statement in its marking of the complex intersections of the mythos of miscegenation, Black male identity, Black sexuality, 93

93Here Riggs, who himself was in a white relationship, sees the act of Black men loving Black men as a type of perfect utopian revolution or liberation to be achieved or desired.
Black masculinity, and Black nationalism. But the same intersections, which charge the statement with its teasingly transgressive and radically unifying revolutionary potentialities, also serve to reveal the disjointedness of its liberatory vision. Is it possible to talk about a project of Black men loving Black men as a form of Black nationalism when what is at stake is differing racial and sexual desires? Andy, another respondent, also indicated that he felt interracial relationships were a form of betrayal to the Black race and an insult to other brothers.

W.C: How so Andy?

Andy: Well we live in a racist society and sleeping with white people is like sleeping with the enemy and besides they only want us for one thing

W.C: What is that one thing?

Andy: Yo’ know, they think we are great sex maniacs and all of us have big dicks and can fuck all day they don’t even have sensible conversations with us. They try to talk about eating jerk chicken, curry goat and rice and peas, as though that is all Black people do all day.

Fanon, in his classic text, *Black Skin White Mask*, wrote on the relationship between Black and white men, observing that, “the Negro, because of his body, impedes the closing of the postural schema of the white man” (Fanon, 1964: 160). The sexualization of racism or the hyperbolic virility by which white gay men view bullers reduces them to a penis or sexual object. “The Negro is taken as a terrifying penis” (Fanon, 1964: 177). The sexualization of racist logic, according to Calvin Herton, “arises from the phallic projections and anal-sadistic orientations in European culture that endow African men and women with sexual prowess” (Herton, 1970). The myth that Black men have larger penises or are better in bed is one that I and the other respondents are trying to overcome in our challenge to white men, by
demystifying their racist logic. Kobena Mercer, in his dossier on Black masculinity, argues that this racist stereotyping myth of Black men "arises from the core beliefs of classical biologising racist ideology which held Africans to be 'inferior' in mind and morality also on account of their bodies" (Mercer, 1988: 119). Andy's political and social commitment to Black love and Black pride is further concretized when he tells us that his relationships and desires will always be for Black men.

Andy: Because white men can't relate to our oppressions. And for me I love my Black community and will continue to go to events in the Black community. Can you see me taking a white boy in the Black community?

Andy's notion of desire is linked to what Isaac Julien discusses with bell hooks the ways in which within certain strands of Black nationalism and desire get constructed so that "being with a Black person is kind of an end point" (Julien 1992: 130). Hooks and Julien stress, however, that the intersections of discourses on miscegenation and same-sex practices reveal the ways in which simply "being with a Black person" is always already a mediated experience. Julien, commenting further on desire in his film Young Soul Rebels, wrote that:

Desire is - will always be - the axis along which different forms of cultural policing will take place. And the desire across racial and sexual lines was the site for constructing my film. The crossing of these lines causes anxiety, undermines binary notions of self/other, Black/white, straight/queer (Julien, 1998: 11).

Desire, then can be seen as a quest for the recognition of something that can be proved both aesthetically and politically to a particular end. It follows that if an informed sexual desire is policed, whatever form it takes or is subject to, it will constantly be influenced by the cultural narratives of the day. To this end, Julien's assessment and formulation of the peculiar transgressive logic in his own work, highlights desire as a force and symbol of either radical
transformation or radical and traumatic stasis. It is clear that his work attempts to come to terms with and "settle" for himself the problematic of desire, as it is figured within an African Diasporic tradition, particularly as it is figured within Black discourses of Black cultural nationalism.

Andy’s narrative tells us that the discourses surrounding interracial same-sex relationship’s makes his same-sex practices/identity more public and easily detectable. Such publicity he tries to erase and hide by being with other Black men. For him being with other Black men reduces the public suspicion of his being a buller, because the stereotype after all is that “Black men are not gay.” For Andy being with a white partner is like:

Andy:  walking with a flag in my hand, saying traitor and batty bwoy all in one (laughter). Then there is so many ignorant Black people who already think that being a batty bwoy means that you could only be getting the diseases from white boys. I will only be confirming that for them. It is also hard enough being Black and gay in the Black community and white boys will only make it harder for you to survive within the Black community.

This philosophy deeply echoes the Black power and Black nationalism movements of the sixties. Many of the bullers interviewed believed when they were young that only white men were “gay”. The choice of not wanting to take a white partner with him into a Black community event, highlights Andy’s discomfort about being out in Black communal living. Andy reinforces the notion that the prejudice and ignorance of some members of the Black community threaten same-sex men’s feelings of safety.

Race alienation and rejection are not unique to the Black heterosexual community. Many bullers also construct Black-white relationships as traitorous, but for different reasons than Black heterosexual nationalists. Some of the bullers interviewed felt if bullers are with a white person they cannot fully commit themselves to the struggle for Black solidarity. They
see interracial relationships as contradictions. The question that arises here is: If it is contradiction, why do some people publicly choose to engage in these relationships? Racial authenticity insists that “true niggers ain’t gay” (Ice Cube, 1991). Is the policing of the body and its practice of interracial relationships a constructive form of Black consciousness, although it is same-sex? This is not to suggest that some Blacks engage in same-sex relationships to become “white” in order to be gay. Rather I am suggesting that Black communities bio-nationalism and homophobia compels some men who have same-sex desires to seek it outside of the Black community to maintain their safety and at the same time experience their same-sex desires.

Overall, what appeared to be relevant to the men’s geographies of pleasure and their narratives about racial preference in lovers or sexual partners is the manner in which the men explained their position in reference to ideological racial discourse or their prior experiences and future expectations of others in their communal relations. In other words, “prior Black communal negative experiences” affected their Black membership and masculine performance investments in future relationships personally and communally. For Mercer, the construction of “Black male identity” and notions of “Black masculinity” are terms which are value-laden, socially-loaded and ideologically-charged (Mercer, 1988). Mercer and Julien write in their “Dossier on Black Masculinity” that:

Black men . . . are implicated in the . . . landscape of stereotypes . . . organized around the needs, demands and desires of white males . . . The repetition of these stereotypes in gay pornography betrays the circulation of colonial fantasy: that is a rigid set of racial roles and identities which rehearse scenarios of desire in a way which traces the cultural legacies of slavery, empire and imperialism (Mercer and Julien, 1988: 133).
Mercer and Julien further note that, “shaped by this history, Black masculinity is a highly contradictory formation as it is a subordinated masculinity” (Mercer and Julien, 1988:112).

But not all of the respondents shared the same opinion on Black masculinity and interracial relationships. There were other men who felt that interracial relationships were not an issue in their lives. Given that interracial relationships is not a problem for all Black men, it disrupts the racial authenticists view who oppose miscegenation and same-sex practices. It also poses a serious challenge to the concept of formulating a Black same-sex politic when it is wrought by challenges of interracial relationships. This excerpt of needs narrative addresses this issue:

Neil: I have no problem with interracial relationship because it is hard to tell a person who they could love and not love. I am cool with it because people can learn things from each other.

W.C: Like what?

Neil: Well they could learn about each other culture, values and stuff like that. And besides it is easier to be with a white person than a Black one because the white community is less homophobic than the Black community.

W.C: How so?

Neil: I was walking with my white boyfriend one day and a group of Black men start to harass us calling us Batty men and buller boys. We didn’t do anything to attract the harassment, but that is how they are. Now I have never been harassed in the white community with my boyfriend who is white. Now why is that? It is so because we (Black people) are less tolerant about gay people than are white people, we are more ignorant. Do you know of any Black gay social services in our community that supports family and friends? I don’t know of any, because we do not see it as important. So my relationships will always be with white men because I do not care about what others have to say about me.
Neil's anger and frustration, caused by the lack of support by the Black community for same-sex relationships is one of the challenges in his daily life. His anger towards Black communities and Black men may also be a reflection of how Black men internalize the dominant culture's racist notions that Black communities are uncivilized and backward; widespread homophobia in the Black community is seen as a symptom of such backwardness. Men like Neil tend to over-value the white community as accepting. The options are very limited, given the homophobia in Black communities and racism within white communities. Such no-win situations make Neil's adamancy about sleeping with white men, an important point. He is very adamant about the fact that his sexual partners will not be policed because he has to negative his safety and feels that his sexual preferences shall not be policed along racial lines, which allows him to conclude that Black communities are more violent and homophobic.

W.C: Have you had any other homophobic experiences in Black communities that allows you to qualify the Black community as being more homophobic that white communities?

Neil: Yes! My mother is a good example; if she hears anything about gay people she gets very mad and say things like "they should kill them, they sick, they spreading AIDS" and if any of her children are batty men she would throw them out of the house.

**Bisexuality, Hyper-Masculinity and Identity**

Mariana Valverde argues that bisexuality as a category was common practice but "bisexual networks and identities really only emerged after the recent wave of gay liberation and feminism had already emerged" (Valverde, 1985: 110-20). In the anthology *Bi Any Name: Bi-Sexual People Speak Out*, Loraine Hutchins and Lani Kaahumanu are critical of gay culture "for perpetuating a sexual code that privileges sexual object-choice as definitive of sexual
identity and that assumes identities neatly fold into a heterosexual or homosexual one" (Loraine Hutchins and Lani Kaahumanu, 1991: xx). This explanation embraces the experiences of those individuals for whom sexual orientation is not a mutually exclusive choice; or for whom a one-dimensional sexual orientation fails to adequately address their gendered experiences: homo-erotic, or hetero-erotic. Prescribing a fixed homo/hetero identity is problematic and therefore easily rejected because of its inherent instabilities and exclusionary practices. In my interviews with Black men the concept of bisexuality continually destabilized any narrow definition of homo/hetero polarity. Some of my interviewees, despite their having sex with other men, did not want to identify themselves as Black same-sex men, bullers or, bisexuals. Bill’s narrative foregrounds a number of complex unanswered questions about identity and identity formation. These questions prod us to examine what same-sex or buller men’s identities are.

Bill: I am still living with my girlfriend and two children. Sex with men is just something I do outside of my relationship. The way I live this double and sometimes triple life is hard for me to label or explain. I do not see sex with men as something that forces me to call myself gay. If anything, I would call myself bisexual for the interview because I know what you are doing. But other than that I am Bill, no labels please.

Bill’s desire not to label his same-sex practices forces us to recognize that the issue of identity politics is neither simple nor static, but is contradictory and often very mixed with constructions of gender and race. One explanation for understanding Bill’s disaffiliation from the label of bisexual would be that it threatens his gendered status as masculine. The label bisexual carries with it associations of effeminacy and a sexual stigma labeled as deviant. This however does not invalidate the label.

W.C: How do you usually label yourself or the sexual acts with men?
Bill: I do not like labels or to label myself as buller man, gay, bisexual or all ah that. I just don’t think of labeling what I do, but as I said for this interview I am bisexual (laughter).

There is another issue at stake here for Bill and other bisexual Black men. Often, there tends to be great hostility towards people who identify as bisexual. The alienation a Black bisexual faces from the white gay and lesbian community and from Black communities discourages Black men from embracing such an identity. For Black women, to find out that their male partners are having sex with other women, is cause for community, self and family shame, to find their partners having sex with other men is catastrophic. Men like Bill go to great lengths to protect their “gender,” “race” and “masculinity” by eschewing labels. In the narrative to follow Bill explains why he rejects labels.

W.C: Can you tell us why you do not accept sexual labels?

Bill: Because we really do not need it, in the end I will do what I want to do and you will do what you want to do. Like I do not think that heterosexual men who have sex in prison are gay or bisexual. I see it as something they do in the absence of women. As for married men who have sex with other men I just see it as something they try with no commitment to it. I do not see myself living my life around this gay identity and gay politics.

W.C: Does your girlfriend and children or any other family member know about your sexual desires, encounters and experiences with men?

Bill: No!

W.C: Any particular reason why no one knows?

Bill: Because it is not up for moral judgment. And besides when I have sex outside of my heterosexual relationship I don’’t’ get
fuck, it is always the other guys who I meet that gets fucked and that also make me think of myself as straight. I also have sex only with white men, because I do not want Black men to talk about my business with other Black people that might know me. The chances of a white person knowing the Black people I hang with or my family is slim. But chances of other Black men knowing my family or people I hang with is very high and besides Black men open their mouths too much.

W.C: What do you mean by open up their mouths?

Bill: Well they will tell other Black people your business. Are you crazy my wife and them do not know and I keeping it that way.

W.C: Did you have an experience that led you to saying this and desiring white men only to have sex with?

Bill: Yes! I was sleeping with this Black guy and he was cool with it. I told him that I was living with my girlfriend and children. He had no problem. But then I got tired of the relationship and I told him I could not see him anymore. Then he threaten to tell my girlfriend and Black people that I know. So after that one experience I decided I am not going to sleep with any more Black men. I also find that white men are more respecting of your space and privacy than are Black men. They are also very feminine and love to play the passive role, I also believe that they think that acting straight or macho is a turn-on for them.

The immediate question here is, what is at stake for Bill in his insistence on a "masculine" position of power in his relationships and his preference for white men who, by the fact of their being white, secure his anonymity? He sees white sexual partners as having more respect for his privacy and personal life.

94 Bill's choice of sleeping with white men only, because they are feminine and love to play the passive role, reflects/embodies white racist fears and white sexual colonial fantasy of him as Black body and no brain. It is important to also note, that he does not see himself as dangerous or that his body is monstrous, as racist colonial fantasy would construct him. Rather he should be credited for not concealing what many bi-sexuals feel and enact but never state.
He tells us that the white men whom he sleeps with are very feminine and he implies that he is able to set up a social construction of gender differentiations and power dynamics that secure his masculinity.

_Bill:_ Well the men are very girly, you know kind ah feminine and I am not. I also only or prefer to have sex with white men. I also believe too deep down inside that if I am doing the fucking and the other guy is doing the receiving that I am more man than he is so I ain’t gay. Fucking for me is about saying that I am the man in the relationship and the other person is the woman or less male than me. I also find that you can do anything to white men and they accept it, but Black men always challenges you. And besides now none of my straight friends and family know that I sleep with men and if they find out that I am getting fuck they will really think that I am a woman or that I must be sick.

_Bill_ gives us a view of his sexual practices steeped in a confirmation of a powerful masculinity. _Bill’s_ investments in this Black-hyper masculinity can be seen as a reaction to heterosexism within Black communities. Mercer argues that the:

hegemonic repertoire of images of Black masculinity, from docile “uncle Tom,” the shuffling minstrel entertainer, the threatening native, to “Superspade” figures like Shaft, has been forged in and through the histories of slavery, colonialism and imperialism” (Mercer, 1988: 137).

_Bill’s_ survival performances are not free from a hyper-masculinity centered in a reaction formation to the effects of the denial of Black masculinity which took place during slavery. Sociologist Robert Staples suggests that:

the central strand of the “racial” power exercised by white male slave master was the denial of certain masculinized attributes to Black male slaves, such as authority, familial responsibility and ownership of property (Staples, 1982: 137).

Hence the sexualization of racism reproduces historical patterns evident in some of the men’s performance of their sexuality. Men like _Bill_, implicated within these racist
constructions of masculinity and femininity, must hide same-sex practices out of communal and public shame.

*Bill:* I try very hard to keep it a secret from my friends, family and the Black community. So everything I do have to be straight and I will always take on the manly role in relationships and always try hard to act masculine and straight in front of family and friends.

*Bill* excludes his family from his hidden sexual desires and experiences. He works to confirm their assumption that he is heterosexual. No one needs to know of the practices which would disrupt this assumption. His actions reproduce a heterosexual front and maintain an oppressive structure of sexual signification. This may not be deliberate, but he is nevertheless complicit in exclusionary and oppressive practices against men he constructs as bullers or feminine. Such practices are built on a binary logic, with pernicious effects. According to Fuss, this idea of the “logic of identity boundaries necessarily produces a subordinated other, where the social productivity of identity is purchased at the price of a hierarchy of normalization and exclusion” (Fuss, 1990: 1).

It is not surprising then that Black men such as *Bill* are more likely to be abusive of their white partners, whom they construct as feminine. This misogyny may originate in their own experience of self-hate, because of the oppression they experience from family, Black communities, the Black church and white society. This hate, which feeds the erotic of power, *Bill* clearly expresses. Additionally it should be noted that Black men negotiating their safety in geographies of pleasures hide their same-sex desires and tend when they gratify to choose white partners because there are so few places where they can let out their anger, rage and frustration. Their white partners become the outlet for these emotions separate from the communities of accountability. These actions can be done more easily with white men because
they will assume the conflict is related to cultural differences; most Black men would not tolerate this abusive acting out. Mercer contextualizes this for us by arguing that “Black male gender identities have been historically and culturally constructed through complex dialectics of power and subordination” (Mercer, 1994: 137). Mercer further argues that “social definitions of what it is to be a man, about what constitutes manliness, are not natural but are historically constructed and this construction is culturally variable” (Mercer, 1994: 136). In this context, Bill’s behavior reflects the particular tendency for some Black men to enact their homoerotic desires without disrupting their constructed masculinity. They secure their identities within a powerful masculinity organized with a bio-nationalism that gives definition to communal solidarity. For men like Bill, projecting or performing a form of toughness helps them to erase all signs of effeminacy and same-sex signifiers so that the wider culture would be led into believing they are heterosexual.

Clearly, what defines masculinity for some of the men in this discussion is power and control. This actually cultivates forms of misogyny visible in the ease with which some men label others as feminine and therefore bulliers or weak. As we have seen, Eldridge Cleaver in his attack on James Baldwin, and Francis Welsing in her writing on Black men in therapy, equate male effeminacy with weakness and such weakness with whiteness. Hence, within particular ideologies of Black masculinity, it is safer for some Black men like Bill to have sex with white men. Because effeminacy equals whiteness, (at least this is how the racist logic goes) they are allowed not only to keep intact their constructed gender in same-sex relations with white men, but also to maintain “their Blackness.”

These men’s sexual identities involve a recognition of the fundamental validity and importance of varying forms of sexual and cultural expressions of identity, pleasure and
negotiation. They must not be seen in isolation from their historical contexts. The Black historical context of secrecy, denial of Black same-sex practices, moral and religious shame, forced men like Bill into locating out their geographies of pleasures in white-dominated public spaces, far from Black “eyes.” As Bill’s narrative informs us, these public spaces guarantee him his anonymity and secrecy.

*Bill:* I maintain some Black and heterosexual privacy by going to bath houses and sometimes using chat lines. But the best is the bath houses, because everybody is in there for sex and you don’t have to worry about anybody falling in love with you or giving anybody your telephone number. Besides there is great anonymity in public sex and I love that.

What *Bill* is telling us about his particular site of pleasure (i.e. the bathhouse) is that his anonymity is maintained, not only because he is unknown as a Black man in a white-dominated space, but also because people do not ask for any identifying information.

Another respondent, *Tom,* implicated within similarly walled gender constructions as *Bill,* echoes some of *Bill*’s sentiments on same-sex practices and the subordinated construction of the other as “the feminine men” with whom he sleeps.

*Tom:* For me having sex with men is not the same sleeping with them, because I fuck the feminine men only. I think if I slept with them I may want to call myself a buller man. But I am not in any committed relationship with men so I do not see the need to call myself a buller man. I might call myself bisexual if I am with another man, especially white feminine boys, the ones who likes to think that every man is gay. But I wouldn’t let another woman know that I am bisexual.

Here we see similarities with some of the Black men in Isaac Juliens’ film *Young Soul Rebels.* In the film the phrase “Black and white unite and fuck” floats ambiguously in response to one of the more intensely Black nationalists character’s exhortation that “it’s all right as
long as you are doing it to them!” (Julien, 19). “As long as you are doing it to them” not only supports the position of some of the men interviewed in this project around their construction and understanding of sexism, misogyny and power imbalances in interracial relationships, but also illustrates the many ways in which Black masculinity and the importance of manhood or Black heterosexuality constructed, maintained and reproduced within interracial same-sex relationships. As Tony Gould, the Black father of a gay son, wrote in *The Life and Times of Colin MacInnes*, “what you must do son, is become a fucker and not become fucked. It’s simple as that. Boys or girls, up the pussy or the arse, whichever you prefer but you’ve got to remember there is a cock between your legs and you are a man” (Gould, 1983: 89). The idea of his son doing the fucking represents and upholds an accepted form of masculinity, and avoids very specific same-sex practice that would have been seen as traitorous, demasculinized or sick. Tom’s narrative explains further, that he will not tell his girlfriend that he is having sex with men.

W.C: Why wouldn’t you tell another woman that you are bisexual?

Tom: Because she will think I am less of a man and I try hard to maintain my masculinity by fucking men and not being fucked and by having a wife for public image. I also have a family that expects me to be the head of the home and to provide. So there is all of that for me that makes it hard for me to want to keep some privacy on sexual matters like this one we are talking about.

The constraints of family life for Tom and other bisexual Black men often create further problems. Tom is a typical example of a Black man who is trying to work through the notion of his positioning as being masculine by accepting white stereotypically racist constructions of Black masculinity. He does this partly through the discourse which frees him from taking on a buller man or same-sex identity, by appropriating that part of the discourse
that allows others to construct him as masculine and heterosexual while allowing him to maintain an identity he wishes others to see or know. Here sexuality is gendered, as gender is sexualized. For the erotic submission and domination to exist for Tom, Bill and other men who assume a masculinized and bisexual identity, it must always be mediated through the other male partner created as woman or feminine. Here, clearly, gender performance is mediated via dominance, submission and difference. This situation reflects cogently Judith Butler’s insistence that performativity is the power of discourse (rather than the authority of the volitional ‘subjects,’) to produce and reproduce the gender it names. Thus gender and sexual performativity for these Black men require “the understanding of performativity not as the act by which a subject brings into being what she or he names, but, rather, as that constitutive power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (Butler, 1993: 2). Below Tom explains the dilemmas of negotiating his geographies of pleasure and desires, which are hindered as a result of family life.

**Tom:** There have been men who I met at the baths or parks that I would have like to spend more time with but often thought of my wife and children and so I don’t get involved.

**W.C:** Does your wife or children know that you have sex with men outside of the relationship?

**Tom:** No. Are you crazy? That is why I go to bath houses and parks far away from where I live so that I could maintain my privacy and anonymity. I like it that way, because I don’t have to worry about family and societal problems. Like shaming the family or the neighbors and stuff like that.

**W.C:** Do you worry about any communicable disease and the spread of it to your wife?

**Tom:** No! I tell you I do not get fucking and as long as I am fucking I will not get AIDS and them things. You only get AIDS if you get fuck without a condom and practice unsafe sexual acts or from sharing needles.

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The concealment and fear of any open acknowledgment of bisexuality or same-sex eroticism by these men reflect the strident Black communal heterosexist dictates. The logic, for these men, around communicable diseases. Chris' view on role-playing and gender identity and performance differs from Tom's and Bill's; he is much more comfortable with being labeled a buller:

W.C: What do you mean by role playing?

Chris: Well some of my friends talk about being the wife and the husband in their relationships. For the two of us we are gay men and whatever we do we try to find mutual respect for the positions that each of us take and we certainly do not take on other gender roles in our relationship. I think role playing tends to be common among men who define themselves as bisexual, those labeling themselves as macho, feminine, men who are not out and men struggling with their sexual identity. I think I have done some work and thinking on these issues and have made a very conscious choice not to be a part of this problem.

Chris and his lover, unlike other men who work hard on affirming a masculinized front and performing gender, do not see the need to publicly or privately define themselves as male in order to define or accept their masculinity.

For the other men, the issue of gender performativity is not irrelevant. It raises a couple of fundamental questions: (1) What are the traditional categories of gender marking, in buller relationships. (2) How is this marking influenced by issues of race? Devon tells us that he does not think there can be any real union in same-sex relations, a view held by men internalizing homophobia and a view held by Black nationalists who see same-sex practices as immoral, sinful and destructive of Black family values.

Devon: I do not think that there is any future to two buller men living together calling themselves family. I do not think that they would get very far at all, besides it is a futureless, hopeless and sinful situation to be in. Nobody is going to respect you.
W.C: What makes you say that?

Devon: Look at how the Black community does treat batty boys. In Jamaica they will stone you and here in Canada they laugh at you and ridicule you. I see that many times on the street and in the barber shop, with them Black people when they know that you bulling, man.

For Devon, having sex with men but not committing himself to buller-men, politics or identity is central to his existence.

Conclusion

As has been demonstrated thus far, (bi)sexual identification is a very complicated issue for many of the subjects of the study. The men who are cohabiting with women see themselves as holding a heterosexual identity through their engagement in macho or masculine sexual practices; and see the men they fuck as feminine or women. Sexism and the construction of traditionally-held gender roles, for these men, are important indicators of how they position themselves vis-a-vis same-sex practices. Gender then must be seen as a foundational issue around identity. Judith Butler, in her text Gender Trouble, and in the further expanded Bodies That Matter, deals with the resonances of gender performance (Butler, 1990, 1993). Gender she argues, is performative. Gender and the act of same-sex practices by these Black men “ought not be constituted as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts

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95 Here the men’s limited understanding of their social construction of same-sex practices and gender, hinders their ability to understand that their constructions of other men as feminine and themselves as masculine privileges power roles that enacts a form of violence in their daily lives and in the relationships they embrace. In this context their acts are violent.

96 The term ‘performative’ is described by J.L. Austin (1975), in "How To Do Things With Words" as a speech act where ‘the issuing of the utterance is the performing of the action’ (Austin, 1975: 6).
follow, rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through stylized repetition of acts” (Butler, 1993: 140). Some of the men in this study are telling us that same-sex sexual practices, gender, Black masculinity and Black femininity are contradictory and unstable positions that do not necessarily coincide.

Gender, itself, is an unstable and contradictory historical and cultural construction that operates as a linking process within various social practices in such a way that justifies, express and supports the power of men over women. As such, it is an important tool for giving men that hegemony (Pogner, 1990: 52).

While I agree that these Black men may be implicated in this hegemony, what this hegemonic practice also suggests is that gender, sex and race are each mutually constituted and mutually constituting.
Chapter Seven

Provoked By Desire

My power and ultimate form of resistance is to be who I am in a visible and conscious way.
(Michael, Respondent)

Introduction:

This dissertation is intended to evoke questions and provoke dialogue aimed at re-evaluations of African-Canadian and African-Caribbean positions on same-sex practices. This study asks people in Black communities to consider if there are other, more humane ways to make visible and to positively embrace the expression of Black same-sex energy. Likewise, this enquiry allows the voices of those constructed as outsiders, deviant and sick people to speak. These are Black men who live in Black communal settings that oppose same-sex practices, but they have had the courage to give expression to their negotiative sexuality amid the pain and suffering of Black communal living.

What was once invisible and voiceless has become at least partially visible in the conversations I have presented. Sociologist Norman Denzin, commenting on the need for new storytelling voices, argues that only two categories of storytellers exist in any culture: “the ordinary people who talk and tell stories to one another and the self-and-society-appointed experts ... who write and tell stories about others stories” (Denzin, 1990: 7). For me my interviewees represents the ordinary people who talk and tell their stories, it gives the ordinary Black same-sex men an opportunity as “outsiders” to tell their stories and speak to their communities, calling on its members to respond. They have, as bell hooks (1992) writes,
"pointed to what they see that others are not doing and calling them on it. We cannot privilege one way of knowing over another".

The Black men interviewed for this dissertation, have generously given us a glimpse of what it means to negotiate the hegemonic communal structures of dominance that attempt to regulate their every day same-sex practices. As men who engage in same-sex practices, they have spoken of violence, pain, anger, joy, outside-status and their impact on their struggles to maintain membership in their families and their communities. They have shown how commitment to membership in Black communities is negotiated through the enforcement of bio-nationalism. This is a discourse with material groundings in the norms and exclusionary violence of communal institutions as well as the cultural productions of contemporary Black nationalism. Indeed, in the pain and anger of the men, one can hear a critique of Black bio-nationalism and a need for Black communities to find other bonds of solidarity other than a persecution based on difference. This call is to value people for what they do and not who they are, grounding solidarity in relations of mutual support necessary for a disparate collective communal existence. Here the task is to conceive of an appositional politic based not on bio-nationalism or unitary notions of family and identity, but on notions of solidarity that look towards a non-hierarchical proliferation of identities and practices. To live in a wholistic fashion is the ultimate goal of all bullers, where they can live within Black communities but, beyond the control of a Black bio-nationalist politic. To this end, Black consciousness and bio-nationalism, can be thought of as a political imaginary, a desire for a racial community based on a common understanding of the shared past among its members. Yet, Black bio-nationalism should be seen for what it is, a form of accommodation and an exclusionist ideology responding to the history of racism and refusing those commonalities which transgress its

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ideological terms. This expression of exclusion constitutes a site of privilege that seeks to deny agency to bullers and batty bwoys.

In doing Black anti-heterosexist work, one need not start with pity for the buller brother or empathy for his plight as doubly oppressed. Instead, we need to recognize how the systemic homophobic hegemonic structures of dominance work against Black men engaging in same-sex practices and how these structures are embedded in Black communities. Although nationalism may have its uses, it is also a dangerous template. Black communities cannot afford to lose members, and it is very hard for Black communities to see what it loses when it is already lost.

For these and other reasons, I suggest that bullers and heterosexuals begin to dialogue and embrace each other’s differences by challenging the binary logic of sexuality that marginalizes bullers. Difference, too, often gets constructed as other and deviant. We must beware of constructions that render difference an external corruption that destroys or weakens Black communities. When same-sex relations are projected on these terms, it is by a political movement that has been reduced to an ideological construction of Black hetero-normativity. Needed is a location of the exclusion of bullers within the broader discourse of family values that exclude many different people and practices. This thesis is a call for difference in sexual practice to be viewed as an internal and integral part of Black diasporic nationalism. Our goal should be an attempt to dismantle the diasporic bio-nationalism that is written on the Black same-sexed body. Hence identity politics must not limit what we can desire or imagine for ourselves to the kind of proliferation and formation of who we are; as we move towards a project of social justice, not limited to or primarily focused on the bonds of identity.
Beyond Heterosexism and The Need To Care For Bullers and Batty Bwoys

On what other terms might a Black revolutionarily project exist other than through a heterosexist bio-nationalism? This is a difficult problem, given that the construction of a Black masculinity over and against the emasculated Black male has been the premise upon which Black nationalism has been built. Until now, the overwhelming historical significance of race and racism has made it virtually impossible to consider same-sex politics and identity as a political and public issue. Black masculinized nationalism enacts a self-legitimation through arguing that the Black male is an endangered species in North American societies. This argument has become a prop for many Black men in North America to see themselves as powerless. This has encouraged many Black men to act in stereotypically racist hypermasculine ways, because powerlessness means effeminacy. Hence, their inability to understand how racism blocks them from understanding their own sexism and heterosexism.

This was especially true in the Civil Rights movements of the sixties and seventies. As Gates, Jr. wrote,

An almost obsessive motif that runs through the major authors of the Black aesthetic and Black power movement was heterosexist. In short, national identity became sexualized in the sixties in such a way as to engender a curious subterraneous connection between homophobia and nationalism. (Gates, 1988: 79).

Given the above analysis, we can understand why bio-nationalism has been so psychologically and communally important. Regulation of the body has constituted the space for the construction of nationalism without a state. This raises a number of fundamental questions. First, how does one work to transform bio-nationalism, admitting the exclusionary nature of its roots and recognizing that these have real lasting consequences on Black lives? How does one organize a Black nationalist project that does not become a form of policing
bodies? What are the grounds for a diasporic nationalism that recognizes disparate bodies and different notions of solidarity? Lastly, can one identify a Black project that is not about nationalism, but is about building a future for a disparate set of communities whose solidarity is focused on what they work for and not solely who they are? These questions lead me to my next point of why we should care for bullers and batty bwoys.

**Why Should The Black Community Care About Bullers And Batty Bwoys**

Recent bio-nationalists made by Martin Luther King Junior the 3rd and his niece Alveda Celeste King. Martin Luther King Junior the 3rd eldest son and namesake of the first leader of the Southern Christian Leadership, was elected the fourth president of that eminent Civil Rights group. He stunned same sexed people when he said “any man who has a desire to sleep with another man has a serious problem” (New York Times, 11/2/97) later apologizing calling his statements “uniformed and insensitive” (ibid).

I and other Black gays are surprised that a Black leader, with the stature that King has, and with a particular position of leadership in the Black community as he, has reached the point of saying what he said. When attacked by Black gays and lesbians in the U.S. he said his statement was “uniformed and insensitive” (New York Times, 11/2/97). His apology without an explanation for me raises some fundamental questions. For example, What does it mean that he is sorry he said it? Does this mean that he does not believe it? Does it mean that he sees himself contributing to a discourse which further solidifies the hegemonic status of bio-nationalism? And even more important in his apology he did not speak of an alternative vision for the Black community, that will define more inclusive terms, with Black same-sex people.
I addition, for King to simply, apologize without an explanation for the basis of his apology, further leaves the leadership of the Black community bankrupt in terms of articulating a vision that could challenge what is currently done to Black same sex men and women.

I am here using King’s example as a type of crystallization, of the overall prevailing influence of bio-nationalism and hegemonic masculinity within the Black community. Because, what we are experiencing here is an, assertion, an assertion of a particular kind of hegemonic Black masculinity, which precludes the Black nationalist discourse.

In this sense we have the production of a very odd couple. I am here thinking of Minister Louis Farrakhan and King. I mention King and Farrakhan as an odd couple because what King did in making his comments, much to the surprise of Black same-sex folks, continues to circulate within Black hegemonic masculinity, which further supports Farrakhan’s position. King’s position as a minister in the church continues to be suspect , if he behaves in a way consistent with Minister Louis Farrakhan and other bio-nationalists who view Black same-sex practices as sinful, deviant and sick. If King wanted to truly apologize for his statements he could have made a statement about Farrakhan and others for example, indicating that their bio-nationalism is very offensive to the very people he wants to apologize too. Had he made a statement, dissociating himself from Farrakhan comments on Black same-sex practices, he would have been viewed as more credible on the subject, or at least in part making an effort to understand the pain and oppression of bullers and batty bwoys.

It is important to recognize that the lack of significance of Black same sex communities is not simply a symptom of the fascist thinking of Farrakhan only, but we can also see some of Farrakhans logic and sentiments being echoed by King and other Blacks who are perceived to be progressive and acceptable thinkers in contemporary Black culture.
There is another King, his niece Alveda, in opposing pending California state legislation bill AB 1059 and 257, which would provide housing and job protection for gays and lesbians, and allow companies to provide insurance benefits for domestic partners, and add gays and lesbians to the list of minority groups in need of fair employment and housing protection, stated that “to equate homosexuality with race is to give a death sentence to civil rights. I have met many former homosexuals, but I have never met a former Black person. No one is enslaving homosexuals..., or making them sit at the back of the bus” (Venus Magazine, 1997:25).

There have been a variety of progressive responses to Alveda King’s statement in the Black gay and lesbian US community.

One response is from lesbian activists Sabrina Sojourner who reminds us that “Kings’s statements narrow civil rights to being a Black issue and it is not. Anytime we narrow the civil rights discussion to exclude somebody we are actually creating the arguments for our own demise. Discrimination is discrimination. Pain is Pain. Be it race, size, or sexual orientation” (Venus Magazine, 1997: 25). Another insightful response is given by, Kevin McGruder, executive director of gay men of African descent in new York. He termed Ms. King’s reading of her uncle’s legacy narrow and disappointing. According to Mr. McGruder Mr. King preached that:

people who are committed to the movement are committed to standing up to injustices anywhere. McGruder accused Ms. King of buying into rhetoric which is being used by the religious right to divide Blacks and gays. “Because people are gay and lesbian doesn’t mean they don’t have family values and that they are not part of families, said Mcgruder, homophobia is detrimental to building the Black family (Venus Magazine, 1997: 25).
I particularly want to draw your attention to the difference between these two statements made by Sabrina and Kevin, and what that difference means in relationship to the themes and arguments developed in my thesis.

The logic by which Sojurner and Kevin have written their views is as follows:

Sabrina Sojourn is saying that we have to develop a counter response to hegemonic Black masculinity, because it violates individual rights, and Kevin McGruder is saying, that we have to develop a vision of a Black community/family that includes bullers.

The arguments in my thesis is that the problems of the Black community is not going to be resolved, only on the basis of legal protection. The terms by which I have written my work, argues we should care for Bullers and batty bwoys, because of how it weakens community, not only on the basis of individual human rights, because the problems of Black communities are not going to be resolved through legal protection of the individual only, rather on the basis of a communal collective solidarity, where people see racial uplift not being achieved by the limited opportunities offered in a capitalist liberal state, rather they see it requiring social forms of collective communal solidarity and not individual personal achievement. The problems of the Black community are only going to be worked through if there is a form of collective communal solidarity which control all the resources of the Black community. My work therefore examines an instance of discrimination as an activity and practice where individual rights are violated, because a discriminatory act exists be it race, sex, size or class.

Bullers and batty bwoys carry the potential of a different kind of double vision, which can constitute a unique and important contribution to Black diasporic politics. Again, this is not simply an appeal to Black heterosexuals (faced themselves with the experience of racist
oppression) to be more sensitive to the double oppression of their buller man and batty bwoy brothers. Rather, it is a call for all those committed to the building-up of the Black nation to recognize the inclusions needed to accomplish this work. The argument here, then, is for a progressive revolutionary movement founded on an alliance among those committed to working toward a communal vision that might become a genuine alternative to bio-nationalism. What is needed are forms of communal solidarity that will connect bullers to Black communities in a positive and constructive way. Thus the urgent need for Black national forums to reflect, discuss and plan how best to embrace men engaging in same-sex practices. For example, public community forums in Toronto and Halifax could be the beginning. If such forums do nothing else but locate people with the courage and commitment to work towards an inclusive vision for Black communities they will be successful. The goal clearly is to put to rest the hostility, pain and alienation that has traditionally existed among bullers and heterosexuals within our communities.

Knowledge lies in the everyday working lives of all Black people, which can be translated into Black power and Black consciousness, without excluding bullers and batty bwoys. The elimination of all systems of oppressions requires the participation of everyone. This project cannot tolerate heterosexuals policing gays and Black bio-nationalists policing same-sex practices. These insights are not new. They constitute the legacy of writers like Baldwin, Hughes, McKay, Lorde, Hemphill, Riggs, Smith, hooks and others, who have laid out the path to education, social justice and equality. It was Lorde (1984: 42) who asked the very important question that summarizes the mobilization and central challenge to members within Black communities, “I am .... a Black woman warrior poet doing my work - come to ask you, are you doing yours”? It is not possible to be a Black activist working around issues
of racism, sexism, heterosexism and homophobia and not have a very deep sense of gratitude to the writers listed above and in particular to the voice and works of Audre Lorde.

**Expanding Discourses**

This dissertation has set out the urgent need to set new terms for an expanded set of discourses for an alternative visionary Black nationalist project. The justification for this is not only on the basis of the intellectual critique of bio-nationalism provided. Just as importantly, response is needed to the testimony provided by the men of this study, a response to their demand for a transformation of the basis of Black communal life. Some of the men presented in this dissertation are calling for a Black revolutionarily movement that is an alternative to bio-nationalism, enhancing the economic, familial, and communal lives of the men in this thesis and the lives of Black folks generally. If bio-nationalists and those embracing their views continue to mark Black men engaging in same-sex practices as sick and deviant, this can and will have lasting negative effects on Black communities. Bullers and batty bwoys who are alienated will suffer materially and will be disadvantaged from social life generally. There needs to be a basis for commitment to community on beneficial terms for everyone. To the extent that bullers are oppressed and constrained and their attempts to participate and reconstruct new values, beliefs and practices is denied and frustrated, or to the extent that bio-nationalists can force an arbitrarily limited set of choices on Black individuals marked as other, then we all incur the cost.

The Black nationalism that I have addressed in this project has been a diasporic nationalism that resists racialized domination. Historically, diasporic nationalism has been viewed as a contradiction in terms. This raises the question of how one can have a national identity in a diasporic space? Viewing this as impossible, Garvey, Cabral and others attempted
to rectify the situation by a geographic move back to Africa. Some nationalists, particularly those in the United States, have attempted to develop proposals for a Black state in the United States. Neither of these solutions solve the problems of homophobia, heterosexism, sexism and misogyny, nor do they seem like viable alternatives that most Black people are ready to embrace. We could therefore, ask ourselves the following: what will constitute a viable and representative nationalism in a diasporic space? This will require a nationalist movement that seeks to redress the injustices of homophobia, heterosexism and the misogyny of Black hegemonic masculinities. Heterosexism and homophobia are important to challenge - not just to relieve pain, although I think this is much of what education, social justice and compassion are about, but also the defeat of heterosexism will require a re-constitution of Black nationalism.

**Toward Communal Solidarity**

One of the few institutions in Black communities that have the power to act as an ideological force is the church. Responses from many of my interviewees indicated the central importance of religion in their lives and their relationship to community. Since the 1960s, there has been a growing emphasis on the wholeness and sanctity of Black families and communities. This has meant in some cases, a visibly increased sense of loyalty to Black institutions and Black communal solidarity. For some of my respondents, the Black church’s economic and political leadership has provided a sense of collective identity and fostered sentiments of solidarity. As well, the organizations and activities of the church gave some of the men an opportunity to develop leadership skills and competencies, opportunities not available to them in the broader society. In addition, from my interviews we learn that family and church are
very important aspects of the Black men’s lives. If these institutions are integral to the future development of the Black community, are weakened by the positions of ambivalence on the part of bullers and batty bwoys, bio-nationalist then will force large numbers of the men out of the Black community. Also if these institutions are the foundations of solidarity and support for helping people make their way to challenge community racist practices, when the basis of these institutional forms are weakened, people’s commitment to these institutional forms will be compromised; weakening people’s commitment to the struggle both internally and externally.

It is clear that those who embrace the church as a religious and communal institution, must live with a certain "splitting of the self" which is often difficult and painful. However, the fact that many men continue to do this indicates the communal commitment among same-sexed men who ironically are also victims of Black heterosexist theology. As James H. Cone notes:

... If the struggle of the victims is the only context for the development of a genuine Christian theology, then should not theology itself reflect in its speech the language of the people about whom it claims to speak? This is the critical issue...I think that Black religion or the Black religious experience must become one of the important ingredients in the development of a Black theology and liberation (Cone, 1979: 618).

A Black theology of liberation, arguably, is in a position to work towards to address the plight and alienation of some of the men in this project, given their affiliation to church and community. West, in his book Prophesy Deliverance: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity, argues that; “a hegemonic culture survives and thrives as long as it convinces people to adopt its preferred formative modality, its favored socialization process. It begins
to crumble when people start to opt for a transformative modality, a socialization process that opposes the dominant one" (West, 1982: 119). The role of Black churches and their leadership then is to embrace the two-ness of identity (to use a term of W.E. DuBois), reflecting both the heterosexual and same-sex parishioner. What this could provide is a space of worship where the discursive practices are non-hegemonic, culturally sensitive and affirming of family networks in light of the racism and homophobia that Black gays must confront in the wider society. Given that the church has also been one of the most successful Black institutions within Black communities, it will also contribute to the economic agenda of Black communities through the church's financial collection. The church and a revised inclusionary Black Christian theology, could become the major site for rethinking the violence of homophobia and hatred of bullers. As West argues:

Black religious leadership can make an enormous contribution to a counter-hegemonic culture and structural social change in society... The freedom of Black pastors and preachers, unlike that of most Black professionals, is immense. They are the leaders of the only major institutions in the Black community that are not accountable to the status quo (West, 1982: 121).

Institutional historical structures within the church will mobilize against these changes. There would then only be a minority of men and women who would fight for these changes. It is the responsibility then of pastors and preachers not to abuse their power and further contribute to the hegemonic structures of dominance that oppress the men in this project. The absence of a systemic analysis of the violence internal to Black communities has been viewed negatively by men engaging in same-sex practices. The Black church has the unique opportunity to act as an educational forum for tolerance, transforming what has been one of the most intolerant historical institutions in our community. The embracing of men who participate in same-sex practices will not be met without some degree of resistance from and
within Black communities. Yet, the struggle for the re-constructing of a Black theology that embraces same-sex Black folks could have very practical consequences for the provision of material, human and ideological support in the face of racism and sexism in the wider white community and homophobia in society generally. The conflation of heterosexism or bi-nationalism with “normlessness” needs to be disrupted and contested. Despite the incipient movement against the forces of resistance and homophobia within churches and Black communities, it is still far too simplistic to idealize these respective Black communities in Halifax and Toronto.

**Disrupting The Heterosexist Codes**

Stuart Hall takes up issues of representation and points out that “the way a group of people is represented can play a determining role in how those people are treated socially and politically. This means that the process of representation is a politically charged act” (Hall, 1988: 28). One of my respondents Michael, suggested that “my power and ultimate form of resistance is to be who I am in a visible and conscious way.” Our question must be, how can Michael’s power become a new form of Black power and Black consciousness, or Black male homo-erotic power? How can “being who I am” contribute to a Black revolutionary project? Michael’s statement opens up the possibility of transforming the basis of communal solidarity to terms other than bio-nationalism. In a similar vein, Marlon Riggs, cited earlier, has provided the utopian call “Black men loving Black men is the revolutionary act of our times.” This can be a starting point for a fundamental transformation of revolutionary action, which does not tie community life to bio-nationalism. The transformative force of Black men loving Black men works to fundamentally transform the bio-nationalist project to a different set of terms. These
terms speak much more to a set of principles upon which Black communities are to define themselves, principles of freedom and democratic participation.

Peter McLaren and Tomaz Tadeu da Silva have provided a guide post for educators and activists to consider. They argue that for those committed to social transformation the:

Task . . . is to provide the conditions for individuals to acquire a language that will enable them to reflect upon and shape their own experiences and in certain instances transform such experiences in the interests of a larger project of social responsibility. It is a language that operates critically by . . . brushing common-sense experience against the grain, by interfering with the codes that bind cultural life shut and prevent its rehistoricization and politicization, by puncturing the authority of monumental culture and causing dominant representations to spill outside their prescribed and conventional limits (McLaren and Tadeu da Silva 1993: 40).

What must be disrupted are the heterosexist and homophobic codes that bind cultural life shut. This task requires everyone to participate, and not just those who poses a same-sex identity. I am not implying that only those who poses a same-sex identity have the necessary qualifications for engaging in critical transformative anti-heterosexist work. It is Gilroy who informs us that, "histories of suffering should not be allocated exclusively to their victims. If they were, the memory of the trauma would disappear as the living memory of it died away" (Gilroy, 1997: 340). The direction here is not to establish a "buller" movement separate from Black communities. Black politics cannot emulate the separation of white gay and lesbian identity based movements. For many of the men in this study the Black community, with all its painful homophobic experiences, still remains their home in a white, dominated society. To abandon the Black community is to become homeless.
**Education For Liberation**

Our practice as bullers also requires us to think how free we can be as African-Canadian and African-Caribbean men in our gendered, sexualized selves. A curriculum which include the texts of Black writers, scientists, poets and visual artists who have been/are same-sexed is a must for the classroom. Who appears in school text and under what sign, does matter.\(^7\) The presence of the buller man and batty bwoy points to the ultimately endless possibilities of being human. The adoption of Black same-sex representations in the curricula may serve to empower Black youths struggling with their same-sexed identity. However, while it may be the case that buller youth might experience a form of self-recognition through engaging materials presenting aspects of the lives of Black same-sexed men, the importance of including buller men in the curriculum transcends this possibility, by educating none same-sex practitioners. In the classroom, expanding the intellectual canon to include Black-Caribbean and Canadian male same-sex writers and activists for more inclusive and representative curricula does not alone subvert racialized and genderized hierarchies. At best, a curriculum that offers no critique of the dominant practices of Black bio-nationalism and Black homophobic academic canons shields against any critique of heteronormativity. A

broader definition of Black diasporic nationalism and sexuality will erase the difficulties for same-sex men to be at home in the community without ambivalence. For this reason, materials constructed to place same-sex experiences into the classroom must encourage educators to contextualize and critique Black and white heterosexist dominant discourses, posing the possibility of a broader definition of Black consciousness and Black nationalism in a Euro-Canadian context.

As one example of what it might be to both articulate and disrupt Black heterosexist discourses, teachers might reconsider what materials and pedagogical practices should be used to teach either the works of Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, James Baldwin or the activism of Bayard Rustin. For decades the literary works of these three men have been presented to scores of high school and university students as examples of the Black American contribution to the modernist literary canon. Hughes has often been presented as a great folk poet of American culture, Baldwin as an early contributor to the 20th century literature of Black resistance to American racism. However, rarely are these men recognized as Black men whose lives were invested in the pleasures and desires of homosocial or same-sex practices. This is not a call to reduce these men to their sexual preference nor to require complete biographical accounts in order to read their work. However, these three men did write both explicitly and implicitly about same-sex sexual desire (Langston Hughes, The Langston Hughes Reader, 1958 and Collected Poems, 1994, Claude McKay, Home To Harlem, 1928 and Banana Bottom, 1933 and James Baldwin, Giovanni Room 1956 and). To simply erase this aspect of

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98 Bayard Rustin served as Martin Luther King's primary organizer for the 1963 March on Washington and the 1964 New York City Schools Boycott. I am not sure if there were ever any public recognition speeches or acceptance from King to Rustin, but it is well know among African-American gay men and women that he is a gay man.
their identification is to erase the possibility of these sensuously lived desires. The point here is that there are great pedagogical possibilities in teaching the texts of Hughes, McKay and Baldwin together with an exploration of why and how their identifications as same-sexed men have been erased both in dominant white culture and hegemonic Black nationalism.

In addition to pedagogical initiatives, teachers and counselors working with Black youths need to know what materials and support services exist for those youth searching for an understanding of their own sexuality. However, perhaps more important is the need for teachers and counselors to grasp the risks, especially for Black males, inherent in such a search. This thesis has made it clear why many Black youths would not want to publicly identify with a same-sex identity. Furthermore, even heterosexual youth may find it difficult to publicly consider the transformation in Black communal consciousness called for above. This is why the focus on the systemic basis of homophobia and oppression experienced by buller men is so important to study. But along with an understanding of such power relations, educators will have to strive to find the classroom conditions which will enhance the courage it will take for they and their students to speak out against homophobic violence.

Finally in advocating for an inclusive curriculum, I must also be cognizant of the limits of an “inclusive” curriculum, by asking myself: How might teachers be encouraged to critically assess how practices of normalization are taken up through categories of race, sex and nationalism? The cautionary response would be for teachers not to naturalize these kinds of identities (race, sex, nationalism) by failing to examine how identities are produced and replicated through hierarchies of power, in particular through local and historical circumstances.
Support Services

The spaces that bisexual Black men negotiate for pleasure and sexuality are fissured by notions of gender and hypermasculinity that leave them at serious risk of exposure to HIV and AIDS. I think that there are serious implications here for HIV/AIDS education, given the duality of identities these men hold on sexual practices. The discovery and spread of AIDS in the late seventies created great hysteria for men engaging in same-sex relations. There was also increased homophobia and right wing religious attacks against those labeled “gay.” However, Black communities, at least in Canada and the Caribbean have not responded to the crisis in the same manner as did white gay and lesbian activists. Many within Black communities saw HIV/AIDS as a gay and white man’s disease, hence their slowness to respond. Many Black men engaging in same-sex practices construct themselves as macho, tops,99 heterosexual and to some degree bisexual, see themselves as immune from contracting the HIV, and risk therefore contracting AIDS at the expense of maintaining their masculinity. As was evident in some of the conversations, it some men act on the belief that “I do not get fucked, therefore I cannot get AIDS.” By extension these notions also put their female partners and children at risk.

Given the above, it is then important to consider whether AIDS educators gain access to Black men who have sex with other men. How do the men identifying as bisexual or heterosexual while engaging in same-sex practices get accurate information to protect

99 Here the concept top within same-sexed vernacular refers to men who narrowly constructs sex, intimacy and their relationships in relation to the person who does the penetration. In other words the man who penetrates the other and does only that is constructed as a "top" while the man who receives the penetration is constructed as the "bottom" or passive partner. Most Black men who do the penetrating argue that they cannot get AIDS.
themselves, their female partners and children from the spread of AIDS? There are clear and substantial risks of not getting accurate information, therefore being infected, or infecting women and children. Relatedly, one might ask if some bullers avoid Black communities and sex with Black men, how can they receive the service delivery of services by Black agencies and organizations set up to work with Black men engaging in same-sex practices? Can Black agencies such as The Black Coalition For AIDS Prevention (Black Cap) and AYA be the groups or organizations to access these men, given that they are avoiding Black men and Black communal publicality? Lastly, how do we construct a movement where Black AIDS educators and bullers and batty bwoys have an explicit language for sexual practices that make it possible for them to talk to each other about sex without been ashamed or humiliated. It is clear that Black men engaging in same-sex and heterosexual practices must continually struggle for that space within Black communities, a space yet to be achieved.

Support services in Black communities are a must, given the emotional and physical violence to which bullers are subjected. There is no need for separate service agencies, rather what is needed are agencies and services that are a part of the community infra-structure. One approach that has met with some success is the locating of AIDS prevention services within agencies based in Black community organizations. A drawback here might be the reluctance by some Black community residents to disclose their risk behaviors and use these services. Black agencies need to display pamphlets in their agencies about buller me and batty bwoys support groups, and AIDS education. As well, they should enforce polices that will not discriminate against gays and lesbians in their organizations. Given that bisexuality and the racist construction of masculinity enable some men to think that they were immune from contracting HIV and AIDS, it is even more important that Black agencies move very quickly
to address this plight of Black men who are in positions of spreading AIDS to their female partners and un-born children. The staff at Black agencies, can benefit from human sexuality courses and training that delivers anti-homophobic training and be sensitized how to work with and handle homophobic or same-sex situations when they do arise. It is also the responsibility of these community groups to organize workshops at least once a year focusing on the changing dimensions of Black families and same-sex coupling, by encouraging the participation of bullers and heterosexuals in dialogue locally. Black community newspapers may want to give a monthly column to the discussion, serving as an educational forum for men and other community members who agencies, organized workshops and pamphlets are not able to reach. This call for a more tolerant community recognizes that there will be contradictions, differences, tensions, ambiguities and contradictions, hence heterogeneity is not implied, rather it is disturbed and is a call for critiques of such concepts as they have historically been used in Black bio-nationalism and Black consciousness. Given that a fair percentage of Black men do not wish to be identified with Black AIDS organizations, anti-racism training in white organizations is a must for sensitivity in the delivery of counseling services.

**Popular Culture Education**

The comedy is now over and the dance part to the function starts. The first song the disc jockey started to play was “Boom Bye Bye,” by Buju Baton. I felt as though it was a direct stab at us, but at this point we thought that it was hopeless and left the event, so much for our fun evening

(Michael).

Finally there is the role of popular culture, particularly popular music. Reggae, Hip-hop, Rap, House music and Calypso in different contexts of Black communal living have signified Black male homophobia and heteronormativity. These terms continue to have great
influence in Black lives. It is important to examine the role and influence of Black musical forms, because it reaches youths of all ages which finds its music appealing and influential and this is one target population that must be reached in their early stages of political consciousness and awareness around a sexual politic. Then maybe we may want to think of some of these musical genres as mediums of education, given their widespread influence on especially those with poor proper reading, reasoning and writing skills. The present technological era makes it much easier for this type of information to reach millions without added cost to the anti-heterosexist work that so few of us are engaging in. Hence, it is important to encourage forms of musical activism which disrupts the circulation of homophobic musical discourses. This may be as concrete as changing the radio station or programming of dances to ensure that homophobic music is not part of an evening entertainment. Such activities may encourage and create a communal counter-hegemonic alliance among musical artists, writers and cultural workers. Examples of this counter-hegemonic discourse can be found in the music of Black female artists, musical contributions of Queen Latifah, Salt and Peper, Sister Souljah and Tracy Chapman who have produced counter-hegemonic discourses on the hyper-masculinity of Rap, Reggae, Hip Hop and House music. The next move then is for most Black artists to produce counter-hegemonic forms in their music that will disrupt homophobia. The attempt then will be to try and create support for commercial production that is working in the articulation of such discourses. Creating a counter-hegemonic discourse around homophobia in Black musical forms named herein will also work towards eradicating the rigid identity markers that are partially fueled by homophobia and anxiety ridden, hypermasculinity and misogyny for which most Rap, Reggae, Hip-Hop and House music have developed a reputation. The only down side to this is that the
popularity of some of these artists may drop given that they have traditionally spoken to those communities embracing bio-nationalism, misogyny and hypermasculine views.

**Conclusion**

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that as Black men engaging in same-sex practices, a portion of our energy and creativity should be directed at exposing and subverting the structures of dominance. A majority of the same-sex men interviewed for this dissertation oppose the homophobic structures of dominance and bio-nationalistic practices that characterize mainstream Black institutions. These men demand the freedom to peruse new ways of defining themselves with respect to others and in association with those who freely share their commitment to participating in this process.

Connecting critical consciousness with caring gives us a more adequate basis for engaging in resistance because it better captures the circumstances under which we make decisions about our/selves and our relations with others. Based on this understanding of autonomy, in terms of critical consciousness and caring, we must commit ourselves to the collective effort of reshaping or reconstituting the bio-nationalistic practices and Black institutions that determine the circumstances of empowerment.

Collectively the church, family, community and formal educational systems can create counter hegemonic conditions which will encourage bullers and same-sexed men to be courageous in confronting the forces of hatred and the oppressive structures of dominance within Black communal life. It was Martin Luther King Jr. who reminded us that “the ultimate measure of a person is not where they stand in moments of comfort and convenience, but where they stand at times of challenge and controversy” (King, 1968:135). The challenges
ahead for a more inclusive Black communal solidarity require the commitment and courage from bullers, parents and anti-heterosexist workers to produce a place where it is possible to challenge homophobia and bio-nationalism. Families who positively embrace bullers, will be needed to take a lead role in this. Members, could for example, create family support groups and act as educational resources and emotional support to the families that find it difficult to shift their oppressive views on same-sex practices. It is members of the families that have developed the courage to be out there and supporting their children who arguably are in positions to organize family therapy groups with a psycho-educational focus, as well as workshops and kitchen table discussions to share feelings and concerns with other families and community members. Furthermore, given that the family is such an important institution in the lives of the men in this thesis and within the Black community; it should not be reduced to a conglomerate of independent families, in many ways the Black community functions as family and home. Hence the abandoning of Black brothers and sisters is tantamount to weakening the family. With families, churches and other institutions and organizations, forming of alliances and working together with bullers, there exists the possibility, that within the larger Black community individual voices (buller men and heterosexuals) will become voices of resistance to homophobia and bio-nationalism articulated in the form of coalition politics. With all these institutions and people working together, with each having its own terrain of discourse articulating different forms of Black nationalism, they can build not only voices of resistance but also counter-hegemonic alliances.

Finally embedded in this dissertation to critically analyze the intersections of race, nationalism and identity for English-speaking African Caribbean men and African-Canadian men in Toronto and Halifax, is a theoretically significant and practically important study.
exploring an instance of the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination in the lives of Black same-sex men many for whom family, community and religion is significant, but hostile towards them.
Appendix

A

The following tables highlight some aspects of the men’s lives:

Table 1
Number of men interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caribbean men, Toronto</th>
<th>Canadian men, Toronto</th>
<th>Canadian men, Halifax</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Caribbean countries represented are Trinidad & Tobago, Jamaica, Bahamas, Guyana, Barbados and St.Lucia.

Table 2
Educational attainment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Toronto</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Education is used also to indicate the traditional understanding of the men’s social class.

Table 3
Age cohort of the men interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Groups</th>
<th>Toronto</th>
<th>Halifax</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-39</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-plus</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4
Personal Identification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bisexual identified</th>
<th>Same-sex identified</th>
<th>Men previously married or living with girlfriends and children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5
Pseudonym and city identification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Toronto:</th>
<th>Halifax:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Devon</td>
<td>Bill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohammed</td>
<td>Brian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Joseph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>Terrance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

254
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Desmond</th>
<th>Lennox</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carl</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonte</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laqueshia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the data analysis the names of men from Toronto are bolded, while the names of men from Halifax are in italics. I have marked this in the text but not when they are speakers.
Appendix

Partial List of Questions

Here is a list of questions and probes that were used during the interview process with the men. The questions were broken up into three categories. The first category dealt with questions concerning family violence, intimidation and shame; the second part deals with the texture of everyday experiences in Black communal living; and the third part dealt with questions about issues of same-sex relationships.

All the participants spoke English as a first language of expression and communication. Essentially these questions were an attempt to identify issues and concerns about the texture of the respondents' everyday experience, particularly how they negotiate the structure of dominance in Black communal life, in their families, community and various Black organizations.

(1) Family violence, intimidation and shame

Are you out to your family and friends?
Are you married and do you have children?
Can you tell us any stories where you might have experienced family violence?
Can you share with us some moments of shame you experienced in your family around your sexuality?
Is your family connected to Black communities in any way?
Is there any aspect of family life I left out that you would like to share with me?

(2) The texture of everyday experiences in Black communal living

What have your experiences, being like within Black communities?
Can you share some stories of that experience, both positive and negative?
Have you ever experienced actual physical violence in Black communities?
Can you share that story with us?
How do you negotiate your everyday life within Black communities as a person who have sex with other men?
Do you know of any Black agencies doing support work for Black same-sex people?
What are your views of Black nationalists?
Who would you consider to be a Black nationalist?
Why do you think it is so hard for Black communities to accept same-sex practices as "normal"?
Do you participate in events organized by Black communities and Black organizations?
Can you share some stories of events that occurred in Black communities that you would consider to be heterosexist?
Would you say Black communities are more heterosexist than white communities?
Would you say our communities are very religious?
What is your view on Black pop artists?
What and who did you come out to in the Black community?
Do you know of groups or organizations that are there as support systems for Black men engaging in same-sex practices?
Is there an aspect of the community I left out, that you would like to share with me?

(3) Questions dealing with issues of same-sex relationships.

Are you currently in a relationship?
What are your views on same-sex relationships?
What are your views on interracial relationships?
How do you identify yourself in your relationships, bisexual, gay etc.?
Is there any aspect of family life I left out that you would like to share with me?
Do you have any questions for me?
Appendix C
Chronology of Bullers and Zami Organizing/Events

1983 The first lesbian of color organization is formed in Toronto

1984 Zami, the first Black lesbian and gay organization is formed for people of a Caribbean origin.

1984 Xtra, Toronto's gay newspaper front pages Zami as a new group in the community

1984 Zami and gay Asians challenge the Body Politic on its racist advertising and the representation of gays and lesbians of color in general at the 519.

1984 Lesbians, Gays & Race - a video on gay and lesbian Asians organized by Zami and gay Asians, with this event followed by a panel discussion.

1985 Zami celebrates its 1st anniversary/party with a dedication to the Color Purple by Alice Walker.

1985 Zami’s first gay and lesbian Pride Parade and march on the streets of Toronto as out Black lesbians and gays.

1985 Zami’s first Caribana bash party.

1985 Accepted by the Gay and lesbian community appeal as a gay and lesbian community group. At this point in our political development we got involved in volunteering at dances and other events for our money in return from the appeal fund.

1985 Zami membership reaches a record high of fifty.

1987 Sepia, a Black lesbian and gay organization is formed, amidst Zami and Lesbians Of Colour.

1988 A group of Toronto gays and lesbians of colour host for the first time the International Lesbian and gay people of colour conference with attendance from the Caribbean, US and England.

1989 We witnessed the decline of Zami.

1990 AYA, a new group for Black gay men is formed.

1990 The first Black lesbian and gay retreat was held north of Toronto

1990 Glad - the first Black gay and lesbian discussion HIV/AIDS group is formed.

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1990  Young Ebony Sisters is formed - a group for Black lesbians.

1990  The Black Coalition For AIDS prevention is formed.

1991  The second Black lesbian and gay retreat takes place.

1993  AYA received its first grant from Toronto gay and lesbian community appeal.

1993  AYA held its first gay men’s retreat north of Toronto.

1993  AYA held its first Quansai gathering.

1994  AYA’s second Quansai gathering.

1994  Lexicon - A Toronto gay and lesbian newspaper does a cover story on AYA the group and its members.

1994  AYA held its first fashion show titled, “From Plantation to Paradise.”

1994  De Poonani Posse is formed for young Black lesbian artists.

1995  AYA publishes its first newsletter and brochure outlining the group, its objectives and goals.

1995  AYA held its third Quansai gathering celebration.

1995  AYA held its second fashion show entitled “Pandemonium.”

1995  AYA’s summer picnic at Hanlan’s Point.

1995  AYA’s fund-raiser entitled “Pappy Show” held at El Convento Rico - Toronto’s lesbian and gay Latin bar and dance club.

1995  Reception held for Thomas Allen Harris film “Vintage.”

1996  AYA celebrates Black history month with a series of readings at “A Different Booklist” Toronto’s first Black gay, lesbian and people of colour bookstore and coffee house.

1996  AYA for the first time formally elects a board of directors to steer it into the new generation.

1996  AYA hosts its third annual fashion show.
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