

## INTRODUCTION

Silence is a noticeable feature of the way Black people deal with the idea of homosexuality in their various communities (Marlon Riggs, 1989). In Native African society, even though same-sex desires and expression have existed for all time, the modern idea of homosexuality is largely a social taboo (Constantine-Simms, Delroy, 2001). Besides, the vast majority of the 54 African states' penal codes have either criminalized homosexuality or simply kept quiet on the issue of sexual orientation. Moreover, Diasporic Blacks, such as the Caribbean, have also shown taciturnity on the expression of queer identity in their community. According to Tara Atluri, a researcher at the University of Toronto, this demure over sexual differences does not help in promoting gender equality in the Caribbean culture because "there is a strong correlation between homophobia, heterosexism and sexism" (Atluri 2001:4). Subsequently, the extreme sexual identity conformity in some black communities can exclude members of the community - who do not confirm to such standards - and perhaps limit their individual self-expression.

Another place where Black Diaspora can be located is in Canada. Canada is home to many ethnic groups including people of African descent who have existed in Eastern Canada dating back several centuries (Milan 2005). More recently, there have been a large influx of Black immigration to this North American country. In 2001, nearly half (45%) of Black Canadians were born outside of Canada (Milan 2005:4). Moreover, Black immigration to Canada predominantly came from continental Africa and the Caribbean (ibid). As a result, there has been a nascent cultural mosaic of Black Canadians because of the mixture between the original Black Canadians and the new arrivals. What is more, since it is apparent that sexual identity nonconformity exists in most ethnic groups, there are Black Canadian homosexuals.

In this paper, I will theorize that the Afro-Canadian gay male identity is not monolithic, but rather multilayered. Further, the objective of this study is to explore the various ideas surrounding the perception and construction of Black Canadian gay male social personalities. It is worth noting that not all Canadian gay males of African descent have the same origins (indigene Africans or Caribbean) and social backgrounds, so I will try not to generalize or exclude. My analysis hopes to be a synthesis of the very limited amount of information available on this topic: there are simply not enough academic resources to offer a general summary of the Afro-Canadian gay male identity. In lieu of this absence, I hope to shed light on the influences and similarities in formulating Black queer identity in relations to power structures in North America (Atluri 2001:5). Aptly, this conversation is an attempt at addressing the elephant in the room: homosexuality among Black men. Without a doubt, the importance for me, as an Afro-Canadian gay man, to participate in this dialogue cannot be overlooked because it will contribute to an organic perspective for a community I belong to.

Specifically for this essay, I will approach the subject matter in three folds. Foremost, I will start my essay by explaining key ideas and words, such as Black or Afro Canadian, male homosexuality, and identity. In this part, I will endeavor to use theoretical frameworks - like critical or queer theory, essentialist or social constructionist theory - to situate their academic relevance. Sequentially, the second section of my paper will highlight the debate over some of the original ideas in which the black Canadian gay persona is formulated. As well, contemporary notions of Afro queer identity will be given credence in my observation. I intend to demonstrate the uniqueness of same-sex expression among an inter-sectorial group: sexual minorities within a marginal ethnic community.

## **SECTION ONE: Context and Definition**

The country of Canada is geographically located in North America and occupies the vast land mass just above the United States of America: the 47th longitude divides these two Western countries. More recently, the country with population of thirty-three million – Canada - was ranked by the Human Development Index, a report by the United Nations indicating the level of human development, as the fourth best place to live in the world (see Website). Canada, as a burgeoning multicultural nation is home to many ethnic minorities, such as Chinese, South Asians and Blacks (Milan 2004:1). In addition, these ethnic minorities, including Black Canadians, have helped to shape the local, as well as the national cultural vegetation of Canada as a pluralistic modern society. So, who are Black Canadians?

Rinald Walcot - a professor of Black Canadian studies at the University of Toronto - defines the label, *Black Canadians*, as people of African descent whose identity is “syncretic, always in revision and in a process of becoming because of migration and the history of uprootedness” (Walcot 1997:120). In keeping with this explanation and exclusively to this essay, I will use the term *Black, Afro, and African* Canadian interchangeably to refer to people of African origin: people who trace their heritage from Sub-Saharan Africa. For me, the word *African* is an ethnic term that can be used to replace *Negro, color or a Black* person. For example, ethnic terms like *Chinese, Italian, Irish, Ukrainian, French, and Japanese* are respectively used to qualify Canadians who self-identify as such or share the same ethnic heritage, although are no longer indigenous to the culture of the old world. Similarly the label, *African* Canadian, includes diasporic Blacks together with Blacks – born in continental Africa - who currently live in Canada. Also, when I make reference to a *Black* person living in the old world of Africa, I will specifically tag that person as a *native or indigene African*. Certainly, I do recognize that the debate over nomenclature in describing people of African descent is ongoing (Marlone Riggs 1995). Nevertheless, my clamor for using the term *African* to replace *Black* affirms a common heritage and stands in solidarity with my brothers and sisters in

Black Africa.

Further, according to Isaac Saney, an expert in Afro-Canadian history, the first African person in Canada was working for a provincial French Governor as an interpreter in 1602 (Saney 1998:79). Black presence in Canada is evident by British loyalist – during the American Revolution - immigration to Canada from the United States, which often included their African slaves (Milan 2004:2). Therefore, Afro-Canadians existed as private property in Eastern Canada between the period of 1628 until the early 1800s (Ibid). Although many Blacks stayed in Canada and “founded settlements in Nova Scotia and Ontario” in the aftermath of slavery (ibid), some decided to go back to the United States, while others moved back and forth for economic reasons or as an attempt to maintain contacts with relatives on both sides of the Canadian-American border.

In fact, during this period of the early part of the twentieth century, the general experiences of Black Canadians, as a community, were not that different from the mundane realities of many African-Americans. As a result, one can postulate that there are not many differences between Afro-Canadian identities and mainstream Black American identities. To a large extent, “American culture is widespread in mainstream Canada and vice versa, many Canadian cultural products and entertainers are successful in the U.S.. For this reason, many Canadian and American cultural products are enjoyed by a unified *North American* culture” (Blackwell, 2005). Thus, one can contend that Canadian-established identity is not unique from American cultural identity. This cultural penetration - in its simplistic sense - can help to understand the meaning of group identity.

Though the concept of identity is ambiguous, “group derived identities are seldom unitary in any sense, as each individual feels a part of more than one group” (Dynes 1990:573-4). Besides, the notion of identity seems to hinge much more on individual fluidity rather group control (ibid). In order for one to discern the complex nature of African Canadian identity, one has to look at it from two perspectives: essentialist and social constructionist theories. While essentialist theories argue that identity is inherent within human biological make up, as is affirmed by the statement: *I was born Black*; conversely, social constructionists contend that identity is a social formulation (Helma Seidl 2006:197). In other words, identities such as race, gender or sexual orientation, are marked and “experienced differently depending on the historical and social disposition on the time” (ibid). As specified by this school of thought, social forces can, over time, influence personalities or identities into mutually exclusive binary systems and reject ‘other’ race or sexual orientation identities, as a deviation from the acceptable norm (ibid). Clearly from the above definition, it is conceivable for an individual to have more than one identity, for example, both Black and homosexual.

As part of my attempt to explain Black Canadian homosexuality, this study defines homosexuality “as the entire range of male same-sex relations and affections”

including self-identified straight men who have sex with men (Dynes1990:556-7). The term *queer*, *gay* and *homosexual* will be used to mean the same thing: non-exclusive male same-sex attraction. It is worth noting that most vibrant gay communities are located in urban areas in North America (Livingston 2009). Also, the gay subculture in North America is very small in terms of population and marked by spotty existence. The prevailing gay subculture influences or builds on the attitudes and norms of other gay groups. Gay men, for instance, frequent different queer festivals in major cities, as a sign of group solidarity, and to this end exchange group norms and ideas (Livingston 2009).

### **ANTECEDENT EXPRESSION OF BLACK HOMOSEXUALITY**

In supporting my thesis, Afro-Canadian gay male identity is not monolithic but rather multilayered, I would like to ruminate on some of the basic ideas which influence the complex dimension of black homosexual identity formation. Remarkably, the arrival of Europeans in Africa brings to light some antecedent expression of indigenous African same-sex behavior. During this period of European colonization, many Western anthropologists contended that same-sex desire was alien to Africa since Africa was a primitive culture. Steven Murray, a renowned American sociologist affirmed this perspective when he said:

*“Among the many myths Europeans have created about Africa, the myth that homosexuality is absent or incidental in African societies is one of the oldest and most enduring. For Europeans, Black Africa - of all the native people in the world - most epitomized “primitive man.” Since primitive man was supposed to be close to nature, ruled by instinct, and culturally unsophisticated, he had to be heterosexual, his sexual energies and outlets devoted exclusively to their “natural” purpose: biological reproduction. If black Africans were the most primitive people in all humanity - if they were, indeed, human, which some debated - then they had to be the most heterosexual”* (Murray 1998: xi).

Conversely, same-sex desire did exist in traditional African society even though many Western scholars did not want to grant African cultures that recognition for racist reasons. Suffice to say, native African society seems to be accommodative in the area of pluralistic gender sexual identity. Most indigenous African spirituality provides an outlet for same-sex desire and expression. “In traditional Zulu culture, a man must be a man...and a woman must be a woman, but with Sangoma [priests] it is more flexible. [a Priest] can dance like a woman and wear a woman’s clothes and [at the same time] dance like a man and wear a man’s clothes” (Nkabinde 2008:73). Another illustration of sexual malleability in native African culture is provided by S. Frazao, a Portuguese student of Angolan cults. He observed during a religious event that: “It may take months for the [ancestral spirit] possession to wear off. While it lasts, women behave like men, taking one or more wives, and men dress like women and live with youth, [men]” (Zolla 1981:82).

Furthermore, another evidence which shows that the concept of homosexuality is not foreign to native African milieu is documented by Mayerowitz, a European anthropologist, who worked with the Akan peoples of West Africa from the 1920s to the 1940s. Mayerowitz observed that “...the matrilineal Akan people who live in present-day Ghana and Ivory Coast, created a powerful state in the eighteenth century and used male slaves as concubines, treating them like female lovers. Male concubines wore pearl necklaces with gold pendants. When their masters died, they were also killed” (Murray 1998:105). Also the western female anthropologist recalled: “at that time men who dressed as women and engaged in homosexual relations with other men were not stigmatized, but accepted” (ibid). Mayerowitz contended that there were good reasons for men to become women, since among the matrilineal Akan the status of women was particularly high. Unfortunately, the renowned scholar added that this situation of gender flexibility has changed due to European Christian missionary activity.

Despite these copious evidence of same sex behavior in traditional African societies, many Black leaders hold the contentious opinion that homosexuality did not exist in Black Africa and it was westerners who brought gays to the second largest continent. Mark Epprecht, professor at Queen’s University, has noted that some Zimbabwean leaders have claimed “that homosexuality is a *white man’s disease* or is spread by inferior *tribes*” (Epprecht 1998:199). Whatever the reasons behind this blatant lie, no one can refute the fact that this erroneous notion helps to perpetuate the racist myth that: “*real* African men are exclusively heterosexual by nature”( ibid). One negative side effect of allowing this myth to stand can be seen in the homophobic ideas which saturate the mainstream media depiction of Black men in North America. *Lianna* (1983), a film by John Sayles, talks about the *coming out* of a White bourgeoisie women. In one of the scenes, a football coach makes the following comments:

*“I had a player once, a halfback, a hell of a runner. Anyhow, I found out in the middle of the season that he, uh you know, he liked guys. I’d recruited this kid out of high school, watched him develop four years and I had no idea. I mean, he was a Black kid. I didn’t even know they had them that way”* (Nero 2005: 235)

The coach’s comment underlines the racist idea that African American males are “hyper-virile” so they cannot be gay. Most Black gay men are depicted as lying about their queerness in some of the most critically acclaimed movies and dramatic works. Strikingly, the major theme that appears in such works highlights “black heterosexual masculinity as authentic and black homosexuality as trivial, ineffectual, and, indeed, inauthentic” (Nero 2008: 235).

## **SECTION TWO: AFRO-CANADIAN QUEER IDENTITIES**

In addition, one of the primary ideas of same-sex behavior among Black men in Canada is called *down low*. This, in its simplistic sense, means men having sex with men without self identifying as a homosexual. Keith Boykin, a New York based Black gay activist, in his famous book, *One more River to cross: Black and Gay in America*, said what most Blacks do not like is not homosexuality, but rather an open expression of homosexuality. That is to say, this thinking permits same-sex desires and behaviors to be labelled as private in the Black community. This practice between men who have sex with men and still ascribe to heterosexuality as their sexual orientation is not unique to the African Canadian society. According to an expert in cross-cultural homosexual identity, Dr. Wayne, the concept of sexual orientation is a western idea; in most non-western societies, homosexuality is most at times part of heterosexuality. Homosexuality is practiced and understood as a verb – an action – and not an individual social personality, a noun (Wayne 1992:338-52). So this paradigm of secret bisexuality sanctions a man to have sex with another man and still self identify as a straight man and even marry a woman.

*“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”* ( Crichlow 2004:164).

This is what Bill, a Black man *on the down low*, said during an interview with Wesley Crichlow, the author of *Buller Men and Batty Bwoys: Hidden Men In Toronto and Halifax Black Communities*. Crichlow believes that his interviews with Black men in Toronto and Halifax helped to explore the convoluted concept of bisexuality as well as the “narrow definition of homo/hetero polarity” (ibid). Some interviewees, despite having sex with other men, did not want to self identify themselves as homosexuals, or even bisexuals. Thus Bill’s narrative, explains the realities of those individuals for whom sexual orientation is not a mutually exclusive choice (ibid).

Nevertheless in mainstream Canadian gay communities, there are two main types of Black homosexual self identities. *Black gays* and *gay identified Blacks*. The Black gays are those who identify with their race first. “They feel their black identities are more important because skin color is more visible than sexual orientation, which they can hide. Hence, they believe skin color had a greater influence on how others interacted with them” (Constantine-Simms 2000:7). A case in point is Lennox - a Black gay man who is in a relationship with another Black gay man in Halifax - interviewed by Crichlow, Wesley, a researcher in Black queer studies at the University of Toronto (2004: 156-7). During one of the meetings with Lennox, Crichlow posed the question: “How does being with a Black partner make your life easier politically, culturally and socially?” Lennox answered by saying:

*“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 to have in a relationship” (Crichlow 2004:157).*

There are a variety of reasons why people chose partners for relationships. In this interview, Lennox’s thoughts on the importance of loving a Black man were that it was culturally practical and the primacy of being with someone with a shared experience seems to be couched in communal values of minority group solidarity and group consciousness.

In situating this discussion in an academic discourse, Crichlow pointed out that Lennox’s reasons for loving a Black man resemble those of Ron Simmons, an advocate for “same-sex consciousness among black men in the United States” (1991). Ron Simmons believes that Black men loving Black men is emancipatory since it captures or resonates with ideas of community self-reliant and self-love against the backdrop of extreme poverty and self-loathing among Black men. An interesting fact is that the homicide and suicide rates among Black men are the highest in North America. In March 2008, Essence magazine, a leading African American magazine, reported that a Black man is murdered every day by another Black man in Philadelphia and as a result the city has been nick-named Killadelphia by some residents (Amber 2008). Black on Black violence accounts for almost 798 people who were victims of homicide between 2006 and 2007 in Philadelphia (ibid). This grim statistics pushes the city’s homicide rate to be higher than any other city in America (ibid). This unbridled desire to kill another human being just because of gang affiliation can be said to be inspired by lack of personal validation and low-esteem, which is the more reason to each other.

Further, one can argue that a Black man is the president of U.S.A so Black men have no excuse for playing the victim, to counter this point, Dee Marshall, a commentator at Essence magazine says “even with a Commander-in-Chief of a darker hue in the White House, Blacks with the same college degrees as their white counterparts find it extremely difficult to close the unemployment racial gap when it comes to searching for a job (Marshall 2009). For example, the unemployment rate among Black men of 16 to 24 years old is 34.5 percent - three times the national average (Gordy 2009). Even more, these statistics are comparable to the Afro-Canadian reality. This gives credence to the idea that Black men should come together in order to find unique solutions to their own

predicaments:“ once individuals recognized their role in creating their own life predicament, they also realize that they, and only they, have the power to change that situation (Yalom 2002:141). The late Black gay activist, Marlon Riggs in his groundbreaking film, *Tongues Untied*, revived the discussion of the urge for Black men - especially Black gay men - to come together by declaring that: “Black men loving Black men is the revolutionary act of our times” (ibid).

Since Black gay men put more emphasis on their ethnicity instead of their sexual orientation, there is little viable place for them in the mainstream gay culture, hence their deep marginalization (Conerly 2000:12). From my personal experience in interacting with Afro-Canadian homosexuals, I have realized that many Black gays are increasingly dark-skinned blacks and impoverished. Accordingly, they form an underground sub-culture with limited resources to affirm their fervent love for each other. Sometimes this serves as a middle ground and spurs them to create a unique Black gay culture; a sub-culture that is at times appropriated by the mainstream white gay culture as its own or as a unified culture. In return, Black gays overwhelmingly disapprove of the white gay community’s efforts to appropriate their expression of inter-sectorial identity without giving them due recognition. This observation is consistent with the dominant themes of *Paris Is Burning*, a documentary film about Black gay subcultures in the American ghettos. James Baldwin, a pioneer Black gay writer, affirms the identity formation of Black gays when he opines that sexuality and race are intertwined and inseparable.

Furthermore, one of the most important reasons why Black gays have created their own subculture in relation to the dominant gay group is because of what they consider to be overt racism in the white gay community. The words of James Baldwin highlights this dynamic: “The gay world as such is no more prepared to accept black people than anywhere else in society. It’s a very hermetically sealed world with very unattractive features, including racism” (Nero 2005 or Conerly 2000). Likewise, *Tongues Untied*, a 1989 documentary by Marlon Riggs, illuminates this theme of rejection when a Black gay man becomes incensed after a white doorkeeper requested *five-forms* of picture identification to enter a white gay bar. This and many examples led Marlon Riggs to proclaim that while living in San Francisco’s overwhelming white and gay male *Castro District*, he became “an invisible man”, possessing “no shadow, no substance. No history, no place [and] no reflection.” Riggs concludes, in the gay *Castro District*, he became “an alien, unseen, and seen, unwanted” (Riggs 1989). Without a doubt, Marlon Riggs’ experience mirrors the general social reality for many Black gays in the mainstream gay community in Canada.

So strong is the tug of racial identification in the gay culture that it hinders a - race neutral - communal expression of shared sexual orientation in the Canadian gay community. When *black gays* see white gays, what many of them see are not brothers and sisters in the struggle, but instead, just a different group of whites. Unfortunately, Black gays attach to white gays the same traits we attach to heterosexual white people,

including the ‘ubiquitous white privilege.’ As well, *Black gays* “distrust the predominantly white male leaders of the gay movement, because we see their objectives as an attempt to eliminate the last little glitch - gayness - that makes life difficult for privileged whites (Boykin 1996: 216-28). Similarly, an analogy can be drawn between how Black gays see white gays and how Black feminists see white feminists. Some Black feminists reviewed the white feminist movement with the following: “despite their differences from the white, heterosexual male power elite, they still benefited from the entrenched privilege of race” (ibid). Kimberle Crenshaw, a Black feminist activist, explains that white feminists “ignore how their own race functions to mitigate some aspects of sexism and, how it often privileges them over and contribute to the domination of other women” (qtd ibid). Therefore, it is not over-ambitious for me to reason that the way Black feminists see the white feminist movement is parallel to how Black gays see the white-dominated gay culture.

On the other hand, the *gay blacks* are the second major type of Afro-Canadian homosexual group in the gay community; *Gay Blacks* are those who identify with their sexual orientation more than their race. “ Their gay identity was more important to them because they felt the gay community was more tolerant than the Black community, sexual orientation affected their social lives more than race, and they felt more oppressed by their sexual preference than by their race” (Constantine-Simms 2000:8). Undoubtedly, they were accepted by the mainstream gay society because they did not talk about their racial and class teething troubles (ibid). According to them, their race is inconsequential to their sexual proclivity and to this end feel issues of their sexuality is preeminent over any other issue. They were *gay* first and *black* second. Once again, from my anecdotal experience, most *gay black* men whose ideas of sexuality chime with mainstream gay society are of middle class upbringing or with interracial parents (Crichlow 2005). Their mulatto status certainly aids them to gain acceptance to the dominant gay culture. In other words, it was easy for them to appeal to whites because they were more similar and closer to them. Strangely, those who found it difficult to ethnically identify as blacks became the standard black representatives in the gay society. This acceptance sanctioned by white liberal gays is inherently exclusive as it enforces two tiers of black homosexuality: *dark black gays* and *gay pale blacks*.

In the opinion of Gregory Conerly, the author of *Are You Black first or Are You Queer? Gay Blacks* overwhelmingly prefer white lovers (2000:8) even though most white gay men are noted for liking Black men because of their perceived sexual prowess. As one Black homosexual in Halifax pointed out: “Yo’know, they [white gays] 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” (Crichow 2004:160). Moreover, this stereotype of the *active* Black man with a *big dick* in the gay community is central to Frantz Fanon’s psychological study of interracial relationships. In *Black Skin, White Mask*, Fanon postulated that the hypersexual image of the Black male - an image some Black men

delight in enforcing - makes him a sex monkey, without the capacity to think. In other words, "The Negro is taken as a terrifying penis" (Fanon 1967: 177).

Still, Gay Blacks offer other reasons underpinning their desire to be with the mainstream gay community. Neil is one Gay Black man, who resides in Toronto, in a relationship with a white gay man. He recalls his unique experience to support his desire to be with a white man:

*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 relationship will always be with white men because I do not care about what others have to say about me (Nero 2005: 163).*

Even though it is not impossible for a Black man to be in a relationship with a white man without any racial political dynamics, Neil's reasons for being with a white man seem to be an internalized negative perception of the Black community to justify his own fascination. The fact that one has encountered an unsavory experience with one social group does not provide sufficient justification to stop having a relationship with that group, especially within the community one belongs to. Suffice to say that gay Blacks, like Neil, are usually castigated for choosing to identify with white gay culture as their primary social world because they are perceived to be dismissing their cultural heritage (Conerly 2000:8). However, Barbara Smith, a Black lesbian author of *Home Girls*, talks about the dangers of using "cultural beliefs and habits that may characterize many [gay Blacks] into requirements and use them as proof of [their] own and others' full membership in the race" (qtd Conerly 2000:13).

## CONCLUSION

Even though many Black leaders gainsay the existence of homosexuality in their respective communities, same-sex desire has existed in continental Africa since time immemorial. Sadly because of racist reasons, anthropologist did not see the need to believe that the hyper sexual African male can practice homosexuality. Colonial Africa repressed traditional African notions of same-sex desire. According to Mark Eppretch "the colonialist did not introduce homosexuality to Africa but rather intolerance of it - and systems of surveillance and regulation for suppressing it [and] only when natives people began to forget that same-sex patterns were ever a part of their culture did homosexuality become truly stigmatized" (Murray 1998:XVI). As a result, silence and denial has

become a noticeable feature of the way Black people deal with the idea of homosexuality in their various communities

It is my opinion that homosexual behavior is not foreign to any group of people including Blacks. In North America, there are Black homosexuals and it is obvious that the Afro-Canadian gay male identity is not monolithic, but rather multilayered. I do not in any way intend to overlook the fact that these identities are not stagnate: the primary identity choice of Black homosexuality - as discussed - can change over time. In order for one to understand the identity construction of any group of people, one has to explore identity formation to mean: “group derived identities are seldom unitary in any sense, as each individual feels a part of more than one group” (Dynes 1990:573-4). Besides, the notion of identity seems to hinge much more on individual fluidity rather group control (ibid).

I do concede that there are many more notions of Black homosexualities that need to be explored, however, in this paper we recognized three main types of Black Canadian homosexual identities. The first type was called the *down low*: This, in its simplistic sense, means men having sex with men without self identifying as a homosexual. Black gays were the second group identified in this survey, “They feel their black identities are more important because skin color is more visible than sexual orientation, which they can hide” (Conerly 2000:8). Gay Blacks are Canadians who identify with their sexual orientation more than their race. Finally, my discussion of homosexuality in my community, African Canadian Community, has or will helped to break the yoke of silence surrounding this great taboo.

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