SHORT REPORT

Homophobia, hypermasculinity and the US black church

ELIJAH G. WARD

Institute for Health Research and Policy, School of Public Health, University of Illinois at Chicago, USA

Abstract
Black churches in the USA constitute a significant source of the homophobia that pervades black communities. This theologically-driven homophobia is reinforced by the anti-homosexual rhetoric of black nationalism. Drawing on a variety of sources, this paper discusses the sources of homophobia within black communities, and its impact upon self-esteem, social relationships and physical health. Religion-based homophobia and black nationalism point to wider structures which have influenced their emergence, including racism, patriarchy and capitalism. It is vital for US black churches and communities to understand and transcend their longstanding resistance to openly addressing complex, painful issues of sexuality and embrace healthier definitions of black manhood.

Résumé
Aux USA, les églises noires représentent une source significative de l'homophobie qui imprègne les communautés noires. Cette homophobie basée sur la théologie est renforcée par la rhétorique anti-homosexuelle du nationalisme noir. En exploitant diverses sources, cet article examine l'origine de l'homophobie au sein des communautés noires, et son impact sur l'estime de soi, les relations sociales et la santé physique.

L'homophobie basée sur la religion et le nationalisme noir semblent indiquer que ce sont des structures sociales plus larges qui ont favorisé leur émergence, parmi lesquelles le racisme, le patriarcat et le capitalisme. Pour les églises et les communautés noires américaines, il est vital de comprendre et de transcender leurs vieilles résistances afin d'aborder ouvertement les questions complexes et douloureuses de la sexualité, et d'adopter des définitions plus saines de la virilité noire.

Resumen
Las iglesias negras de los Estados Unidos son una fuente de homofobia importante y dominante en las comunidades negras. Esta homofobia impulsada teológicamente está reforzada por la retórica antihomosexual del nacionalismo negro. Basándonos en toda una serie de fuentes, en este documento mostramos las fuentes de homofobia dentro de las comunidades negras y sus repercusiones en la autoestima, las relaciones sociales y la salud física. La homofobia basada en la religión y el nacionalismo negro están estrechamente vinculadas a estructuras más amplias que han influenciado su aparición, como son el racismo, el patriarcado y el capitalismo. Es de vital importancia que las iglesias y comunidades negras de los Estados Unidos comprendan y superen su tradicional resistencia a tratar abiertamente problemas complejos y difíciles de la sexualidad y adopten definiciones más saludables sobre la masculinidad negra.

Keywords: *Homophobia, religion, black men, masculinity, community health*

Introduction

Although many of them do not support anti-gay discrimination, evidence from media-based and empirical surveys indicates that significant numbers of people in the USA, including black people, see homosexual relationships as unacceptable and morally wrong (Crawford *et al.* 2002:179–180). Black churches hold a central and uniquely influential position within black culture and society in the USA (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). Both directly and indirectly, black churches have been identified as fostering homophobia—a fear or contempt for homosexuals and behaviour based upon such feelings—playing an important role in its genesis, legitimation and weekly reinforcement in black communities (Dyson 1996). Indeed, theologically-driven homophobia, aided by black nationalist ideology, supports a strong and exaggerated sense of masculinity within black communities that, along with homophobia, takes a significant but generally unexamined psychic and social toll on people's lives. These forces adversely shape the lives not only of black gay/bisexual men but also those of black heterosexual males and females.

Methods

The analysis presented here was developed following a literature review focusing on socio-cultural analyses within the fields of history, gender studies, politics and theology; qualitative and quantitative sociological and psychological studies, including surveys or reviews of sets of surveys; national opinion polls; and other sources of evidence. This analysis was also informed by conversations with nine black clergy, and speaking/lecture engagements by five additional black ministers, all of whom were encountered during the author's attendance at local and national conferences attended by black clergy, or through visits to black churches. The author was raised in a black church and has worshipped in many different black churches over a period of many years.

The influence of black churches

US black churches are diverse in character, spanning vast differences along many dimensions including theological tradition, style of worship, music, urban/rural location and socioeconomic status. The black church in the USA is widely recognised as the central, oldest and most influential institution in the black community (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). It has been the organisational and cultural matrix from which many black social institutions and forms of artistic expression emerged and have been sustained over the past 250 years. But even more critically, the black church is the spiritual ark that also preserved and empowered black people socially, psychologically and physically during and after slavery (Miller 2001). Surveys indicate that four out of five blacks belong to a faith tradition (CDC 1999) and that 97% of black people in the USA claim some religious affiliation (Dawson *et al.* 1994).

The black church wields a potent influence, on many levels, in the lives of churchgoers (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990, Douglas 1999). Church affiliation is strong among all socioeconomic levels of black people, and is often a significant element of the social lives and networks of blacks. But what is also striking is the influence it wields indirectly in the lives of those blacks that are not churchgoers. Even if as adults they no longer embrace the church or religious principles, many blacks have been profoundly influenced by the church

ideology and imagery with which they were raised, and this continues to influence their later beliefs and practices (Dyson 2003, Reed 2003).

Sources of the homophobia in black communities and churches

Within many black communities the church plays a significant role in the production of homophobia, although it is important to recognize that black churches are not the only source of the homophobia in black communities. Homophobia exists within many cultures, subcultures and religious groups. But what are the roots and character of homophobia in black churches within the USA? Three different types of explanation have been put forward, which privilege respectively (i) religious beliefs, (ii) historical sexual exploitation, and (iii) race survival consciousness. All are intimately related to the history of black slavery, underscoring the complex background influence of racism in the genesis of homophobia.

According to the first of these perspectives, homophobia is related to literalist theological views. Recent work by theologians and biblical scholars has done much to move Christian groups toward greater biblical integrity on homophobia as well as other issues (e.g. Spong 1992, Nelson 1993, Helminiak 1994, Douglas 1999). Work of this kind has given contextual clarity to passages long-adhered to as justifications for homophobia. Yet, black ministers and congregations have been relatively immune to, or distrustful of, such generally white-dominated approaches to biblical scholarship and revisionism. Homophobia in black churches is therefore directly related to the authority given to a perceived literal interpretation of scripture in these churches (Brown 2002, Fowlkes 2003, Reed 2003). Douglas (1999:90) argues that '[S]cripture is often the cornerstone of homophobia in the black community'. She explains why black people's use of the Bible to condemn homosexuality is understandable in the context of their historical experience, as enslaved blacks sought refuge and found freedom in the literalness of Scripture.

A second line of thought holds that, among blacks, homophobia may well be at least in part the expression of a more general fear of sexuality. Some black thinkers and scholars locate this wider fear of sexuality, and of homosexuality in particular, in a psycho-cultural response to the history of white exploitation of black sexuality during slavery and afterwards. Douglas (1999) has offered the most complete explanation of this thesis. Beyond their adaptive sense of humour in response to debilitating stereotypes, black people in the USA have been profoundly affected by the persistent efforts of whites to demonise them and their sexuality. In the social construction of standards of beauty, measures of intelligence and assessments of moral character, elements of racism have been used to effectively privilege whiteness and denigrate blackness. Much of this has been accomplished through the institution of slavery and its aftermath.

US media stereotypes developed during slavery such as that of the mammy, the jezebel, and the wild and hypersexual buck have their latter-day incarnations in the domineering matriarch, the 'welfare queen' and the violent and sexually promiscuous black man. The old images of blacks as bestial, lustful, wanton, lascivious, and promiscuous persist in the US psyche today. Douglas (1999) says that Cornel West speaks for many others when he noted that institutions in the black community – families, schools, churches – have historically and assiduously avoided addressing the fundamental issue of sexuality. This reticence on the part of blacks to speak about sexuality in public grows out of a fear that it will confirm the stereotypes that whites have long held.

A third approach to explaining contemporary patterns of homophobia can be found in the work of Crichlow (2004), who emphasizes notions of race survival consciousness. In his treatment of Crichlow's work, Lemelle (2004) notes that black homophobia in North America is rooted in the moralisms about homosexuality produced in the melding – within the context of colonialism and imperialism – of both Western and traditional African religious beliefs. These homophobic religious moralisms have dovetailed with the urgency of a racial consciousness of survival and preservation among blacks, that sought to construct black masculinity as the struggle against white domination. Crichlow refers to this racial consciousness as bionationalism. The fallout from this ideological joining together of religion-driven homophobia and bionationalism has been that whiteness and homosexuality are both understood to connote weakness and femininity; conversely, black masculinity has been constructed in hypermasculine terms.

Whereas many black churches are perhaps easy to identify as visible founts of homophobic rhetoric, the overarching influence of racism that has given rise to such homophobia has also nurtured it in secular settings as well. Black men's conceptions of what it is to be a man have been inextricably shaped by enduring racial stereotypes of black men as athletes, criminals and sexual predators – racial stereotypes not merely peculiar to the USA, but also pertaining to black males globally (Pieterse 1992).

Homophobia: a pillar of hegemonic constructions of masculinity

Beyond sources of homophobia related to experiences of slavery and racism, black people and churches have also been influenced by the homophobia prevalent in the larger US society, and by related US notions of masculinity. Current dominant US construction of masculinity include the following characteristics: a degree of mastery over one's environment, the display of avid interest in sports, competitiveness, independence, being strong/tough, suppressing feelings, and aggressive/dominant control of relationships (Staples 1982:2, Jakupcak 2003, Seal and Ehrhardt 2003:315).

Hypermasculinity, an exaggeration and distortion of traditionally masculine traits, has been studied by psychologists since the 1920s (Glass 1984). Mosher and Sirkin (1984) have viewed, for example, hypermasculinity, or machismo, as a trait associated with the assertion of power and dominance often through physically and sexually aggressive behaviours. Benson (2001) has argued that hypermasculinity is a value system extolling male physical strength, aggression, violence, competition and dominance that despises the dearth of these characteristics as weak and feminine. Hypermasculine symbols and characters suffuse many arenas of US life, including sports (Burstyn 1999), big business (West 1994:10), television (Scharrer 2001), the military and foreign policy (Ehrenreich 2002). Indeed, the normative construction of masculinity in US society is heavily influenced by hypermasculine symbols and ideals.

Homophobia operates as a linchpin of the prevailing hegemonic construction of masculinity in the USA. Normative conceptions of masculinity in US society are inherently heterosexist and homophobic (Kimmel 1994). Because of the conflation of gender and sexuality, to be seen as masculine requires being heterosexual, prompting the hypermasculinisation of behaviour among males in order to avoid being labelled a 'fag' or 'queer' (Kimmel and Mahler 2003). According to Jabir (2004), ideologies of hetero-normativity *require* the performance of homophobia – the pathologisation and demonisation of the homosexual – in order to legitimate, consolidate and essentialise their cultural ascendancy.

As in wider US society, homophobia shores up versions of hegemonic masculinity prevalent in black communities. Black masculinity in the USA is in a state of crisis. hooks (2004:xii), reminds us that the core imagery with which the black male is constructed is that of the murderous, rapacious brute – 'untamed, uncivilised, unthinking, and unfeeling'. Racist, capitalist patriarchy, she says, will never allow the full empowerment of black men.

Hypermasculinity is a living force within black communities. For Saddik (2003), hard-core 'gangsta' rappers are dramatising the essence of black hypermasculinity, which in many ways is an intensified, black male cultural reflection of the patriarchy, sexism, heterosexism, and 'gangster-style' market materialism of wider US society. Wolfe's (2003:848) review of several studies indicates the prevalence of patterns of hypermasculine behaviour among US black males, especially the tendency to relate to black women with manipulative and exploitative attitudes, and the 'quest for sexual prowess, with babies as proof'. Intimately related to this is the 'cool pose' of so many US black males (Majors and Billson 1992), a complex, ritualised form of masculinity emphasising strength, toughness, pride, control, poise and emotionlessness. Being cool is expressed in highly stylised yet individualised manners of walking, talking and dressing, and is the key to fitting in with other black males, especially among youth. For Majors and Billson (1992), it is a coping strategy black men use to allay and triumph over the anxieties and stresses of racism and related blocked social opportunities, as well as a means to express bitterness, contempt and rage toward the dominant society.

As Majors and Billson (1992:10) indicate, cool pose may well be related to the many self-destructive and other-destructive behaviours that plague black men and communities, from adolescent deviance and substance abuse to domestic violence, gang behaviour and homicide. Qualities such as being 'socially incompetent, disabled, or crippled—a sissy' are considered the opposite of being cool (*ibid*:83). hooks (2004) has pointed to some of the contradictions, vulnerabilities and insecurities of black male identity in contemporary US society. She notes that lack of intimacy ultimately erodes the self-respect of black men, an untenable situation whose source she locates, interestingly, not only in patriarchy and narrow constructions of black manhood, but also in conservative religious traditions. These sources are also intimately related to the production of homophobia.

In effect, homophobia is used as a strategy of domination by various individuals and groups – both in US society and within its black subculture – to define not only who or what a homosexual is, but even more importantly, who or what *a man* is not. For as Thomas (1996:59) has argued, 'The jargon of racial authenticity [i.e. in the black community] insists, as the gangsta-rapper Ice Cube has put it, that "true niggers ain't gay"'.

Homophobic constructions of masculinity in the black church

Black churches vary widely in their approach to homosexuality. However, the responses of the majority of black churches range from verbalised hostility toward homosexuals to, at best, silence on the issue. Only in a small contingent of US black churches that typically identify as black gay churches – usually pastored by black lesbian or gay ministers – is there an active and explicit embrace of gay/bisexual persons. Non-denominational Christian churches that actively embrace black lesbians and gays do in fact exist, but are typically multi-racial churches of which blacks comprise a minority.

A palpable silence around homosexuality exists in many black churches. There are, in fact, predominantly black congregations that are socially and theologically progressive. Yet these black congregations typically exist within predominantly white denominations (e.g.

the Episcopal and United Methodist churches), and their influence within black communities is overshadowed by the much larger number of congregations within the eight historically black Protestant denominations, many of which have traditions with homophobic elements.

In many other black faith communities, unmistakably homophobic rhetoric is an everyday part of the communal life (Griffin 2000). The pastor or senior minister often sets the tone through sermons of condemnation from the pulpit, as well as through informal conversations with church members. It is not uncommon for some black ministers to regularly use derisive terms such as 'fags', 'punks', 'sissies', and 'bulldaggers' to refer to gays and lesbians. Furthermore, ministers critical of homosexuality are rarely challenged or criticised by church members. Reed (2003:5) notes, 'I've been in churches where the preacher's gay, much of the choir is gay, and much of the congregation is gay, and the preacher's condemning homosexuality as an abomination, and nobody [in the church] thinks there's anything wrong with it'.

All black churches, however, do not espouse homophobic views. The Trinity United Church of Christ is a black mega-church in Chicago that has taken a leadership role both locally and nationally in confronting homophobia and HIV/AIDS stigma, spurring other black churches to follow. The Balm in Gilead, an organisation based in New York City, has worked with thousands of black churches nationally and overseas during the past two decades, championing HIV/AIDS awareness and intervention with an implicitly counter-homophobic approach. The Regional AIDS Interfaith Network assists black (and other) congregations in North Carolina with developing HIV/AIDS prevention education and compassionate teams to support the HIV/AIDS-affected. One example of the emerging, predominantly black lesbian and gay churches is the association of Unity Fellowship Churches, which began in Los Angeles and Detroit in 1991 and has since seeded churches in several US metropolitan areas (Cohen 1999:288). Thus, although it is still in its infancy, there is a loosely-knit but emerging movement afoot among positive faith-based organisations to counter the homophobia common to many black faith communities by communicating affirming stances on same-sex relationships – a movement spurred in great part by the need to address HIV/AIDS in black communities. Yet, such forward movement is also countered by processes such as that exemplified in the stances against gay marriage adopted and publicly proclaimed by various associations of black ministers throughout the USA during and after the 2004 US presidential election, whose fears were cleverly inflamed and exploited by political networks of white evangelical Christians supporting the Republican candidate (Wallsten and Hamburger 2005).

The impact of theologically-driven homophobia on black men and masculinity

Church-related homophobia influences conceptions of what it is to be a black man, thereby influencing the behaviour and lives of black males, both straight and gay. Heterosexual men who might not normally express a hypermasculinity may feel pressure to do so as a result of repeated, impassioned church-inspired homophobic messages. The attitudes of black men are likely to be shaped by these communications. Lemelle and Battle (2004), for example, found that among black men, regular church attendance was significantly associated with more homophobic attitudes toward gay males. Expressing hypermasculinity is socially popular in many black male circles. It seizes upon opportunities for projecting male dominance, possibly functioning as a means to vent the extra frustrations that black men experience in a racist society, while also shoring up a sense of identity in an uncertain social

world. Expressing hypermasculinity also serves the added purpose of precluding questioning about one's sexual orientation, through a generous and decisive clarification of any potential ambiguity about the matter.

One effect of religion-inspired homophobic messages is that heterosexual men who are already homophobic or vulnerable (through their associations, upbringing, insecurities, social frustrations and anger) feel thereby vindicated in their beliefs and fears. If they are already expressing a hypermasculine persona, such messages reinforce their extreme and narrow understanding of what masculinity is. In this way, males who already have a tendency to believe that being a real man means or entitles them to engage in bullying, misogyny and gay-bashing find additional socio-cultural, ideological and spiritual legitimation for such a view of masculinity.

The stigma of homophobia creates tremendous psycho-social pressures for black gay/bisexual men (Cohen 1999, Fullilove and Fullilove 1999, Kennamer *et al.* 2000). Evidence suggests that internalised homophobia may lead to lower self-esteem and psychological distress in some black gay/bisexual men, possibly contributing to sexual behaviours that put them at risk for HIV (Stokes and Peterson 1998). However, still stronger findings indicate that black gay and bisexual men who strongly identify as gay or generally disclose their sexual orientation to others have also been linked to higher levels of sexual risk-taking activity (Crawford *et al.* 2002) and HIV infection (CDC 2003:83) than those who are more closeted.

For some black males, hypermasculinity – although driven by deeper social structures – also operates as a mask for their hidden need and desire to be sexually intimate with another man, which they nevertheless secretly pursue parallel to their relationships with their families, girlfriends and wives (Crichlow 2004), a situation now commonly being referred to in the US black media as 'the down-low'. Research by Woodyard *et al.* (2000) has found that participation in some black churches encourages sexual secrecy among young black men who have sex with men.

Although church-projected homophobia drives some black gay men from the black church, other black gay men for various reasons remain in traditional black churches that are unabashedly homophobic, and endure the oppression. Many find or create their own niches in traditional churches, perhaps involved in or responsible for some aspect of the music programme, either as choir member, choir director or musician. Some gay men may be ministers within churches, thus having a clerical or pastoral incentive for remaining. Some stay in order to protect younger gays and lesbians from hostile forces within the church against which these youth might otherwise have little or no protection or psycho-spiritual support. Yet others may remain in vocally homophobic churches because they have significant supportive ties to members or networks within the church that do not espouse or endorse the dominant homophobic theological rhetoric.

The impact of theologically-driven homophobia on black communities

Although several sources of evidence suggest the possibility that US blacks may be more homophobic than Americans in general, other data present a more ambiguous picture. Lewis' (2003) review of several surveys conducted since 1973 also found greater disapproval of homosexuality among black adults than among whites, a finding that persisted when religious and educational differences were controlled. However, his review also indicates that blacks were moderately more supportive of gay civil rights and significantly more opposed to anti-gay employment discrimination than whites.

Homophobia is not evenly distributed throughout black communities. Hill (2002) found that religiosity and homophobia were predicted by social class status, defined in educational terms. Similarly, Lemelle and Battle (2004) found that among black women, income, education, urban residence, and age were significantly related to holding more positive attitudes toward gay men. Nonetheless, Fullilove and Fullilove (1999) found that homophobia is common across various segments of the black community.

Because black hypermasculinity, and its attendant homophobia, prevents many black men from engaging in much more than an appearance of intimacy (in part, for fear of appearing 'weak' and unmanly), black heterosexual women are often denied the experience of emotional intimacy with their male partners. In addition, their female mates and mothers often share the sole responsibility, and psychic burden, of knowing who these men are and what they are actually dealing with in their lives. One important effect of homophobia among black heterosexual males in general, whether church-sanctioned or deriving from extra-church sources, is that it stifles expressions of affection, vulnerability and intimacy between men that many quietly yearn for, but learned to deny for fear of being labeled homosexual.

Black hypermasculine ideals are having a devastating impact upon the self-esteem, well-being and health of young, low-income black young people, and young black women in particular. Davis (2004) has recently called attention to the pervasiveness of a 'play or get played' mentality characterising both young black inner-city males' and females' approaches to sexual relationships. Her article also reveals widespread patterns of abuse, disrespect and devaluation of black women – on the part of women as well as men. Moreover, Wolfe (2003) has related the hypermasculine behaviours of black men – specifically, higher rates of multiple sex partners than any other male ethnic group and an aversion to using condoms (because they are viewed as undermining virility and manliness) – to the extremely high unintended pregnancy rate and the emerging HIV epidemic among young black women.

Indeed, the risk of HIV/AIDS – which disproportionately and overwhelmingly impacts blacks in the USA – is augmented by the silence and denial around homosexuality. Not only black gay/bisexual men, but increasingly, women and black teenagers are affected. According to the US Census Bureau, black adults and adolescents in 2001 had an AIDS case rate ten times higher than whites. Observers, ministers, activists and researchers have reached the conclusion that homophobia is one of the most significant factors crippling the willingness of the black church to respond positively to AIDS (Cohen 1999, Fullilove and Fullilove 1999, Linsk and Warner 1999, Brown 2002, Wright 2003).

Beyond the risk for and reality of AIDS, homophobia projected by the black church directly damages black gay men through an impact that might best be understood as spiritual genocide. It takes much inner strength, self-esteem, psychic vigilance and social support to disown the label spiritual abomination (Miller 2001), and likewise to resist the overwhelming tide of a culture that continually surrounds the gay male with the subtle message that he is not a man, and thereby not even a person. Unfortunately, many black gay men in the USA do not survive this assault. Also, through the silence and denial that homophobia encourages and enforces among black gay men a potentially significant source of resistance and change within the black community to these constructions is lost.

Conclusions

A host of social ills currently derive from the fallout around hypermasculinity and the homophobia that supports it within US black communities (Cohen 1999, Wolfe 2003,

Lemelle and Battle 2004). Yet, open and honest discussions of black sexuality, as well as the generation and reinforcement of more grounded and balanced constructions of masculinity might play a valuable role in wider, multi-pronged efforts to improve the state of well-being in black communities (also see Collins 2004:306). Beyond the clear need for more research to explore in greater depth the connections hinted at in this paper, a critical examination of the effects of current constructions of masculinity, and indeed of patriarchy, needs to begin in black social and cultural circles. The persistence of racism in the USA is at least as significant a factor as homophobia in destroying black communities and lives, and is deeply woven into the machineries of homophobic oppression. Indeed, as stated earlier, homophobia among blacks directly supports white racism's history of and tendency to hypersexualise, pathologise, demonise and mystify black sexuality (Thomas 1996:66). But black gay men are equally injured by the racism inherent in white gay communities' tendency to objectify black male bodies and to marginalise black men seeking an acceptance they are denied in black communities (Kraft *et al.* 2000).

The dire social and health issues facing many black communities in the USA are complex and deeply interwoven. Homophobia and the rigid constructions of masculinity it supports are but one thread among many, including the realities of poverty, high unemployment, drug trafficking, substance abuse, non-rehabilitative incarceration, depression, domestic violence, child abuse and fatherless households. Nevertheless, a mutually validating intimacy between black heterosexual males might normalise and sanction a deeply-needed, more positive construction of masculinity that might easily incorporate vulnerability and intimacy, as well as strength. It would have consequences for male health and well-being. In concert with ongoing community and policy efforts to address these critical problems, a vocal advocacy for healthy, non-homophobic constructions of manhood in black communities spearheaded by the spiritual authority of black churches, may contribute significantly to lessening the problems of violence, as well as closely-related social ills, in black communities.

In particular, a dialogue must begin over the disadvantages of homophobic approaches to socialising black males. These approaches are presently generated and legitimated in great part by black churches, yet are also strongly influenced by the binding nature of racial stereotypes of black males and by the still persisting need for a counter-racist bionationalism among blacks. Griffin (2000:114) has argued that blacks realise collusion with the dominant society in denouncing homosexuals as *the despised other*, helps black people deflect the old label of sexual immorality and buys a measure of acceptance into the larger culture. Reed (2003) and Collins (2004:107–108) have also identified this motive as an important factor behind the rejection of homosexuals by many black ministers and church members. For the black church has historically been that one haven where slaves (and many of their present-day descendants) could find dignity and social honour – where people who were *nobody* could, at last, become *somebody*.

It is critical that black churches and communities begin to take responsibility for their role in producing homophobia. However, while it is vital that conversations about homosexuality and homophobia begin in black churches, such discussions must be paralleled by the invitation of more fundamental conversations about sexuality. It is common knowledge in black communities that black churches are still reticent to genuinely address issues and pressing problems in the arena of sexuality such as teenage pregnancy, out-of-wedlock births, contraception and sexually transmitted diseases (Brown 2002, Dyson 2003, Wright 2003). A de-mythologising of black sexuality is an essential ingredient of the sexual discourse that needs to take place in the black community.

Finally, heterosexist and homophobic hegemonic constructions of masculinity are hardly peculiar to black communities. They exist within white, Latino and other racial/ethnic communities in the USA and elsewhere, and it is unclear in this respect whether black churches are any more homophobic than others. Among blacks and black faith communities, however, these patterns are reinforced by an acute consciousness of race survival, as well as by racialised stereotypes of masculinity. Indeed, for black communities, religion-based homophobia and the narrow constructions of masculinity it supports can never be fully disentangled from the more fundamental, interlocking systems of racism, patriarchy and capitalism in the context of which they developed.

Acknowledgements

References

Benson, R. W. (2001) Changing Police Culture: The Sine Qua Non of Reform. *Loyola of Los Angeles Law Review*, 34, 681–690.

Brown, Rev.T. (2002) Personal communication.

Burstyn, V. (1999) *The Rites of Men: Manhood, Politics, and the Culture of Sport* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press).

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention–CDC (1999) HIV prevention within faith communities and communities of color, Atlanta, GA.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention–CDC (2003) HIV/STD risk in young men who have sex with men who do not disclose their sexual orientation – Six U.S. cities, 1994–2000. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 52, 82–86.

Cohen, C. (1999) *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

Collins, P. H. (2004) *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge).

Crawford, I., Allison, K. W., Zamboni, B. D. and Soto, T. (2002) The Influence of Dual-Identity Development on the Psychological Functioning of African-American Gay and Bisexual Men. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 39, 179–189.

Crichlow, W. (2004) *Buller Men and Batty Bwoys: Hidden Men in Toronto and Halifax Black Communities* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press).

Dawson, M. C., Brown, R. E. and Jackson, J. S. (1994) National Black Politics Study, 1993 [Computer file]. ICPSR version. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago/Detroit, MI: Wayne State University/Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, [producers], 1994. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 1998. http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/issr/da/index/techinfo/I20181.HTM

Davis, T. (2004) The Height of Disrespect. *The Village Voice*, 17 March, 23–25.

Douglas, K. B. (1999) *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books).

Dyson, M. E. (1996) *Race Rules: Navigating the Color Line* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley).

Dyson, M. E. (2003) *Open Mike: Reflections on Philosophy, Race, Sex, Culture and Religion* (New York: Basic Books).

Ehrenreich, N. (2002) Masculinity & American Militarism. *Tikkun*, 17, 45–48.

Fowlkes, T. (2003) Personal communication.

Fullilove, M. T. and Fullilove, R. E. (1999) Stigma as an Obstacle to AIDS Action. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 42, 1113–1125.

Glass, L. L. (1984) Man's Man/Ladies' Man: Motifs of Hypermasculinity. *Psychiatry*, 47, 260–278.

Griffin, H. (2000) Their own received them not: African American lesbians and gays in black churches. In D. Constantine-Simms (ed.) *The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 110–121).

Helminiak, D. A. (1994) *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality* (San Francisco: Alamo Square Press).

Hill, S. A. (2002) Teaching and Doing Gender in African American Families. *Sex Roles*, 47, 493–506.

hooks, b. (2004) *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (New York: Routledge).

Jabir, J. O. (2004) Personal communication.

Jakupcak, M. (2003) Masculine Gender Role Stress and Men's Fear of Emotions as Predictors of Self-Reported Aggression and Violence. *Violence and Victims*, 18, 533–541.

Kennamer, J. D., Honnold, J., Bradford, J. and Hendricks, M. (2000) Differences in Disclosure of Sexuality among African American and White Gay/Bisexual Men: Implications for HIV/AIDS Prevention. *AIDS Education and Prevention*, 12, 519–31.

Kimmel, M. S. (1994) Masculinity as homophobia: fear, shame, and silence in the construction of gender identity. In H. Brod and M. Kaufman (eds.) *Theorizing Masculinities* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage), 119–141.

Kimmel, M. S. and Mahler, M. (2003) Adolescent Masculinity, Homophobia, and Violence: Random School Shootings, 1982–2001. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 46, 1439–1458.

Kraft, J. M., Beeker, C. G., Stokes, J. P. and Peterson, J. L. (2000) Finding the "Community" in Community-Level HIV/AIDS Interventions: Formative Research with Young African American Men Who Have Sex with Men. *Health Education & Behavior*, 27, 430–441.

Lemelle, A. J. (2004) Personal communication.

Lemelle, A. J. and Battle, J. (2004) Black Masculinity Matters in Attitudes Toward Gay Males. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 47, 39–41.

Lewis, G. B. (2003) Black-White Differences in Attitudes Toward Homosexuality and Gay Rights. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 67, 59–78.

Lincoln, C. E. and Mamiya, L. H. (1990) *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press).

Linsk, N. L. and Warner, R. S. (1999) 'He Listens… and Never Gossips': Spiritual Coping Without Church Support Among Older, Predominantly African-American Caregivers of Persons with HIV. *Review of Religious Research*, 40, 230–243.

Majors, R. and Billson, J. M. (1992) *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America* (New York: Lexington Books).

Miller, R. L. (2001) African American Churches at the Crossroads of AIDS. *Focus: A Guide to AIDS Research and Counseling*, 16, 1–4.

Mosher, D. L. and Sirkin, M. (1984) Measuring a Macho Personality Constellation. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 18, 150–163.

Nelson, J. B. (1993) *Body Theology* (Westminster: John Knox Press).

Pieterse, J. N. (1995) *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

Reed, Rev. J. Y. (2003) Personal communication.

Saddik, A. J. (2003) Rap's Unruly Body: The Postmodern Performance of Black Male Identity on the American Stage. *The Drama Review*, 47, 110–127.

Scharrer, E. (2001) Tough Guys: The Portrayal of Hypermasculinity and Aggression in Televised Police Dramas. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 45, 615–634.

Seal, D. W. and Ehrhardt, A. A. (2003) Masculinity and Urban Men: Perceived Scripts for Courtship, Romantic, and Sexual Interactions with Women. *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, 5, 295–319.

Spong, J. S. (1992) *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism: A Bishop Rethinks the Meaning of Scripture* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco).

Staples, R. (1982) *Black Masculinity: The Black Man's Role in American Society* (San Francisco: The Black Scholar Press).

Stokes, J. P. and Peterson, J. L. (1998) Homophobia, Self-Esteem, and Risk for HIV Among African American Men Who Have Sex with Men. *AIDS Education and Prevention*, 10, 278–292.

Thomas, K. (1996) Ain't nothin' like the real thing: black masculinity, gay sexuality, and the jargon of authenticity. In M. Blount and G. P. Cunningham (eds.) *Representing Black Men* (New York: Routledge, 55–69).

Wallsten, P. and Hamburger, T. (2005) Black Clergy Wooed for Values Fight. *Los Angeles Times*, 2 February, B–3.

West, C. (1994) *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage Books).

Wolfe, W. A. (2003) Overlooked Role of African-American Males' Hypermasculinity in the Epidemic of Unintended Pregnancies and HIV/AIDS Cases with Young African-American Women. *Journal of the National Medical Association*, 95, 846–852.

Woodyard, J. L., Peterson, J. L. and Stokes, J. P. (2000) ''Let Us Go into the House of the Lord'': Participation in African American Churches Among Young African American Men Who Have Sex With Men. *The Journal of Pastoral Care*, 54, 451–460.

Wright, Rev. J. (2003) Conference keynote speaker. Breaking the silence: in times like these. The National Black Religious Summit VII on Sexuality. Howard University School of Divinity, Washington, DC, 9 July.