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Two Struggles Under One Nation: A Critical Reflection

Many times in the United States, Americans have trouble understanding and respecting people of other ethnicities, genders, religions, and sexualities and the daily struggles they have/still go through. Especially when we're talking about ethnicity and sexuality. Initially, I would like to discuss my findings on the lives of African Americans in this country and historically how they have faced immense economic, political and social impediments that have occurred through Institutional Racism. The second topic will be the conditions in which bisexual folk have to live in, because of the scrutiny from both the straight and gay communities (monosexuals) and how that plays a role in their indecent quality of life here in the U.S. These two diverse communities have both in many aspects experienced the effects of being marginalized within our supposed "equal for all", post-racial, post-biphobic society. As such, their experience within the conflict perspective will be ever-present in this critical reflection.

The struggles of American Americans have existed in many forms; 250 years of cruel/oppressive chattel slavery, 80 years of unjust Jim Crow law, 60 years of segregation, and now in today's U.S society, African Americans have to hurdle over the obstacles that are set in place in order to collectively benefit the majority (Caucasian Americans) and hinder many people of color. Even after the signing/implementing of The Emancipation Proclamation, it took the U.S having to divide into two factions and fighting in one of the most bloodiest wars (The Civil War) this country has ever seen to officially end the

enslavement of African Descendants, along with the ratifying of the 13th Amendment, which stated "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." (US Const. amend. XIII) As African Americans continue to fight for equal rights/representation, the effects of Institutional Racism sometimes trumps over their efforts, and one of the leading causes of this is that ironically some African Americans to an extent contribute to/participate in the oppression of their own people. "We don't know enough about psychology to know about PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) or sociology to know about the correlation between the auction block and the ghetto, plantation and the prison system. To us it doesn't matter what your grandfather couldn't do, it's what you can but won't do." (Bé 1) In order to understand this, you have to understand that when desperation increases in terms of accessing a decent quality of life (employment, education, healthcare, etc.) within a certain community, the results are an increase in psychological trauma. Within the historical context of psychological trauma that African Americans have undergone: "Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS). The systematic dehumanization of African slaves was the initial trauma, and generations of their descendants have borne the scars." (Talvi 1), and the effects of PTSS are the occurrences of depression, aggression, low self-esteem, identity crisis, problems with interpersonal relationships, along with guilt and shame.(Mims 7) The central struggles of the African American community are heavily rooted in a culture of survival and resistance, and in turn allowed them to endure the horrors of human bondage and the struggles that followed.

The ways in which African Americans still face the struggles of Institutional Racism is through being denied jobs, living wages, housing, education, and may other economic opportunities. Without access to these opportunities African Americans become very isolated from the rest of the country, even with the benefits of civil rights legislature. Much ground has been gained with the ending of state-sanctioned segregation, but even so African Americans are still most likely to be undereducated, unemployed and live in substandard housing compared to Caucasian Americans in the U.S, according to new report from the Economic Policy Institute. (Otis 2) In 2013 nearly half of African Americans living in poverty still live in areas of concentrated poverty, while only one-tenths of Caucasian Americans are living in the same conditions. "Starting in the 1960s, black poverty — like poverty overall — dropped dramatically, from 55.1% to 32.1 % in 1969. Another drop came in the late 1990s, when black poverty reached an all-time low of 22.5%. However, the Great Recession of 2007 drove black poverty rates back up to 27.6% in 2011, nearly three times the 9.8% poverty rate for whites that same year."(Otis 2) Youth who live in areas of concentrated poverty face a multitude of socioeconomic troubles, including but not limited to higher exposure to lead poisoning that leads to severe learning impediments-alcohol and fast food, higher crime rates and less access to nutritious foods/green spaces. African Americans are also 40% of the USA's poverty population, although they only make up 13% of the US's population. Along with having the highest rate of severely cost-burdened renters, having to pay at least half of their income to rent, leaving little to no money to afford a quality education. Some of the African American community are in denial of the reality of racial oppression in the U.S., they assume they will be accepted and loved within the conservative Republican Party, who have none of

their interests in mind. As a collective African Americans overwhelmingly reside within the working class and therefore are susceptible to having to conform to racist institutions like corporate America, something that is referred to as cultural assimilation. This concept is what further strips African Americans from their cultural identity in the attempt to beg White America for the essentials of a decent life. They will essentially have to speak European languages, have European ideologies, and deny everything that is African Descending. Which means to willing deny their rich African Heritage, until everything that is African culture becomes unfamiliar and/or foreign to the average African American. Now the exponential support for President Barack Obama in the 2008 election by the African American community can be understood by his ideologies of preventing the cutting of government programs, the attacking of one's right to vote, and the dismemberment of unions. Not only that but, the hoping for their new found (African American) leader to "change" the condition they live in by investing more in the public school system, supporting them in their economic endeavors, and helping them gain the political leverage on the laws/policies that the federal, state and city governments put into place. Even within the 2012 election we saw that there was still a glimpse of hope within the African American community for President Barack Obama to aid in the betterment in their lives. But, what America needs to understand is that just because we have some form of representation in the White House or other positions of social, economic, or political power, doesn't mean that the U.S. as a country has overcome its racist tendencies.

Although bisexuals have found integrity and authenticity with an orientation that define their attractions, behaviors, and identity; one of the central struggles of the

bisexual community is finding recognition and social acceptance of that sexual identity. Being told your sexuality is a phase and/or non-existent causes trauma that in turn can bring about many mental health issues like low self-esteem, low self worth, depression, and thoughts of suicide. (Celis 1) The struggle to find other people with the same sexual identity as you is essential to having a sense of community and safety. Having to pretend to be something that you're not just for the sake of hetero-normative/monosexual conformity is in a sense stripping yourself of your sexual identity. Many monosexuals have the idea that multi-gender loving individuals (bisexuals, pansexuals, polysexuals, etc.) have to be apart of the gender loving binary, in which a person can only be attracted to one gender, this notion is a leading cause of bisexual+ erasure. Bisexual+ erasure is the tendency to ignore or falsify the evidence that legitimizes bi+ as actual sexualities. "With few representation of bisexuals in the media, politics, and most other realms of civil society, I am grateful to have found bisexual role models who have supported my professional development." (Aagenes 1) The positive portrayal of bisexuals in various professions allows for the social acceptance of the bisexual community as a whole and motivates bisexuals to develop themselves politically, socially, and economically. Major barriers in social acceptance of queer sexualities are religion and the wish to live a traditional/heteronormative life. Most of the non-acceptance for bisexuals actually comes from the LGBT community, the legitimacy of bisexuality is always called into question and because of this bisexuals are casted away from an already marginalized community. There is an immense distrust within the LG community because of "hetero-tendencies" bisexuals' exhibit sexually. I believe this distrust exists because of the historical terrorizing of the homosexual community by the heterosexual community.

The many misconceptions that bisexuals are labeled as like greedy, promiscuous, indecisive, and incapable of long-term relationships are all forms of discrimination. Finding a partner/dating is in actuality harder for bisexuals because of these prominent misconceptions, even as the range of potential options has seemingly doubled. Another factor in this disdain for bisexuals by monosexuals is that bisexuals have the capacity to love differently then them; the possibility of someone being able to love two or more genders is incomprehensible to them. Being devoted to the primacy of gender, as a determining factor in love is a very narrow way of thinking and it also denies the existence of the identity of millions of people worldwide. On the contrary to what people may believe and history has proven, bisexuals are more likely to fight for LGBT rights and dismantle the institutions that negatively affect the queer community rather than being contempt within "heterosexual privilege". Being constantly pressured to fit the monosexual norm, bisexuals risk losing the confidence they have within their identity. "This can cause feelings of isolation and marginalization, which prior research has shown leads to higher substance use, depression and risky sexual behavior, ...it also can result in lower rates of HIV testing and treatment." (Baulkman 1) The issues within the bisexual community as recently been discussed on a federal level because of the immense lack of health resources available to them. Giving people information and writing/telling stories that talk about the everyday issues within the bisexual community in turn gives both hope, and guides social marketing interventions and outreach to reduce that stigma, and improve rates of HIV prevention, testing and treatment within the bisexual community.(Baulkman 2)

As both communities face immense setbacks that are reinforced through prejudice institutions and social conditioning, being apart of not only one but both communities would be to experience a convergence of systemic trauma that is exponentially difficult to overcome. The African American and Bisexual Communities interacting with one another is conflicting, because of non-acceptance of either community onto each other. I believe this is because of the disapproval that the African American community has for the queer community, within their narrow-minded religious views. Residing within the middle of these two groups of people, we have to become a voice that puts aside the core differences of their identity and help expose the truth about the injustices each community faces. This allows for uneducated individuals to gain a new view on the lives of people who are different from them. With being an advocate for both communities, we have to eliminate all fears of being denied by racist, or biphobic individuals who want to continue to spread hate within the U.S. Along with that we have to have political interests in creating spaces in which bisexuality can become apart of natural human behavior in order for people living in both communities to be able to live healthy, empowered, and just lives. As a country we need to reform the laws and policies that continue to oppress marginalized communities, only then will we see a real step towards true equality for all races, ethnicities, genders, religions, and sexualities within our nation.

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