

SAVED, SANCTIFIED, AND FILLED WITH GAY:
LIBERATION THEOLOGY WITH AAMSM AND THE BLACK CHURCH

by

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ABSTRACT

AAMSM (African American men who have sex with men) endure homophobia and racism in their political realities because of their identity. How do multiple oppressions impact the experiences of AAMSM participating within Black churches? Despite the Black church's legacy for liberating African Americans, AAMSM feel demonized and alienated while enduring religion-based homophobia espoused within many Black churches. In the church, AAMSM are pushed further down the hierarchy of oppression and privilege. In response to these observations, this thesis employs a sexual discourse of resistance.

I engage this discourse with a literature review in order to discover links between homophobia and AAMSM in an interdisciplinary manner. Jungian psychology is then utilized to interpret internalized oppression. This leads to a discussion of social and religious justice for AAMSM in the Black church through the lens of liberation theology. While the oppressed have become oppressors within the Black church as regards AAMSM, liberation theology affirms all of humanity. Liberation theology provides a message of love for AAMSM and a source of Christian ethics for the Black church.

DEDICATION

For a mother who loves her son unconditionally-

Dr. Ava Sennetta Brown Green

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Through various social justice movements, oppressed people have demanded that a wide range of prejudices be addressed to make liberation possible. People have been oppressed because of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion and/or other constructions of human inequality. Because oppressed people are conditioned to believe that they are inferior, they have often suffered in silence. For too long, homophobia has oppressed sexual minorities. This thesis is a sexual discourse of resistance that attempts to raise consciousness of sexual diversity and affirm the humanity of a marginalized demographic.

A sexual discourse of resistance is a discourse for human liberation. In her book *Sexuality and the Black Church*, Womanist Theologian Kelly Brown Douglas provides a model for a sexual discourse of resistance. She notes that although the Black church marginalizes Black gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and other non-heterosexual folk, it is also integral to African American culture. Black churches have been identified as sources of both homophobia and racial pride. According to Douglas, “A sexual discourse has two purposes: to penetrate the sexual politics of the Black community and to cultivate a life enhancing approach to Black sexuality” (Douglas 69). My discourse is intended to break the silence about oppression that has impacted Black gay liberation.

In order to facilitate a sexual discourse of resistance this paper synthesizes pro-Feminist thought, the Black gay experience, Jungian psychology, and liberation theology. It is my purpose to focus on AAMSM (African American men who have sex

with men) who endure homophobia within Black churches, to critique such oppression and advocate unconditional love as a possible solution.

Homophobia and racism are constant reminders of contempt for those relegated to minority status. Today, debates over same-sex marriage and adoptions highlight the inequality of non-heterosexual individuals. America fails to honor the humanity of same-sex couples in a society whose self-proclaimed values are “liberty and justice for all.” On the other hand, some would argue that the racial climate of the country is, like the “arc of the universe” proclaimed by Martin Luther King, Jr., “bending towards justice” with the election of the first Black President of the United States of America in 2008.¹ President Obama has repealed the ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ policy² that shamed and silenced gays in the military and chosen not to defend legal challenges to the discriminatory Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA).³ Even so, AAMSM continue to be marginalized by homophobia, racism, and the denial of constitutional rights.

The evidence of this ongoing homophobia can be seen everywhere. In Uganda where the Parliament is currently considering a bill to execute gay people, intense expressions of homophobia have translated into torture, distress, and sometimes death. This bill was actually written as a result of American Christian fundamentalists who traveled to Uganda, lead workshops, and held rallies about the potential dangers of homosexuality and gay rights.

¹ King, Martin Luther, Jr., Montgomery, AL. 25 March 1965

² DADT prohibited gays and lesbians from openly serving in the US Armed Forces as gays and lesbians.

³DOMA is a federal law that defines marriage as a union between heterosexuals and permits states to choose whether to honor same-sex marriages or not.

David Kato, a Ugandan gay rights activist, was beaten to death with a hammer on January 25, 2011 after his photograph appeared in Uganda's main daily newspaper under the headline "Hang Them!" (Gettleman).

Hypocrisy may or may not influence the oppression of AAMSM as much as religion-based homophobia. In Georgia, a high profile pastor in the Black community with a long history of homophobic sermons, Bishop Eddie Long, was recently involved in a scandal when four men accused him of sexual assault in 2010 (Henderson and Thompson). This is significant because it brings into question the various ways that AAMSM interact with Black churches.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, homophobia also impacts HIV prevention strategies. "The CDC believes that "stigma and homophobia may have a profound impact on the lives of MSM [men who have sex with men], especially their mental and sexual health." Joseph Jefferson, an HIV activist, with Gay Men of African Descent in New York City worked to change the stigma about HIV in the Black gay community until he ultimately found his efforts to be futile. In a final note he said, "I could not bear the burden of living as a gay man of color in a world grown cold and hateful towards those of us who live and love differently than the so-called 'social mainstream'." He committed suicide on October 23, 2010 (Dominus).

Definition of Terms

AAMSM⁴ is used to denote African American men who have sex with men. This awkward and queer term is used to re-construct the language used by oppressors.

⁴ Could be read "double A, M, S, M"

The term AAMSM intentionally distinguishes individuals, a broad range of people within the African American community, who self-identify and/or appear to be both male and queer, gay, same gender loving, faggot, sissy, punk, trade, in the life, snap queen!, DL, (down-low), Bi, (bisexual) or MSM (men who have sex with men). Even so, AAMSM ultimately speaks of human beings. Modifiers as used here are not intended to disparage any expression of human love or self-identity.

AAMSM are mothers' sons. Black gay poet Essex Hemphill writes about the obscurity of AAMSM in his poem "Commitments:"

I will always be there/ When the silence is exhumed/When the photographs are examined/I will be pictured smiling/among siblings, parents/nieces, and nephews. /In the background of the photographs/ the hazy smoke of barbecue, / a checkered red-and-white tablecloth/ laden with blackened chicken, /glistening ribs, paper plates, /bottles of beer, and pop. /In the photos/The smallest children/are held by their parents/My arms are empty, or around/ the shoulders of unsuspecting aunts/ expecting to throw rice at me someday/ Or picture tinsel, candles, / ornamented, imitation trees, / or another table, this one/ set for Thanksgiving, / A turkey steaming the lens./ My arms are empty/ in those photos, too, /so empty they would break / around a lover. / I am always there/ for critical emergencies, /graduations, / the middle of the night. / I am the invisible son. / In the family photos/ nothing appears out of character. /I smile as I serve my duty (57)

Like Hemphill, AAMSM have cultural traditions and individual gifts that they can contribute to the American Dream, to the fruition of love, family, and prosperity.

Homophobia as used here is defined as the fear, hatred, or disgust for the sensual relationships between members of the same sex and/or gender. Homophobia is attributed to heterosexual privilege, but is not limited to a belief in heterosexual supremacy or ignorance of sexual diversity. To be clear, there are many definitions and reasons for homophobia, and it is expressed through various social, political and

religious privileges for heterosexuals. Religion-based homophobia often validates and justifies homophobic beliefs through interpretations of a particular religion or theology. While questions of sexual diversity are beyond the scope of this paper, I will explore reasons why homophobia is oppressive.

Although heterosexuals oppress and oppress persons who experience themselves as drawn to sexual relationships other than heterosexual, heterosexism and homophobia are not interchangeable terms. In this discourse, **Heterosexism** refers to a system of oppression similar to racism, classism, or sexism, which serves to create institutionalized power differentials. Heterosexuals assert heterosexuality as the default and dominant sexual orientation for all people; while everything non-heteronormative (relationships between one biological man and one biological woman) is considered deviant. Audre Lorde defines heterosexism similarly as “a belief in the inherent superiority of one form of loving over all others and thereby the right to dominance” (Lorde 15). Thus, heterosexist Black churches discriminate individuals who have love attractions and/or romantic relationships similar to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people.

AAMSM embody a reality that is often marginalized by heterosexuals and hypermasculine ideals. **Hypermasculinity** is a narrow explanation for gendered expectations based on socially constructed ideals. Stereotypes of Black masculinity reflect the construction of Africans in chattel slavery and the racist discourse that developed from it. African American men are often stereotyped in hypermasculine

terms, such as the “violent buck” or “angry Black man.”⁵ African Americans have resisted oppressive stereotypes that portray Black people as hypersexual, hypermasculine, and thus inferior humans.

In response to oppression, African Americans have actively pursued social transformation. In this paper, the **Black church** is understood as a religious vehicle for seeking that transformation. The Black church includes Christian denominations that are led by African Americans, churches with predominantly African American congregations, and other places of worship for Black Christians that are based upon the historical significance of a church that edifies Black lives in the midst of social strife. African Americans who participate in the Black church attend for various reasons and have individualized reasons for their affiliations and religious beliefs. There are many different rules, practices, and people that compose the Black church. Still, the functionality of the Black church is reflected by the roles and responsibilities of its participants.

Affiliation with religion in African American culture is significant to the history of the Black agenda in America. The connection between Black people and understandings of a higher power can be traced throughout Black intellectual thought. WEB DuBois in “Our Spiritual Strivings” writes about the role of “Negro priests” for enslaved Africans: “He found his function as the interpreter of the supernatural, the comforter of the sorrowing, and as the one who expressed, rudely, but picturesquely, the longing and disappointment and resentment of a stolen people” (DuBois 57). A safe

⁵ Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*

place to negotiate identity in a culture marked by racism, the Black church has been a space to search for meaning of the material world.

Ideally, the Black church is still an opportunity for Black people to gather and build an institutional base. Contemporary Black folk who love God and Jesus, raise their children, volunteer their time, donate, tithe, wed, dance, sing, bury their loved ones, or consider the religious rhetoric of the Black church maintain its tradition of politicizing Black bodies. Even as some churches teach homophobic values, the Black church has long been a religious learning place for Black people enduring oppression, seeking faith, and actively pursuing liberation. According to DuBois, “it [the Negro church] has instilled and conserved morals, it has helped family life, it has taught and developed ability and given the colored man his best business training” (DuBois 259). Thus many AAMSM participate, contribute, and pray within the Black church even as they endure homophobia for various reasons.

Method of Research

The goal of this paper is to challenge homophobia towards AAMSM within the Black church in an interdisciplinary manner. I will review existing literature to discover links between AAMSM and the Black church as regards homophobia. Correspondingly, I explore the problem of religion-based homophobia to raise consciousness about this oppression through Jungian depth psychology. I then seek to address this problem through a conversation with liberation theology. The values of unconditional love and unity proposed by liberation theology have the potential to transform homophobic belief systems. I will conclude by advocating liberation theology as a solution to homophobia

within Black churches, to inspire unconditional love for AAMSM, and to strive for social justice.

CHAPTER 2: AAMSM AND THE BLACK CHURCH

To the degree that Black churches make possible the exploitation of queer bodies and perpetuate oppressive constructions of AAMSM they become oppressive institutions that demand a sexual discourse of resistance to affirm humanity. Despite a legacy for liberating African Americans from racism, the African American community is both united and divided at the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality, and religion. Some Black churches have taught their congregants homophobic values. With its history of agency for the liberation of African-Americans from racism, the Black church is a central location to expose the oppression of AAMSM and arouse AAMSM liberation.

AAMSM are pushed further down a hierarchy of inferiority already in place due to racism and heterosexism. Black churches that express religiously based homophobia validate heterosexual supremacy in Black communities. In the process of resolving internalized identity, AAMSM must also confront the realities of their body and contemplate their human connection to God. Without a sexual discourse of resistance silence maintains the oppression of AAMSM within the Black church.

I will engage this discourse for liberation in the following way: Homophobia distorts reality because it is a common ingredient in our racial, familial, and religious constructs; thus, homophobia restricts access to a positive self-esteem. In the literature review that follows I will systematically explore existing studies, books, anthologies, poetry, and theories that contribute to this discourse for liberation in an interdisciplinary manner. This literature review features the voices that seek to illuminate the homophobia perpetuated by the Black church.

The connection between AAMSM and the Black church has been of interest to some scholars. Links between AAMSM and homophobia within the Black church have been established through research produced by religious scholars, psychologists, social workers, and other analysts interested in social justice for this population. Literature written by Black gay authors will aesthetically inform readers of the reality that AAMSM experience. I also integrate personal poetry to portray the depth of AAMSM imaginations.

A. Homophobia distorts reality because it is a common ingredient in racial, familial, and religious constructs

James Baldwin, a Black gay author and activist, discusses the conflict between AAMSM and the Black church in *The Fire Next Time*, a personal narrative and exposé about oppression during the Civil Rights Movement. The title comes from the old Negro spiritual "Mary Don't You Weep" in which the line appears "God gave Noah the rainbow sign, no more water the fire next time" (Baldwin 120). Hope for a different social reality is essential to both Black faith and the transformation of racial oppression. Raising critical consciousness about religion and politics, Baldwin examines the pain and suffering that Black Americans experience in their political realities. The Black church, as a vehicle for Black faith, is a symbol for Baldwin's belief in social transformation throughout this book.

In response to social prejudice and the unjust distribution of power, Baldwin suggests that oppressed people seek a higher power and thus become liberated.

Baldwin uses religious constructs to argue that love can have a transformative force for people victimized by systems of oppression. To illustrate love, Baldwin says,

The universe, which is not merely the stars and the moon and the planets, flowers, grass, and trees, but other people, has evolved no terms for your existence, has made no room for you, and if love will not swing wide the gates, no other power will or can. And if one despairs-as who has not? - of human love, God's love alone is left (Baldwin 44).

The Fire Next Time is a call to love for both oppressed and oppressive individuals. In other words, God's love makes room for Black people to live in freedom.

The Black church brings oppressed, discouraged, and imperfect people together so that they can overcome oppression or enhance their lives together. Although Baldwin does not define homophobia in *Fire Next Time*, he criticizes the Black church for its exclusions. According to Baldwin

“[the church] was a mask for hatred and self-hatred and despair. The transfiguring power of the Holy Ghost ended when the service ended, and salvation stopped at the church door. When we were told to love everybody, I had thought that meant everybody. But no. It applied only to those who believed as we did, and it did not apply to white people at all.” (Baldwin 53).

The Black church is a social institution, a space to celebrate the Divine, and does not entirely reflect the day-to-day interactions of its congregants in other spaces.

Baldwin offers his own experiences in the Black church to illustrate its important role in the Black community. Embracing religion, embodying love, and congregating together- Baldwin says, “[Within the church] their pain and their joy were mine, and mine were theirs- they surrendered their pain and joy to me, I surrendered mine to them-and their cries of “Amen!” and “Hallelujah!” and “Yes, Lord!” and “Praise His name!” and “Preach it brother!” sustained and whipped my solos until we all became equal, wringing

wet, singing and dancing in anguish and rejoicing, at the foot of the altar” (Baldwin 47). The Black church provides an opportunity for African Americans to experience communal love. Homophobia within the Black church is particularly harmful because of its role in the lives of those that homophobia alienates.

Negative and homophobic judgments toward persons perceived to be homosexual within the Black church serve to maintain a hierarchy of privilege for Black heterosexuals. Black gay theologian, Horace E. Griffin, in *Their own receive them not: African American Lesbians and Gays in Black Churches* argues that “Black heterosexuals are lifted from sharing a place of inferiority with a gay minority and adopt a ‘we are better than those people’ attitude. Gay condemnation is self-serving” (Griffin 5). This is the root of black homophobia in Black churches. As religion-based homophobia functions to exploit and establish individuals as shameful and sinful, sexual minorities become the objects of projection of hate and discord, a scapegoat, for some Black heterosexuals. Black homophobia exalts the sexual agency of Black heterosexuals while providing a target for projection of collective shadow from purity-based religions. In the process, black homophobia restricts access to full freedom, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for sexual minorities.

Heterosexism functions at the core of homophobic religion like all systems of oppression. According to Douglas’ *Sexuality and the Black Church*, notions of supremacy construct the hierarchy of oppressive institutions.

Douglas says, “In a society where privilege is accorded on the basis of race, gender, and sexual preference, heterosexual privilege is virtually the only privilege that Black people-especially Black women can claim to move to the center” (Douglas 104).

Neither AAMSM nor Black churches that espouse homophobia are monolithic groups. Although the Black church has been life affirming, churches that engage in homophobic rhetoric are polarized by negative attitudes. Black homophobia reflects various expressions of negative attitudes towards others. According to a religious landscape survey conducted by Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 46% of Historically Black Protestant churches, 64% of Evangelical Protestant churches, and 34% of mainline Protestant churches are opposed to public acceptance of homosexuality (Pew Forum). At the least, homophobia is intended to oppress lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender, and the people who love them unconditionally.

Straight like, Jesus
White washed hallelujah
Brainwashed body
I think I'm possessed, so
I hate gay niggers⁶.

Many Black churches have been reluctant to dispel the impact of Christian fundamentalism or what Douglas refers to as the “white cultural attack,” in order to love AAMSM in public. Black churches would have to refute the impact of racism and cultural dominance as it relates to their brand of theology and the history of African Americans. Douglas says, “It is mandatory that the Black community initiate a comprehensive form of sexual discourse if it is to repel and disrupt the power of White culture in relation to

⁶ Green, Adam. “Straight like, Jesus.” 13 Nov 2010

Black bodies, sexuality, and spirituality” (Douglas, 69). Oppressive religion maintains a power differential.

AAMSM are pushed further down the hierarchy of inferiority as the oppressed becomes the oppressor within the Black church. Accordingly, oppressive attitudes foster many Black churches’ denial of AAMSM liberation, including its distanced and detached response to all the HIV/AIDS movements in the African American gay community. Douglas argues “the inappropriate association between HIV/AIDS and homosexuality has been perhaps the critical factor in causing Black passivity in regard to the AIDS crisis”(Douglas 3). Discrimination on the basis of disease or risk for disease is a social justice issue in regards to anyone’s dignity.

Robert Miller surveyed AAMSM living with AIDS in the Black Church in his qualitative study, “Legacy Denied: African American Gay Men, AIDS, and the Black Church,” published by the National Association of Social Workers. Stigma associated with HIV within the Black church is threatening because of high rate of HIV risk in the AAMSM community. Miller’s survey is intended to unveil the silence about homophobia and AIDS-phobia. Interviewing 10 AAMSM who had AIDS and participated in the Black Church, Miller focused on sexuality based prejudices. Although the sample was small, the findings provide a picture of general interactions between some representatives of the Black church and some HIV positive AAMSM. All the men in this study felt like the church contributed to their misery and no longer served as a source of happiness. They left the church in order to survive as AAMSM with HIV, and feel peace.

According to the men interviewed, the ministers preached public shame for AAMSM. They were made to feel especially bad at the funerals of persons who had lived with HIV/AIDS. Feelings of shame set the tone for emotional distress among these AAMSM, which often led them to leave the Black church. For example, one of the respondents shared his account of some of the “words of comfort” he heard expressed at the funeral of his partner: “With the microphone, the preacher leaves the pulpit and walks down directly to us and shouts, “Your friend’s souls is lost. He chose to reject God and God has rejected him. He is in hell.” (Miller 57) In response to this encounter with hate, the respondent says, “Something came over me. I turned around and said, “If you really knew Jesus’ love or was half the man George was, you would be helping and not hating!” (Miller 57). This respondent defended the memory of his friend and concluded that the preacher was unable to provide solace at a time of sorrow.

AAMSM infected with or affected by HIV often feel unable to seek spiritual, emotional, or communal support from Black Church congregations and pastors after encountering homophobic religious responses. According to Miller, “The data reveal the churches’ positions on homosexuality and AIDS were inconsistent with the men’s needs. In extinguishing their church participation, the men now confront the void this loss portends” (Miller 58). Even so, despite this stigma, many AAMSM continue to serve and participate within the Black church for various reasons.

It is important to note here that while homophobia within the Black church varies in intensity AAMSM have often been represented as inferior and different through religion-based rhetoric.

Elijah G. Ward, from the Institute for Health Research and Policy at the University of Illinois, explores the sources of homophobia in Black churches and communities within “Homophobia, Hypermasculinity and the Black Church.” Ward provides a comprehensive literature review of sociocultural 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, including nine black clergy. Yet, even as black churches articulate a religion-based homophobia, they often simultaneously incorporate racial consciousness in their expressions of exploitation.

African Americans experienced and resisted oppressive politics, mental and spiritual exploitation during slavery, segregation, and current manifestations of social upheaval. Ward points out three different explanations for homophobia in the context of the Black church: “religious beliefs, historical sexual exploitation, and race survival consciousness” (Ward, 495). Constructions of Black sexuality in the media, rigid stereotypes of hyper masculine, cool Black men, overtly exclude affirming expressions of AAMSM. The physical strain of slavery and violence against Blacks has constructed a cultural ideal of Black masculinity that is picturesquely crude. According to Ward, “the fallout from this ideological joining together of religion-driven homophobia and bionationalism [or race consciousness] has been that whiteness and homosexuality are both understood to connote weakness and femininity; conversely black masculinity has been constructed in hypermasculine terms” (Ward 496).

As a result AAMSM come to be marginalized on multiple levels of oppression, exploited, and rendered deviant by oppressive social constructs.

Black homophobia, like all forms of oppressions, is socially constructed. Ward notes that homophobia expressed in “majority of Black churches range(s) from verbalized hostility toward homosexuals, to at best, silence on the issue” (Ward 497). Because of this social injustice and silence about oppression, Ward argues, “The rigid constructions of masculinity it [homophobia] 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” (Ward 501). Thus, AAMSM enduring homophobia within Black churches are alienated from solidarity with the Black church’s agency for human liberation.

And yet, in many ways, the Black church is the ideal location to demand AAMSM liberation. All four major historically Black denominations - the National Baptist Convention, Church of God in Christ, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, and African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) - have legislation that bans clergy from performing same sex unions and LGBT ordinations. Homophobia may be found in other institutions, such as the press, family, or education. Seemingly, the Black church is within reason to deconstruct because African American religion could be a source for liberation and homophobia for AAMSM.

In many ways the AME Church is a model for politicizing religion within a Black church context. Like many Black churches, the AME church asserts its intentions to serve the community in its mission statement:

The Mission of the African Methodist Episcopal Church is to minister to the spiritual, intellectual, physical, emotional, and environmental needs of all people by spreading Christ's liberating gospel through word and deed. At every level of the Connection and in every local church, the African Methodist Episcopal Church shall engage in carrying out the spirit of the original Free African Society, out of which the AME Church evolved: that is, to seek out and save the lost, and serve the needy.⁷

According to the AME website, "When officials at St. George's MEC pulled blacks off their knees while praying," Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, founders of the first Black religious denomination in America, aroused a movement for Black folk to experience their religiosity and spread liberating gospel. The AME Church, like many Black churches, has established values that legitimate its role in human liberation and the Black community.

While some AAMSM may have found ways to resolve their personal beliefs, many AAMSM are taught to "hate the sin and not the sinner" although AAMSM are people. Denial of AAMSM liberation through religious values persists as sexual and religious oppressions. Gandhi explains, 'Hate the sin and not the sinner' is a precept which, though easy enough to understand, is rarely practiced, and that is why the poison of hatred spreads in the world" (Gandhi 276). The contradictions of this reality separate the AAMSM body from the love of God. As a result, hatred spreads instead of unconditional love. Internalized homophobia is the negative self-perception of

⁷ www.ame-church.org

homosexual identity. Not surprisingly, self-love becomes difficult for those who are aware of their homosexuality and simultaneously hold homophobic belief systems to comprehend reality. Internalized homophobia within the Black church ultimately forestalls AAMSM liberation.

B. Internalized homophobia restricts access to a positive self-esteem

Internalized homophobia translates into intensive psychological distress, loneliness, alienation, rejection, or depression, which in turn can give rise to self-violent behaviors for many of those targeted by homophobia. AAMSM who hold negative perceptions of their identity, believe that their perceived inferiority is warranted, whether self-inflicted or imposed. In the words of Black gay activists in *Tongues Untied*⁸, to represent AAMSM liberation: “Anger unvented, becomes pain unspoken, becomes rage released, becomes violence.” AAMSM participate in their own oppression when they believe that negative perceptions of their identity are irrevocable truths.

Silence and Shame
I was taught silence and shame
Leviticus and laws, like “don’t ask, don’t tell,”
“do not care”
and I was guilty of gay
Suicide is a sin
HIV is fatal
At least I would have some time to pray!⁹

Heterosexism and racism manifest in psychological distress for many African American LGBQ persons. Syzmanski and Gupta conducted a quantitative study to test

⁸ *Tongues Untied* is a 1989 documentary by Marlon Riggs to celebrate Black men loving Black men as a revolutionary act.

⁹ Green, Adam. “Silence and Shame.” 13 Nov 2010

the impact of intersectional oppression on mental health entitled, "Examining the Relationship Between Multiple Internalized Oppressions and African American Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Questioning Persons (LGBQ)' Self Esteem and Psychological Distress." The study examined the multiple identities contributing to the minority status of Black LGBQ persons in the United States. According to the study, "how one feels as a racial minority and how one feels as a sexual minority are likely to affect how one feels about the self" (Szymanski 112). Psychological distress has long been a part of the cycle of oppression with minorities.

African American LGBQ identity is likely to be influenced by minority affiliation and difference within the minority group, such as being gay in the Black community. Specifically, forms of cultural heterosexism negatively impacts mental health. "Heterosexism may be experienced as relatively more distressing than racism (including their internalized expressions) because of the risk of losing one's racial/ethnic support system as a result of being perceived LGBQ" (Szymanski and Gupta, 115). According to the study, because of the connection between internalized homophobia and low self-esteem, AA LGBQ persons may feel intensely negative about their multiple markers of identity.

The results verify that internalized heterosexism is a significant predictor to low self-esteem, regardless of internalized racist beliefs; and these oppressions function differently and simultaneously. According to the authors, "When these internalized oppressions were examined concomitantly, both IR (internalized racism) and IH (internalized heterosexism) emerged as unique predictors of self-esteem thereby

supporting the additive perspective of multiple oppressions” (Syzmanski 114). These findings also confirm that self-esteem can mediate the psychological distress caused by internalized heterosexism.

For all LGBTQ persons impacted by religion- based homophobia, resolving internalized religion-based homophobia involves an intense critical self-reflection regarding religion. Religious belief systems shape ways of living and homophobic religion denies access to a positive self-esteem across for LGBTQ people. A study of young men who have sex with men regarding their resiliency in resolving homophobia from religious sources in the *Journal of Adolescent Research*, Kubicek et al found that the process of resolving internalized homophobia from religious sources include critically evaluating homophobic messages, religious, texts, interpersonal sources of homophobic messages, and defining and developing individualized spirituality” (Kubicek et al 622). Access to alternative religious education and the importance of ethnocentric religiosity could challenge if not reverse that process.

The significance of African American religion, its history, and political position within the AAMSM experience was highlighted in a study of black gay men’s management of religious and sexual identity conflicts. Richard Pitt, a sociologist from Vanderbilt University, explores the barriers and processes to maintain apparently conflicting religious and sexual identities among AAMSM who are affiliated with Black churches. In his study, “Still Looking for My Jonathon: Gay Black Men’s Management of Religious and Sexual Identity Conflicts,” Pitt presents data from interviews with 34 Black gay men.

Using Richard Troiden's four-stage theory of sexual identity development as a framework, which is used to define the coming out process, Pitt posits that AAMSM manage their conflicting sexual and religious identities through either rejecting the homosexual identity, rejecting the religious identity, compartmentalization of the two identities, or integration of the two identities. Confronting difference within race, family, and religious constructs inevitably requires a struggle.

Pitt found that religious values appeared to conflict with sexuality because AAMSM were taught heteronormative values. Pitt assumes that "because AAMSM's indoctrination in the heteronormative values of their religious traditions preceded their sense of self as gay men, many of them report some residual discomfort about their homosexual identity" (Pitt 45). This conflict often leads AAMSM to lead double lives or reject themselves in order to maintain their pre-queer belief systems and access self-esteem. "While some of the men are completely convinced that God approves of their sexual orientation and that there is no incompatibility between their sexual and Christian identities, most of the men suggest that they vacillate between complete acceptance and uncertainty" (Pitt, 51). Many AAMSM struggle to fully accept or reject themselves within belief systems which support homophobia.

For men who manage to resolve the apparent differences in gay and Christian values, integration of sexual and religious identities significantly reduced their sense of shame and guilt about homoerotic sexual behaviors and lead to healthier lifestyles. Pitt quotes a respondent who rejects the stigma associated with homosexuality from the Black church:

Once I came to realize that being gay wasn't my problem, I was able to hear the messages my pastor preached about trying to find self-esteem in multiple sex partners. I gave up some things that I felt went with being gay when it hit me that those things were plain old sin (Pitt 49).

In order for AAMSM enduring homophobia within the Black church to develop self-esteem, healthy management of religious and sexual identities is a precursor to a healthy belief system.

Within the Black church, many AAMSM negotiate their religious and sexual identities through their understanding of God. Woodyard, Peterson, and Stokes conducted a psychological study that "reports data secured from 76 individual semistructured interviews with AAMSM between the ages of 18 and 29 in "Let Us Go Into the House of the Lord:" Participation in African American churches Among Young African American Men who Have sex with men." According to the study, most AAMSM who experience oppressive theology within the Black church internalize religious beliefs. "In their own words, men we interviewed revealed an ambivalence about their relationship with these institutions [Black churches] and the central spiritual figures: God and Jesus Christ. They have internalized a God-concept who is at once loving and open to their humanness, yet condemns them because of the human sexual condition that they had never sought" (Woodyard et al 459). Because AAMSM internalized religion-based homophobia they often experienced conflicts between the Black church and their human liberation.

The experiences of AAMSM support the need for a sexual discourse of resistance to induce change and liberation.

Existing literature that examines the relationship between AAMSM and the Black church is missing a lens to discover internalized oppression in an integrative manner. Jungian psychological constructs provide a means of examining internalized oppression among AAMSM and the Black church. Likewise, liberation theology provides a potential vehicle for the liberation of AAMSM and the Black church.

CHAPTER 3: A JUNGIAN LENS

Carl Jung is the founder of psychoanalytic psychology (1842-1896). Jung used psychoanalytic theory to conceptualize the human mind. Today, Jungian psychology offers a useful means for discussing internalized oppression. This leads to an understanding of what it means to be a human being, caught in the cycle of mental, spiritual, and psychical oppression. Carl Jung's theories of identity development inform the struggle of being black, gay, and male. In this chapter, I focus on Jung's constructions of ego-self consciousness, persona, shadow, and projection to provide a lens for the relationship between AAMSM and the Black Church.

Within an oppressive culture, AAMSM identities are symbolic of inferiority, and Jung's symbolic-hermeneutic structure provides the structure to interpret this. Although the contradictions of oppressive theology and sexual identity are unsettling, "[t]o Jungians, paradox need not mean absolute contradictions or inconsistency, but includes ambiguity, a puzzle or dilemma, a tension between opposite poles of an issue, even incongruity between elements of a larger whole" (Harris 4). The "larger whole" for AAMSM includes our psychic constructions of a loving God and the social constructions of race and community of which AAMSM are a part. Black churches that espouse homophobia are oppressive for AAMSM participants because the collective identity constructed there demonizes homosexuality and same-gender loving individuals.

AAMSM are taught to believe that AAMSM are not acceptable to God through the lens of religion-based homophobia. These oppressive thoughts are toxic to self-love and liberating discourse. Jungian psychological constructs provide a lens to

conceptualize the processes of the human psyche as it is expected to contain all the contradictions of hatred and love. For example, Jungian theory explains the mechanics of low self-esteem, “the difference between sanity and insanity appears to depend on ego-strength, our ability to contain turbulent energies within a sense of selfhood” (Harris 6). Internalized homophobia restricts access to a positive self-esteem and leads to violence. Not surprisingly, suicide, depression, and self-violence are manifestations of negative feelings or turbulent energies about a sense of selfhood.

Furthermore, oppressive theology and some Black churches contribute to the violence, misery, and suffering of AAMSM. AAMSM experience an intersection of multiple oppressions including race and sexuality as they experience injustice within the Black church. According to Jungian psychology, “what begins as initial differentiation of opposites ends by making a wide split between us and them, a split which becomes a yawning chasm filled with violence, misery, and suffering” (Ulanov 45). Warring religious and sexual identities initiate a conundrum for AAMSM and disrupt wholeness. What happens to this negative content? Where did it come from? How does it function?

A. Ego-Self consciousness

Premier Jungian psychoanalyst Edward Edinger is the author of *Ego and Archetype*. Edinger explores Jung’s symbolic structure of the ego as an element of self; and with ego-self consciousness it is possible to be unaware that the ego is constantly in relation to the center of totality, self. Edinger says, “ Since the Self is the center and totality of being, the ego totally identified with the Self experiences itself as a deity

(Edinger 7). In this book, Edinger details the functions of ego-self consciousness in relation to understandings of religious myth to reflect our understandings of wholeness.

Ego-identity is constructed in relation to the self, whether conscious or unconscious, since the ego is a composite of the collective self. A basic assumption in Jung's psychology is that individuality is constructed at least as a part of a collective identity. "The Self is the ordering and unifying center of the total psyche (conscious and unconscious), just as the ego is the center of the conscious personality" (Edinger 3). AAMSM, like most human beings, tend to think of themselves in terms of 'I' and not 'we'. The ego (I) is illustrative of who we are as unique expressions of humanity, individual human beings. However, the self is a collection of all conscious and unconscious expression.

When one realizes ego-self consciousness, one is aware and accepting of the ego's relationship to "all elements of psychic life no matter how antithetical they be. It is in this sense of acceptance of the self that gives the ego its strength and stability" (Edinger 40). Indeed as Edinger posits, self-esteem is the awareness of the ego in its total relationship to self whether negative or positive, holy or demonic in reality. If AAMSM accepted themselves as AAMSM and the Black church accepted all elements of life, both subjects would be less likely to demonize the awareness of queer reality. This sense of wholeness, ego-self consciousness, is the key to a healthy lifestyle in Jungian psychology.

Internalized oppressions could cause a calamity in ego-self consciousness.

Negative thoughts about self induce self-hate, alienation, and a sense of inferiority. Ego self-consciousness is relative to self-esteem as self-esteem reflects the ego's connection to its selfhood. In response to oppression, promoting self-esteem and pride, building community, and empowering life-enhancing ideas about the self liberates the oppressed. Otherwise, internalized oppression would successfully construe a negative sense of self for AAMSM, limiting psychic wholeness and fragmenting one's identity. Edinger explains this sort of displacement, "When the connection [between ego and Self] is broken the result is emptiness, despair, meaningfulness and in extreme cases psychosis and suicide" (Edinger 43). A negative sense of identity could be generated by negative associations of the ego, thus further displacing one from a more positive sense of self, wholeness, or ego-self consciousness. Oppressive theology may separate the connection between the "I am" and God, the ego and Self, between AAMSM and the Black church

B. Persona

In comparison to ego-self-consciousness, persona is built from a sense of self-awareness. Daryl Sharp collected and published Jungian terms and concepts in *Jung Lexicon*. According to Sharp, Jung defined persona as "the 'I,' usually ideal aspects of ourselves that we present to the world." According to Jungian psychology, "the persona is that which in reality one is not, but which oneself as well as others think one is." The word persona is derived from its original meaning, "a mask worn by actors to indicate the role they played" (Sharp 97). Persona is the masked identity we perform in order to

interact as individuals in public. Thus, persona is the character we play within a particular social script.

Identifying with persona allows AAMSM to identify with their masks only, with the character that meets public expectations within homophobic social locations. Persona, however, is not an adequate replacement for ego-self consciousness. Persona identification can be reduced to denial of self such as when AAMSM attempt to pass as heterosexuals - if not heterosexuals - within the Black church. AAMSM who do not accept themselves as AAMSM often navigate through society without ego-self consciousness, only consciously identifying with a masked sense of socially acceptable self that does not entirely reflect reality.

It is in this paradigm that ego-self consciousness is compromised, and a false, safer identity replaces ego-strength. Rejected psychic content is repressed into the unconscious shadow, maybe even forgotten during social interaction. By navigating life with an exclusive emphasis on persona, one can neglect to identify with their psychic content that a particular society deems as unacceptable.

The consequence of exclusive persona identification, as opposed to ego-self consciousness, is a load of repressed, often negative, content sunken into the shadow where it is vulnerable to psychic projection. Aspects of ego identity that are considered contemptuous by society and thus repressed are not vanquished by one's identification with persona. Ulanov suggests in *Religion and the Spiritual in Carl Jung* that ego-self consciousness and identification with persona reflects the relationship between the psyche and spiritual consciousness.

It is to say that we must direct our consciousness to the center and decide to struggle with it and about it, to know its great positive qualities, its abiding difficulties, ourselves. That will keep our neighbors safe from the unconscious spiritual burden that we only too easily project on them (Ulanov 57).

In order to conceal the guilt of betraying social laws, unfitting realities are repressed into the unconscious shadow so they are not revealed in persona, where they are vulnerable to projection.

C. Shadow and Projection

Because of White oppression, negativity and exploitation have often been painful realities in the Black experience. Social oppression is effective when the oppressed can believe in their inferiority, especially when the oppressed project negative attitudes onto an alternative subject. Jung's construction of shadow is an unconscious image of self, the rejected aspects of persona in human liberation. "This connection between repression and scapegoating is true of all prejudices that are acted out in social oppression" (Ulanov 46). For the scapegoat, this process causes self-alienation and separation from the center of totality. The unwanted matters of self from oppressors sink into unconscious reality of the oppressed.

According to Ulanov, "All that our egos judge unacceptable hurls itself in projection onto our alien and distant neighbors. We identify our neighbors with the bit of ourselves we put onto and into them" (Ulanov 44). Indeed, given the purity and holiness focus of much of Black theology to socialize Black bodies, it is not difficult to see how

collective shadow content of the Black church may readily find expression in the demonization of homosexuals.

The holy rituals and puritanical morals out of which homophobic theology arises have grave affects on the conscious community of the Black church as well as those they demonize in order to teach purity. The shadow is a location for darkness. In the same way, denial of shadow prevents understanding ego-self consciousness. The collective shadow of the Black church includes repressed negative content that prevents its own ego-self consciousness. Accordingly, unwanted material is projected elsewhere while the ego is in denial of its shadow thus requiring the sacrifice of designated scapegoats.

As Jungian psychology illustrates, it is possible to be experience wholeness through understandings of theology and awareness of ego-self consciousness. AAMSM and the Black church can confront religion-based homophobia by questioning oppressive theology to achieve wholeness and AAMSM liberation. Ironically, it is precisely this confrontation that provides the means for both oppressor and oppressed to come to consciousness.

D. Jung and Theology

Jungian depth psychology helps interpret the relationship between the Black church and AAMSM. Black churches allow their members to contemplate human existence existentially and communally according to their religious understanding of theological discourse. Congregants are connected into a collective conscious; and these are “psychic contents that belong not to one individual but to a society, a people

or the human race in general” (Sharp 35). When AAMSM subscribe to oppressive theology, they internalize within themselves the psychic content of religious persecution.

Theological discourse organizes thoughts about the ego and self within Black church institutions. Historically, the Black church has constructed a story about God in order to reject negative psychic content, confront racism, and answer life questions in a safe and liberating space. “He [Jung] discovered that we carry within our own psyches such a center, a Self that is not God but that within us which knows about God” (Ulanov 48). If it is true that God created all of humanity in God’s image, as recorded in the Genesis creation narratives human identities are equally godly.¹⁰ This leads one to wonder: Who am I? What is the meaning of my life? A loving interpretation of theology would correspond to the reality of all people created in the image of God.

Jungian concepts provide another way of thinking about AAMSM participating within the Black church in the wake of a religion-based homophobia that has constructed AAMSM identity as abominable and deviant. Edinger says, “All religious practices hold up to view the transpersonal categories of existence and attempt to relate them to the individual. Religion is the best collective protection available against both inflation and alienation” (Edinger 64). When religious institutions contribute to anyone’s oppression, that construct becomes questionable because it separates individuals from their connection to the collective if not to God.

Whether religious constructs are right or wrong about the divinity of same gender love through homosexuality, Jungian psychology offers a theoretical explanation of what

¹⁰ Gen. 5.1: “This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created men, He made him in the likeness of God.”

we consider sin. "Sin is the inflated presumption of the ego which takes over the functions of the Self" (Edinger 55). Oppressive theology that rejects any kind of positive beliefs toward the homoerotic bodies of AAMSM in relation to all people is, by that definition, sinful. Perhaps AAMSM are an abomination to the heterosexist order within the Black church but that is at least potentially a very different story from whether they are abominations to God since sin yields to incredulity.

Non-oppressive religion could protect AAMSM from becoming alienated from the Black church through homophobia as well as to their God. While this thesis intentionally avoids any deconstruction of homophobic scripture, it does suggest liberation theology as a means of understanding a perception of God's love. In the following chapter, liberation theology provides a means of understanding all expressions of humanity as connected to the same life-giving force.

CHAPTER 4: LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Liberation theology is a religious understanding of human liberation. The liberation theology movement began in Latin America from the hearts of people in poverty and civil unrest as a result of Third World colonialism.¹¹ Through liberation theology, love and freedom have also come to be applied to other groups of oppressed people enduring human suffering because of their race, class, gender, and/or sexuality in other schools of thought. Liberation theology has been critiqued and celebrated for providing a theological framework for the pursuit of social justice.

The objective of liberation theology is social justice for oppressed people. Litonjua in his book *Liberation Theology*, establishes the reason for critical consciousness and collective activism as regards theological discourse for liberation. Litonjua says, “The world in its crises summons the Church and theology in each particular generation to decipher the signs of the times and to respond to them by incarnating themselves anew, assuming what has not yet been redeemed” (Litonjua 27). In order to induce social justice, liberation theology begins by empowering the lives of the oppressed in their present conditions, provides the means of challenging the sinful structures which oppress them, and ultimately points toward the praxis to create a better world through Christian ethics.

Theologies that teach that AAMSM cannot be loved unquestionably for being AAMSM create a sense of eternal hopelessness and despair for AAMSM oppressed by Black churches. Liberation theology can challenge and replace oppressive norms in

¹¹ Litonjua, *Liberation Theology*

theological discourse. A theology of liberation would affirm Christianity as a meaningful religious path for AAMSM to denounce the perceived separation of anyone from the way, the truth, or the life of Jesus Christ¹². Through liberatory deconstruction, AAMSM and the Black church are able to contemplate faith and life in response to contemporary social contradictions. As argued by Litonjua liberation theology has the power to transform oppression. “Theological discourse is justified and validated by social practice: since faith and life cannot be dichotomized, theology is true insofar as it makes for the faith commitment for liberation from oppression, as it effectively contributes to the promotion of justice and the transformation of society” (Litonjua 44). In the same way, liberation theology contributes to the liberation of AAMSM and the Black church.

Liberating understandings of Jesus Christ through versions of Black liberation theology provide hope for Black Christians enduring humanity as oppressed peoples.

James Cone is a pioneer in Black liberation theology and author of *For My People:*

Black Theology and The Black Church. According to Cone,

A religion of liberation demands more than preaching, praying, and singing about the coming eschatological kingdom of God. It demands a critical theology based on the Bible and using the tools of the social sciences so that we can participate more effectively in establishing the kingdom in this world that we believe will be fully consummated in the next (Cone 120).

Liberation theology rejects human suffering as the final destination for humanity, and thus integrates into this sexual discourse of resistance as a possible means to liberate AAMSM and the Black church.

¹² John 14:6: Jesus answered, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father but through me.

Black theologians dedicated to uplifting African American experiences recognized that salvation from human suffering was anticipated by liberating interpretations of the Bible. In order for AAMSM and the Black church to confront homophobic belief systems, like other tools that legitimate persecution, liberation theology suggests unconditional love to transcend bondage. Cone says, “The oppressed do not have to accept their present misery as the final destination of their humanity. The good news is God, the Holy One of Israel, has entered the human situation in Jesus and has transformed it through the cross and resurrection” (Cone 67). It is not uncommon for Black church preachers to proclaim the Biblical narrative of Jesus Christ’s persecution, his death, and resurrection in order to inspire faith and hopes for prosperity with Black folk.

In essence, Black liberation theology originates as a story for persecuted people who rely on religious freedom to identify the enemy and seek God’s salvation and human liberation. Cone says, “Black theology, therefore was created out of the sermonic imagination of black preachers as they fought to establish the freedom for their people that White Americans had denied but that God had foretold and promised” (Cone 74). Black-affirming interpretations of Christianity were employed to justify the Civil Rights movement as a possible response to racial oppression.

Cone articulates how black liberation theology could trigger beliefs in social transformation.

In the United State, black theologians were the first to identify liberation with salvation, and thus with the core of the Christian gospel. It was in this context that they began to refer to God as the liberator of the oppressed Hebrew slaves in Egypt and to Jesus as the new liberator whom God has anointed ‘to preach

the good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and to set at liberty those who are oppressed' (Luke 4:18, 19, RSV) (Cone 80).

Nevertheless, the “sermonic imagination” and the culture of some Black churches continue to construct human suffering for AAMSM. Original discourse for Black liberation theology failed to incorporate oppressions based on gender and sexuality, but focused only on race and class. Consequently, the discourse was too limited to liberate all of humanity or the Black community at that time.

Womanist theologians have demanded a more universal theology for liberation and social justice. Womanism, a term coined by writer Alice Walker, represents the significant experiences of African American women in movements for social justice.¹³ “They [Womanist theologians] believe in the positive sacred-human connections at the locations of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and to a certain degree, ecology” (Hopkins 134). Black liberation theology has been enriched to construct a faith that reflects a broader consciousness of diversity in the Black community through the emergence of Womanist thought.

Similarly, Cone has identified the need to expand the contours of Black liberation theology, and notes that “sexism, racism, classism, though not identical, are interconnected, and thus not one can be adequately dealt with without also dealing with the others” (Cone 97). To apply a holistic Black liberation theology, this discourse for liberation seeks to transform religiously based homophobia and liberate the social location of AAMSM. References to the Bible may further resolve religion-based homophobia within the Black church through the lens of liberation theology.

¹³ Walker, *In search of our Mother's Gardens*

Liberation theology affirms humanity through Biblical discourse. Dwight Hopkins is the author of *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation*. According to Hopkins, “the original creation and the final goal are one: liberation and full humanity” (Hopkins 56). All of Creation is the image of God, and thus celebrated by a theology for liberation. Ironically, previous interpretations of the Bible legitimated the oppression of African Americans many of whom now use religion to legitimate oppression within the Black Church. Racist interpretations of sacred text such as this verse from Hebrew Scripture, “Now therefore ye [are] cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God” (Josh. 9.23) attempted to affirm the exploitation of black bodies. Oppressive theology was regularly employed to justify the supposed rights of slave owners.

Although religious scholars have re-read oppressive interpretations of scripture to liberate persecuted people, some Black churches continue to construct AAMSM as less than Divine or human expressions of God. Womanist theologian Kelly Brown Douglas provides a mandate to disrupt the evils of all oppression in *Sexuality and the Black Church*. Douglas says, “The ministry of Jesus, the incarnate one, clarifies that sinners are those who nurture racist, sexist, and heterosexist structures and systems” (Douglas 139). It is likely that personal biases legitimated by religion often impede the freedom to love our neighbors as ourselves.

The oppression of Black gays and lesbians in churches has prompted a critical evaluation of both Black liberation theology and the role of oppressive thought within the Black church. Black gay theologian Horace E. Griffin’s response to the oppression of

Black gays and lesbians within the Black church in *Their Own Receive Them Not* is a primer for pastoral caregivers. Griffin argues, “In the inheritance of the black church as the center of black people’s lives, black pastors as heirs and keepers of this sacred canopy can lead others in dismantling its sin of homophobia and heterosexual supremacy” (Griffin 223). Through liberation theology, sinners are redeemed by the grace of God; homophobia and heterosexism can be addressed by a theology for liberation.

Roger A. Sneed questions the values of Black liberation theology, Womanist theology and other non-gay cultural critics in *Representations of Homosexuality*. Sneed is concerned that these representations of homosexuality fail to embody the possibilities of radical inclusion and suggests an ethics of openness. “What this ethics seeks is a representation of the Golden Rule that Jesus Christ makes as a maxim for his followers as the beginnings of a reinterpretation of black experiences” (Sneed 192). By introducing better ways of thinking about sexual diversity with the golden rule extended towards AAMSM in this sexual discourse of resistance, AAMSM and the Black church could come to practice unconditional love and justice for all.

Liberation theology with AAMSM and the Black church provides a means to disrupt the cycle of oppression in order for freedom, as exemplified through Jesus Christ, to prevail. Cone contends, “The church will never become an instrument of liberation as long as its leaders enslave the ones they are supposed to serve” (Cone 198). Cone is concerned that elitists could compromise the fruition of social justice within the Black church; the oppressed would be guilty of oppressing. Hate is a tool of

Black churches that espouse homophobia towards AAMSM, and therefore delegitimizes God's solidarity with the Black church. Indeed, in the words of Audre Lorde, "the Master's tools will never dismantle the Master's house."¹⁴ Through liberation theology, AAMSM can release homophobic belief systems and conclude that unconditional love intertwines with reality for all individuals reflected in the image of God. In short, we can all be liberated.

While AAMSM contemplate truth and negotiate identity, Christ-like believers can apply the commandments left by Jesus Christ according to the Gospels

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Luke 10.27).

This includes oppressive theology. Christianity implies that all souls and minds are bound by unconditional love. In the words of LGBT self-love guru, RuPaul, "If you don't love yourself, how the hell you gonna love somebody else?"¹⁵

The imperative for mutual respect to all of humanity is reflected in this principle. Liberation theology demands a response to the manifestations of hatred that terrorize hope for heaven on earth with AAMSM. As the first step in this path to liberation, AAMSM must commit to life affirming beliefs about their identities and as a result access self-esteem. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire says¹⁶, "Consciously or unconsciously, the act of rebellion by the oppressed (an act which is always, or nearly

¹⁴ Lorde, Audre. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House: Comments at 'The Personal and the Political' Panel, Second Sex Conference, October 29, 1979"

¹⁵ As quoted on every episode of RuPaul's Drag Race. RuPaul is the world first Bi supermodel.

¹⁶ Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator who studied critical pedagogy

always, as violent as the initial violence of the oppressors) can initiate love” (Freire 38). When AAMSM release internalized homophobia and replace those violent thoughts with unconditional love, we participate in our own liberation.

As with all oppressed peoples initiating a theology of liberation, AAMSM and the Black church must first reject their internalization of constructs of self-deprecation, here religion-based homophobia. Baldwin reflects upon this process: “It took many years of vomiting up all the filth I’d been taught about myself and half-believed before I was able to walk on the earth as though I had a right to be here.”¹⁷ Releasing the self-understanding of AAMSM that once served as violence to oppress AAMSM is an act of love.

For AAMSM coming to recognize their own dignity is a revolutionary process, and it often takes time. In that vein, Brazilian liberationist educator Paulo Freire confronts notions of passive tolerance as a means to access freedom: “Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly” (Freire 29). Thus, the oppressed will arouse liberation so that their fear of freedom can be replaced by freedom itself.

Love celebrates humanity and challenges oppression, privilege, and human understandings of reality. While inevitably more difficult to achieve in actuality than to merely theorize, unconditional love is not impossible for humanity, AAMSM and the Black church through liberation theology. Saint Paul says,

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in

¹⁷ Baldwin, “They Can’t Turn Back” *Mademoiselle* 1960

wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end (1 Cor. 13.4-8).

Love is liberatory in and within itself.

EPILOGUE

Freedom Story

Invisible, transparent, yet alive-
A mother's child damn demonized
Sacred sweet smile shining sunset and sunrise
So poetry scattered in silence
Three little birds chanted prayers
While my ancestors dined
I offered my body in praise
Dancing in the streets silly
Revolution style
I inhaled to awaken the dead
We spit sugar sometimes because it taste so good
And my crown still fits
Imagination was my only choice
I'm in a castle because I built it¹⁸

I was blessed to write this paper and discover my own liberation through conversations with people who were willing to listen to the complexities of this project. I found this subject to be both painful and healing. To identify with AAMSM and remain silent about my oppression felt fraudulent; it compromised my liberation.

¹⁸ Green, Adam. "Freedom Story." 10 Sept. 2010.

I am oppressed because of my race and sexuality. I am privileged and oppressed because of my gender. I am privileged because of my class and able-bodiedness.

I knew that it was time to love myself in public when I became aware of my connection to the likeness of God and like-minded people: mentors, professors, classmates, friends, and family. While writing this paper I interned with Miracle of Love, Inc., a multicultural HIV/AIDS service organization that also funds The Gathering Center, an HIV prevention program and drop in center for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youths in Central Florida. It was there that I realized how much religion had impacted the collective conscious of the Black LGBT community. My father, who was also my former pastor, told me that he suspected I was homosexual; and he said that there was nothing that I could do or say to convince him to accept me as “homosexual.” Even so, I still do not know what “homosexual” means because we are good friends to each other. I have learned, however, that all people deserve to be treated with unconditional love. I learned a new way to share love with others in writing this thesis.

Further research on this topic should respond to the interests of the oppressed in the context of unconditional love and liberation. I did not intend to ask all the questions or solve all the problems that were imposed in the nature of this discourse for liberation. Precisely, what are the long-term implications of religion-based homophobia in the existential and interpersonal lives of AAMSM who have participated within homophobic Black churches? How do we rate the impact of a sexual discourse of resistance? How do we perceive other tactics for liberation with AAMSM, and thus others impacted by

oppressive institutions? These are questions for other researchers or, at the very least, for another day.

I conclude with my vision for liberation theology with AAMSM and the Black church:

I am my brother's keeper

Me, we, us,
Loving God folk
We walk by faith
Down by Zion
Up from the planet
Take my hand
For my sister, my brother, the other,
It is me
Sweet God
And this time
For freedom
All people will rise in love
From bended knees
In the way, the truth, and the life
With no more water
No hugs or privileges
No conversation or condoms
Souls will have senses
Now
Let the redeemed in love
Say yes to the fire!
Selah.¹⁹

¹⁹ Green, Adam. "I am my brother's keeper."

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