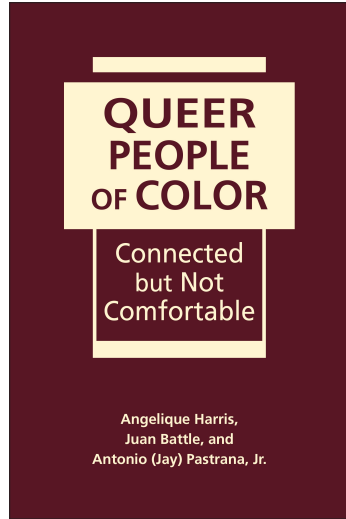


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Queer People of Color:
Connected but
Not Comfortable

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and Antonio (Jay) Pastrana, Jr.

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ISBN: 978-1-62637-715-8 hc



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A DIVISION OF LYNNE RIENNER PUBLISHERS, INC.

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Boulder, CO 80301 USA
telephone 303.444.6684
fax 303.444.0824

This excerpt was downloaded from the
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1

Community Connection Among Queer People of Color

On June 12, 2016, over 100 people, most, but not all, queer¹ people of color, were shot at a nightclub in Orlando, Florida. Forty-nine died from their wounds, making this one of the largest mass killings from gun violence in the 21st century and the largest mass killing of queer people in U.S. history. While the media covered this incident as an act of ISIS-inspired terrorism, the social and political aftermath highlights the intersections of race and sexuality in this country. The attack was devastating, regardless of the racial and sexual makeup of the victims; however, that the event took place in a queer bar on “Latin Night” speaks to how queer people of color often seek community and a sense of belonging with each other and how, even in this safe space, they are sometimes met with violence.

This book explores identity and correlates of community involvement. We examine the sense of belonging and sociopolitical involvement that queer people of color experience within their various communities. This work is based on a quantitative study of over 5,000 respondents from all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia and is one of the largest samples of queer people of color collected. Having historically faced race, gender, class, sexuality, immigrant-based oppression, and marginalization, queer Blacks,² Latinxs,³ and Asian/Pacific Islanders⁴ offer unique perspectives through which to examine how feelings of belonging affect sociopolitical involvement within their communities. We study their involvement in primarily queer communities, in their racial/ethnic community, in communities of color, and in queer communities of color. We also examine how acceptance, “outness” (openness about one’s sexuality), identity, religiosity, and other demographic factors (such as age, education, and income) influence sociopolitical involvement.

Sociopolitical Involvement

We use the term “sociopolitical involvement” to emphasize the social and political nature of community engagement within marginalized groups. Expanding upon traditional ideas of community engagement, which we will discuss in this section, we argue that the best way to assess comfort and belonging within communities, particularly within marginalized communities, is to examine the level of sociopolitical involvement within the communities. Research on community engagement emphasizes the importance of community connectedness (e.g., attending social and cultural events) and its influence on feelings of belonging for individuals (Putnam, 2000). Many individuals, however, feel disconnected and marginalized within their social and cultural groups, particularly when they experience multiple forms of oppression. Examining sociopolitical involvement for members of queer communities, we argue, is a better way to measure engagement within this population.

Sociopolitical involvement emphasizes the social, political, and cultural aspects of community involvement and consists of three distinct types of engagement: (1) civic engagement, (2) political engagement, and (3) social engagement, and their intersections. Civic engagement refers to the ways in which individuals work to serve their communities, most often but not exclusively through volunteer work, for example, volunteering in soup kitchens or hospitals (Goulding, 2009; Rogers & Robinson, 2004). Political engagement refers to engagement in the political life of a community (Chong, Ten, Er, & Koh, 2013; McCartney, Bennion, & Simpson, 2013) to improve community, local or otherwise (e.g., volunteering for political campaigns to canvass or register people to vote). Finally, social engagement focuses on how individuals participate in social life (Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000; Thomas, 2011) of their communities (e.g., attending block parties, gay or ethnic pride events). In the past, civic engagement and political engagement have been linked and used interchangeably, but each has fundamental aspects that differentiate them.

Civic Engagement

Civic engagement can be a form of service, activism, protest behavior, organizational participation, or volunteerism that serves to benefit a community (Galston & Lopez, 2006). Past research on civic engagement primarily studied work on political engagement and overlooked community participation. Researchers, however, tend to think of civic

engagement “as participation in voluntary, community-based organizations and association” (Hays, 2007, p. 402) with political participation emphasized separately. While civic engagement and political engagement are linked, they are distinct.

- (1) Civic engagement draws the citizen out of strictly personal concerns and into a greater awareness of shared, community needs.
- (2) Civic engagement develops skills in organizing and mobilizing people that are transferable to the political realm.
- (3) Civic engagement develops individual feelings of confidence and efficacy that make political activism more likely. (4) Civic engagement develops networks of relationships (the interpersonal aspect of social capital) and feelings of trust (the attitudinal aspect of social capital) that are critical to effective political action (Hays, 2007, p. 403).

In Hays’s analysis of civic engagement, he argues that this engagement happens in the following zones: family relationships, peers and work relationships, civic engagement, and political engagement. Types of civic engagement may include volunteering at the local LGBTQ community center or at an AIDS service organization or group.

Political Involvement

Political engagement or participation has been used to describe everything from social activism to campaigning for political candidates and addressing social issues (Putnam, 1995; 2000; Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999), or, as Verba, Nie, and Kim explained in 1978, “those legal activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take” (46). This consists of “voting, campaign contributions, marching in May Day or Patriots’ Day parades” (Verba et al., 1978, p. 46). Political engagement is the basis of political life, including outreach, and volunteering *for the betterment of that community* (Galston & Lopez, 2006).² Political activism and participation are dependent on three factors: (1) having the means to act; (2) being motivated to act; and (3) the ability to mobilize to act (Wong, Ramakrishnan, Lee & Junn, 2011). Those who face multiple forms of oppression —most notably victims of racial, gender, and sexual oppression—are more likely to be involved in political activism and protest behavior to help bring attention to their plight (Balsam, Molina,

Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011; Poynter & Washington, 2005). Here it is important to note the focus on the community outreach associated in political participation and its goal of community improvement. Examples of political engagement include participation in political organizations and groups, such as the Queer Socialists Working Group or the Log Cabin Republicans.

Social Engagement

Social engagement is the level of involvement in the social life of a community. The primary focus here is on participation in social groups and activities for both entertainment and community support. This includes eating in locally-owned or managed community restaurants, purposefully shopping in one's community and reading local community literature. As such, social engagement might include activism or protest work. Social engagement is often necessary to encourage the feelings of belonging that promote community and civic activism. Hays (2007) argues that social engagement is a type of voluntary association, a form of civic engagement. He explains that social engagement involves interacting with social groups around "some common interest—say stamp collecting or genealogy—[and] facilitates satisfying social ties" (2007, p. 405). Hays goes on to note, however, that this type of activity, "is directed at no societal purpose other than the intrinsic satisfaction of the activity" (2007, p. 405). Although it can be argued that shopping in lesbian bookstores and frequenting queer bars, clubs, and restaurants can be considered political, the primary focus of community engagement, in social terms, is for enjoyment and socialization in a chosen community and not for political activism or volunteering.

Robert Putnam's classic work on community engagement argues that a sense of belonging is a fundamental aspect of social experience and encourages engagement within communities (2000). Putnam's work, however, does not take into account the sociocultural factors that influence how and why groups participate in their various communities. He argues that community engagement is declining and presumes that people lack interest in community, ignoring that community varies. Not everyone has the same experiences with community, and consequently, not the same understanding of community participation and engagement. Sociopolitical involvement, on the other hand, emphasizes the social and political nature of community engagement and reveals not only the individual effects of civic, political, and social engagement but also how they intersect. Ultimately, the significance of sociopolitical involvement is this intersectional approach, which provides better insight into the

daily lives of populations that inhabit multiple and intersecting identities (e.g., Black lesbians, as opposed to just Black people, women, Black women, or just lesbians). Feeling connected and included in a community (or multiple communities) is an engagement in that community (Heath & Mulligan, 2008). As such, analyzing civic, political, and social engagement individually can be a useful approach for analyzing race and gender-specific groups and for analyzing majority groups (e.g., Whites, men). In examining the intersections of race, gender, *and* sexuality, however, we should think more broadly about sociopolitical involvement and look at the intersections of political, civic, and social engagement.

In previous publications (Battle & Harris, 2013; Battle, Harris, Donaldson, & Mushtaq, 2015; Harris & Battle, 2013; Harris, Battle, Pastrana, & Daniels, 2013; Harris, Battle, Pastrana, & Daniels, 2015), we focused on how sociopolitical involvement was interrelated with community engagement, but we did not discuss social engagement or sociopolitical involvement as a subset of community engagement. We argued that civic engagement consists of at least two interconnected elements: community engagement and sociopolitical involvement. Additionally, we accepted the definition of community engagement as a form of community-based service, activism, or volunteerism (Galston & Lopez, 2006). Although this is how we initially examined sociopolitical involvement among queer Black, Latinx, and API people, we now feel that sociopolitical involvement provides a more accurate framework through which to examine community engagement among queer people of color. Also, in this text we note that community engagement includes civic, political, and social engagement, with people who are at the intersections of various politicized identities, is a form of sociopolitical involvement. As such, when we discuss the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality, sociopolitical involvement becomes a more appropriate framework, as we not only look at the variance within the experience of being of color (e.g., Black, Latinx, or API), but we also examine how these inherently political, racial, and sexual identities intersect with gender. Typically, work that examines people of color implicitly compares their experiences to White experiences—at least when systematic exclusion does not make it impossible. In our examination of people of color, women, and queer populations, sociopolitical involvement that considers intersecting identities provides a much clearer framework.

This examination of sociopolitical involvement among queer people of color uses quantitative data collected from thousands of respondents from across the nation. These respondents completed a survey

examining their lives, perceptions, and experiences as people who have historically faced race, gender, class, sexuality, and immigrant-based oppression and marginalization. Queer Black, Latinx, and API populations offer a unique angle through which to examine belonging within marginalized communities and the impact these identities and experiences have on sociopolitical involvement within communities of color, queer communities, and queer communities of color.

Community Engagement in Society

Before we begin a discussion of community engagement, a question begs to be answered. Regardless of (racial or sexual) minority status, what actually motivates activism? Though there are many theories, Swank and Fahs' (2012) four collective action frames serve as a useful lens. They argue:

First, collective action frames initially render some societal norms as wrong, unacceptable, and unjust. Second, frames identify the causes of the injustice. By providing a diagnostic function, frames are etiologies that explain why problems exist and assign levels of blame or capability to different entities. Third, frames also convince bystanders that they should use political tactics to stop these violations. These prognostic aspects of frames usually emphasize the urgency of political action and a sense that challenges from less powerful constituencies can force concessions from a reluctant target (this confidence in movement tactics is sometimes called "agency" or a "sense of collective efficacy"). Finally, frames must provide a collective identity among the aggrieved. In doing so, collective identities establish social boundaries of "us" and "them" by specifying who belongs to the righteous in-group of the mistreated and who exemplifies the antagonistic wrongdoers who must be challenged. These collective identities often contest and refute societal claims that members of their group are inferior, worthless, sick, or maladjusted. Instead, collective action frames offer narratives about the virtues of similar people and they suggest that their group is illegitimately threatened, deprived, or treated badly (Swank & Fahs, 2012, p. 663).

We do not propose their frames are perfect but definitely useful. Especially since research has long indicated that community engagement among people in the United States has declined (Galston & Lopez, 2006; Putnam, 2000; Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999). This decline is due to a variety of social issues, including factors such as increased work hours and a rise in individualism (Putnam, 2000). Feeling connected, i.e., belonging to a social or cultural group, influences the

likelihood of participating in communities (Putnam, 2000; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).

Community engagement has been examined in relation to a number of variables, including race, gender, income, education, geographic location, and age cohort (Putnam, 2000; Sander & Putnam, 2006; Verba, et al., 1995). Age cohort and sex appear to be the largest factors determining one's community engagement across race and class lines (Putnam, 2000; Sander & Putnam, 2006). In examining age and community engagement, Galston and Lopez (2006) argue that people born in the United States "between the late 1920s and mid-1940s... tend to be more participatory and less individualistic in their outlook than are their younger fellow citizens" (2006, p. 5). Activities such as volunteering for organizations, voting, and even church attendance are heavily determined by age cohort; with older Americans participating in more of these activities than their younger counterparts (Galston & Lopez, 2006; Sander & Putnam, 2006). In terms of sex, data have long shown that both men and women report different types of engagement within their respective communities (Barreto & Munoz, 2003; Verba et al., 1978; Verba et al., 1995). Back in 1978, Verba, et al. found that women were much less likely to participate in political activities, including voting, than men, not just in the United States but also in countries such as Japan, the Netherlands, Nigeria, India, and Austria. Decades later, men are still more likely than women to partake in politically themed pursuits (Barreto & Munoz, 2003; Verba et al., 1995). They hypothesized that men had greater economic resources and, consequently, stronger political party affiliation than women. They explained, "If we find sex differences in resources and in the ability to convert resources into political activity, we shall have some explanation of the lower levels of political activity among women" (Verba et al., 1978, p. 236). More recently, women have reported higher levels of engagement in political issues that are more community orientated and social, such as reproductive rights, education, or poverty (Campbell, 2009). Women are also more likely to attend church services and dedicate time to charitable work than are men (Verba et al., 1995). Men, on the other hand, are more likely to engage in actual political work, reporting higher levels of voting, campaign work, and affiliation with a political organization (Barreto & Munoz, 2003).

Queers and Community Engagement

The visibility of queer community engagement and activism increased after the infamous 1969 police raid on a New York City gay bar, the

Stonewall Inn. This raid led to rioting when queer and trans⁶ people of color, including famed queer activist Marsha P. Johnson, fought back against this police harassment. The 1970s saw gains in rights as Harvey Milk became the first openly queer politician elected to political office—he was assassinated only 11 months later. In the 1980s, HIV swept through queer communities, and queer activists fought for increased funding for AIDS research, a reduction in AIDS stigma, employment rights, the ability to serve openly in the armed forces, and to have and adopt their own children. Although federal recognition of same-sex marriage in 2015 was a great achievement, it in no way signaled the end of activism and community engagement in queer communities. In fact, trans issues and economic justice within queer communities are now gaining more widespread attention.

Studies on activism among queer people have shown us that although income and education serve as important predictors for community engagement among queer people, it was primarily education, along with other factors, such as surviving hate crimes and joining political groups, and *not* income, that encouraged activism among lesbians and gays (Barrett & Pollack, 2005; Swank & Fahs, 2011; 2013b). Our research found that, for the most part, there are no statistically significant racial or gender differences within queer communities between those participating or not participating in community activities (Swank & Fahs, 2013a). This finding contradicts research that neglects race but argues that being “out” and experiencing discrimination are the most important predictors for political activism among queer women and men, regardless of race and sex (Swank & Fahs, 2013a). Nevertheless, research finds that Black lesbians are more likely to be politically engaged in the queer movement than White lesbians; a point that will be discussed in chapter 2 (Swank & Fahs, 2013a).

Queer people in the United States vote at a much higher rate than the general population; over 80% of eligible queer voters participated in the 2012 election compared to only 53% of non-queer voters (Bipartisan Policy Center, 2012; Perez, 2014). Similarly high voting trends among queer voters occurred in the 2016 presidential election, where a vast majority (72%) came out in support of Hillary Clinton, with only 20% voting for her Republican opponent (Lapinski & Psyllos, 2016). The high rates of voting were evident where candidates vied for the “pink vote” with both Democratic and Republican presidential candidates voicing support for queer rights. One of the challenges in examining voting within queer communities is that research does not examine the intersections of race, sexuality, gender, and sex. We know that queer

people voted, but we do not necessarily know much more about their demographic profile. Much of the high voter turnout is historically rooted in social justice activism within queer communities. San Francisco's Compton Cafeteria Riots, New York City's Stonewall Riots, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic ushered in decades of direct and highly visible activism targeting access to relationship benefits, job security, housing, and even access to treatment and services. The higher levels of sociopolitical involvement seen among queer Blacks relates back to their need to remain active to retain a connection to their communities; a fact further corroborated by research that shows White lesbians with lower levels of protest and participation in political activity compared to their Black peers (Swank & Fahs, 2013b). For example, some researchers argue that White lesbians are not as likely to vote or participate in protest activities as lesbians of color are (Swank & Fahs, 2013b). One of the reasons for higher levels of political engagement among queer Blacks, for example, is the connection to Black communities, which are much more likely to be sociopolitically involved (Moore, 2010). In essence, to maintain connection to Black communities, one must be sociopolitically active. This connection encourages the engagement of Black lesbians, who often can draw on cultural references in their activism and political work. Moore (2010) also found that their visibility and outness helped to promote queer acceptance in Black spaces, helping to propel and further motivate their activism, making their engagement in their communities sociopolitical in nature.

Social and Political Issues Within Queer Communities

Same-sex attractions, gender, non-conformity, and queer identity are intensely personal and often dependent on self-identification. Sexual identity is not necessarily determined by sexual or romantic partners but on how an identity based on these attractions and behaviors is developed. As such, we do not know the number of queer women and men in the nation, much less the world, although we do have general estimates. There are likely 10 million queer people in the United States, making up roughly 3.5% of the population (Gates, 2017). A 2011 Williams Institute study estimated that 4.1% of the population is queer (Flores, Herman, Gates, & Brown, 2016). More women (4.4%) identify as queer than men (3.7%), which is likely due to the greater stigma associated with male homosexuality and the more severe impact that masculine and feminine gender roles have on men (Flores et al., 2016). Flores and colleagues estimate that just 0.3% of the population is trans (Flores et al., 2016). Although just over 3% identify as queer, 8% of

people in the United States have reported sexual activity with someone of the same sex, and 11% reported same-sex attraction (Gates, 2017). Millennials (those born between 1980-1998) are more likely to identify as queer (7.3%), than Generation X (1965-1979), 3.2% of whom identify as queer. Only 2.4% of Baby Boomers (1946-1964) identify as queer, and Traditionalists (1913-1945), where just 1.4% identify as queer (Gates, 2015). In fact, millennials account for almost half (43%) of the queer community (Flores et al., 2016). People of color are more likely to identify as queer than their White counterparts (Gates & Newport, 2012).

Most queer people are out to their family and friends, and they are coming out as queer at much younger ages than they have in the past (Riley, 2010), which is likely due to a decrease in social stigma. Research indicates that there are no racial differences in the age of coming out (Riley, 2010). Riley (2010) found that over half (61%) of Black women were out to their parents compared to 80% of White women, 72% of Latinx women, and 68% of women who identified as “other” in their study. Among men, Riley found that 77% of Whites, 71% of Latinx, 69% of Black, and 62% of API men were out to their parents.

Queer people of color often experience greater forms of discrimination than their White counterparts in and out of mainstream queer communities. This includes well-documented racism (Choi, Han, Paul, & Ayala, 2011; Teunis, 2007); transphobia; economic disparities (Lee Badgett, Durso, & Schneebaum, 2013; Gorman, Denney, Dowdy, & Medeiros, 2015); increased interaction with the criminal justice system (Meyer et al., 2017); and issues with immigration (Chavez, 2011).

Economic Disparities

Twenty-four percent of lesbians and bisexual women (single or in relationships) live in poverty, compared to 15% of gay and bisexual men (Lee Badgett et al., 2013). Bisexual adults also face heightened levels of poverty, with approximately 40% of bisexual men and 42% of bisexual women living in poverty (Gorman et al., 2015). Queer elderly populations face poverty at higher rates compared to their heterosexual counterparts. While only 4.6% of opposite-sex couples 65 and older live in poverty, and only 4.9% of older male same-sex couples live in poverty, 9.1% of female same-sex couples aged 65 and older live at or below the federal poverty line (Movement Advancement Project, 2013). Rates of poverty are higher among queer people of color than White

queer women and men. Black same-sex couples are more than twice as likely to live in poverty as Black opposite-sex couples, while all same-sex couples of color have much higher rates of poverty as White same-sex couples. Moreover, queer people of color experience higher rates of unemployment, at 11% for queer API, 14% for queer Latinx, and 15% for queer Black individuals. Comparatively, unemployment rates for their heterosexual counterparts are 8%, 11%, and 12 %, respectively (Movement Advancement Project, 2013, p. 5).

Prison Industrial Complex

Queer women and men are overrepresented within the U.S. prison industrial complex (Meyer et al., 2017). The prison industrial complex includes incarceration, interactions with the police, parole, etc. (Schlosser, 1998). A report suggesting various policy recommendations for addressing the experiences of queer people within the prison industrial complex found that a vast majority of all queer identifying individuals, 73%, have had face-to-face contact with law enforcement within five years prior to being surveyed (Hanssens et al., 2014). Of this group, 5% had been under correctional supervision, including jail or prison, probation, or parole, compared to only 3% of non-queer adults. A quarter of those who had contact with police and law enforcement reported misconduct or harassment on their part, while 20 to 40% reported verbal harassment (Hanssens et al., 2014). Another report found that although queer women and men only make up about 3.5% of the general population, queer men make up 5.5% of the male prison population, but approximately 33% of women in prison are queer (Meyer et al., 2017). Additionally, while queer youth comprise 5 to 7% of the juvenile population, they represent 13 to 15% of those who are in the juvenile justice system (Hanssens et al., 2014).

Within prisons, queer women and men are more likely to be sexually harassed or assaulted, are more likely to be denied access to services, and face a higher likelihood of being placed in segregated housing or solitary confinement than their heterosexual counterparts. Trans prisoners face incarceration in gender-segregated prisons based on their assigned gender at birth instead of their current gender identity. They are more likely to be placed in solitary confinement “for their own protection” and are sexually victimized at 13 times the rate of cisgender people. Queer women and men in prison also face the prospect of limited or no healthcare, potentially problematic given the necessity of transition-related or HIV/AIDS care (Hanssens et al., 2014).

Queer people of color face additional difficulties with law enforcement and the criminal justice system, compared to non-queer people of color and White queer individuals. In interactions with police, trans people of color were 2.5 times as likely to experience physical violence than cisgender White individuals. Queer people of color were 1.82 times as likely to experience violence. Queer and trans youth also face increased incarceration. Approximately 300,000 queer youth are arrested or detained each year, of which 60% are Black or Latinx. (Movement Advancement Project, 2015).

Immigration

Mainstream communities often overlook queer immigrants in dialogues on immigration and migration, and within queer communities, migrant needs are often ignored (Chavez, 2011). There are an estimated million queer immigrants living in the United States, a majority of whom identify as people of color, and 30% of whom are undocumented (Center for American Progress Immigration Team, 2014; Movement Advancement Project, 2015). Almost 70% of queer immigrants of color are male, almost 50% are under the age of 30, over 70% are Latinx, and 15% are API (Movement Advancement Project, 2015). A number of these immigrants are held in detention centers where they face high risks of sexual abuse and assault, neglect, harassment, solitary confinement, and lack of adequate or appropriate medical care (Hanssens et al., 2014).

Queer migrants to the U.S. face multiple challenges and have unique needs. For example, many, especially if they are undocumented, lack access to health insurance or the jobs that would provide them with access to health insurance. Additionally, services are often socially and culturally inappropriate, and, in general, the health and wellness of queer migrants are often overlooked. Research on health and wellness among queer migrants primarily examines HIV and mental health issues within this population (Hirsch, Higgins, Bentley, & Nathanson, 2002; Izazola-Licea et al., 2000; Organista, 2007; Organista, Carrillo, & Ayala, 2004; Organista & Ehrlich, 2008; Organista et al., 1997; Yoshikawa, Wilson, Chae, & Cheng, 2004). Another issue queer immigrants face is housing—research on queers and housing often focuses on homelessness among youth (Hunter, 2008; Mottet & Ohle, 2006; Van Leeuwen, Boyle, Salomonsen-Sautel, & Baker, 2006) and the elderly (Cahill & South, 2002; de Vries, 2006; Donovan, 2001; Johnson, Jackson, Arnette, & Koffman, 2005; Orel, 2004). Finally, all migrants confront a system of immigration laws that shapes their day-to-day lives, but as Chavez (2011) argues, queer migrants are particularly negatively

affected by the system. Decades ago, one's homosexuality was used to ban queers from entering the United States (Canaday, 2003; Luibhéid, 2002; Somerville, 2005). Research has documented the experiences of queer migrants, but it primarily examines the difficulty they have in seeking asylum and, prior to the nation-wide recognition of same-sex marriage, this research also examined how partners were unable to sponsor queer migrants (Hazeldean & Betz, 2003; Morgan, 2006; Randazzo, 2005).

Intersectional Frameworks, the Margins, and the Middle

Intersectional Frameworks

As shown above, social issues and problems that affect communities of color disproportionately impact queer community members. Law professor Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1991) coined the term intersectionality, which posits that individuals occupy different social positions in society. As a result, individuals form identities based on the intersection of their differing statuses. This identity formation results from what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) refers to as the “matrix of domination.” For example, according to Collins (2000), a Black woman not only faces certain forms of oppression because of her race but also because of her sex and often because of her social class. “Intersectionality refers to the ways in which race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, and other locations of social group membership impact lived experiences and social relationships. The term emphasizes the mobility of social group identities and locations, not simply of their appearances in individual bodies” (Harris & Bartlow, 2015, p. 251). These intersecting identities influence feelings of belonging and, thus, sociopolitical involvement within their communities.

The concept of intersectionality, or interlocking identities rooted in what some have called relative sociocultural power and privilege, has received much attention (Parent, DeBlaere, & Moradi, 2013; Shields, 2008). In 2008, a groundbreaking series of articles concerning intersectionality was published in which researchers addressed issues including, but not limited to, gender and sexual identity over time (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008); race, gender, and encounters with law enforcement (Dottolo & Stewart, 2008); questioning of concepts of feminism among feminist-identified Latinx men (Hurtado & Sinha, 2008); immigrant identities (Mahalingam, Balan, & Haritatos, 2008); as

well as methodological challenges in conducting intersectionality research (Bowleg, 2008).

The importance of intersectionality has been lauded by many, but none more poignantly than McCall (2005), who, while at times also critiquing it, suggested that “intersectionality is the most important theoretical contribution that woman’s studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made thus far” (p. 1771). While supported and theorized by many, numerous also are the ways in which researchers conceptually frame their thinking. They could be summarized or categorized as additive, multiplicative, or interactionist (Parent et al., 2013). Black feminist theory (Beal, 1970; Collins, 2000; King, 1988) has contributed much to these understandings. The term “double jeopardy” was often used concomitantly with “additive” understandings of intersectionality. In short, scholars argued that minority statuses, like race and gender, work independently and combine additively to shape people’s experiences (Beal, 1970). Later, scholars extended this “additive” understanding and argued that these minority identities interact with each other and multiply their impact (Greene, 1994; King, 1988; Landrine, Klonoff, Alcaraz, Scott, & Wilkins, 1995). From there, scholars—championed by Collins (1990; 1998) and Crenshaw (1991)—contended that the multiplicative identities could not be reduced to their individual components, and they therefore create new and unique forms of identity, thus opportunities for oppression and liberation (Baca Zinn & Dill, 1996). Though differing in some of their assumptions, the consensus of the field is that each of these three perspectives can be useful analytic tools (Cole, 2009; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Shields, 2008), especially for understanding how gender (Moradi & Parent, 2013; Moradi & Yoder, 2011; Swank & Fahs, 2012; West & Fenstermaker, 1995; Yoder, 2013), sexual orientation (Bowleg, 2012; Herek, 2010; Riggs, 2012; Singh, 2012; Worthen, 2012), and race (Galupo & Gonzalez, 2012) interact with each other as well as with other identities (Glenn, 1999; Norton & Herek, 2012).

Intersectionality has also been utilized as a tool for understanding majority group members’ attitudes towards minority groups. For example, Worthen (2012) employed intersectionality to better understand heterosexual women’s and men’s attitudes toward queer populations. She found six theoretical reasons explaining these attitudes. The first attitude is the conflation of gays, bisexual men, and transgender individuals with HIV/AIDS (Fish & Rye, 1991; Herek & Capitano, 1999; Miller, 2002). Second is straight people’s fear of sexual advances by queer individuals (Bortolin, 2010; Eliason, 1997; Kimmel, 2009; Worthen, 2011). The third attitude is the sexualization of lesbians and

bisexual women (Rupp & Taylor, 2010; Russo, 2009; Torregrosa, 2010); while the fourth is “coveting” of gays by heterosexual women (Eliason & Raheim, 1996; Shugart, 2003). The fifth is gender nonconformity prejudice (Bornstein, 1998; Gordon & Meyer, 2007; Lombardi, Wilchins, Priesling, & Malouf, 2001; Sandfort, Melendez, & Diaz, 2007;); while the sixth is heterosexism, sexism, and cisnormativity (Gerhardstein & Anderson, 2010; Halberstam, 2003; Kimmel, 2009).

It should be noted, however, that intersectionality is not without its critics (Robertson & Sgoutas, 2012). Some argue that it sometimes replicates the very concept it is trying to interrupt or deconstruct (McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008). Similarly, Warner and Shields (2013, p. 807) offer a strongly articulated and cited critique in three areas: First, applications of intersectionality do not adequately address the fluidity of identity (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Prins, 2006; Robertson & Sgoutas, 2012); second, applications of intersectionality do not sufficiently address the social construction of the identity categories themselves (Ackerly & McDermott, 2012; Helms, Jernigan, & Mascher, 2005; Robertson & Sgoutas, 2012); and, third, within applications of intersectionality, the act of labeling is itself problematic (Riggs, 2012).

Moving to the Middle: Belonging and Connectedness

Feeling connected to a community is not only important for sociopolitical involvement, but it is also vital to identity formation processes (Flores et al., 2009; Heath & Mulligan, 2008). The feeling of belonging is heavily influenced by social location and role within the social group (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Exclusion, oppression, and isolation often increase the importance of belonging to social groups (Gorman-Murray, Waitt, & Gibson, 2008). This is especially the case for those who experience multiple forms of oppression, such as queer people of color who often experience simultaneous forms of homophobia within their racial or ethnic communities and racism within mainstream communities (Coloma, 2006; Lehavot, Balsam, & Ibrahim-Wells, 2009; Ordon, 2003). Yet, scholarship fails to adequately examine the sense of belonging, or connectedness, and sociopolitical involvement among people who experience multiple forms of discrimination and oppression. Community acceptance and involvement are also important as they help enhance feelings of belonging among those in marginalized communities.

Intragroup marginalization, or “the downgrading and discrimination that more privileged group members have towards other, less privileged group members,” (Harris, 2009, p. 431) is an added stressor to groups

already facing marginalization by dominant groups (Harris, 2009; Rust, 2000). Examples of intragroup marginalization include homophobia among women and within communities of color, as well as gender and racial/ethnic discrimination within queer communities. Rust (2000) noted three coping mechanisms for sexual minorities of color. First, they conceal their sexuality to maintain the support from their racial/ethnic communities. Second, they leave their racial/ethnic community of origin and immerse themselves in the mainstream queer community. Third, they maintain a close connection to their racial/ethnic communities while being “out” and challenge homophobia within these communities. Regardless of their approach, when queer people of color experience intragroup marginalization it has an impact on their psychosocial wellbeing (Rust, 2000).

Although everyone possesses multiple intersecting identities, those who possess intersecting marginalized identities may have a limited ability to engage in their communities because they face increased discrimination and aggression, consequently impeding a sense of belonging in their communities and their ability (and desire) to engage in their communities. Belonging to a community is not only important for individual psychosocial well-being and positive identity formation, but also directly linked to an individual’s level of community engagement (Flores et al., 2009; Heath & Mulligan, 2008). Belonging consists of “an unfolding space of attachment, affiliation, and recognition” (Gorman-Murray et al., 2008, p. 172), or as Nira Yuval-Davis explains, belonging is as much about emotional connection as it is about “feeling ‘safe’” (2006, p. 198). Belonging is frequently determined by the amount of power and status one has within a group, as well as political values and identifications (Yuval-Davis, 2006). This sense of belonging is especially important for those who have experienced multiple levels of identity-based oppression and marginalization.

Belonging does not simply concern identity and social location; it is also about how people view their attachments and how they feel those attachments are judged (Yuval-Davis, 2006). To seek a sense of community and belonging, those who feel marginalized are more likely to identify with other marginalized group members (Tatum, 2003). This exclusion often increases their need to belong to social groups (Gorman-Murray et al., 2008). For example, the sense of belonging is important for those who are recent immigrants (Bourhis, Barrette, El-Geledi, & Schmidt, 2009). For these groups, families and communities are key for their acculturation and support (Bourhis et al., 2009). This is also the case for those in communities of color and within queer communities,

and, in particular, queer people of color. Lehavot, Balsam, and Ibrahim-Wells (2009) explain that both communities of color and queer communities provide resources, a space where community members can socialize with each other, and are often the sites of community activism. Nonetheless, racial/ethnic communities and queer communities are not homogenous, and in-group marginalization often occurs as individuals occupy multiple intersecting identities.

The interplay of sociopolitical involvement with a theoretical framework of intersectionality among queer populations, especially of color, is a rich experiential and intellectual playground in which to better understand and develop the concepts we describe in this book. Without question, in the United States, queer populations, regardless of race, have historically been treated poorly (Herek, 2009). Examining the intersections of race and sexuality has greatly informed the evolution of powerful theories such as minority stress (Meyer, 2003). As coping strategies, some may choose to stay in the closet (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006), while others, realizing as Audre Lorde reminds us that our silence will not protect us, come out, get politically involved, and feel their lives sustained (Taylor et al., 2009).

Much of the research concerning racial minorities and sociopolitical activism focusses on heterosexual populations (Bobo & Gilliam, 1990; Leighley & Vedlitz, 1999; Schussman & Soule, 2005) or White privilege within queer communities (Balsam et al., 2011; Fingerhut, Peplau, & Ghavami, 2005; Ward, 2008). No matter, when studying sociopolitical involvement, it is pertinent to understand the unique experiences and internal heterogeneity among queer communities of color. As Stewart and McDermott (2004) remind us, “(a) no social group is homogenous, (b) people must be located in terms of social structures that capture the power relations implied by those structures, and (c) there are unique, non-additive effects of identifying with more than one social group” (pp. 531–532). Failing to employ methodologies that identify these differences will lead researchers to miss the fact that queer individuals are more likely to engage in queer social movements than their heterosexual counterparts are (Rollins & Hirsch, 2003; Swank & Fahs, 2011) and that racial minorities are more likely to join anti-racist movements than are their White counterparts (Bobo & Gilliam, 1990; Schussman & Soule, 2005). Intersectionality allows for even more nuanced findings. For example, in some instances, Black women tend to be more supportive of feminism (Cook & Wilcox, 1992; Tolleson-Rinehart, 1992) and more politically active than their White counterparts (Cole & Sabik, 2010; Manza & Brooks, 1998). While, conversely, some argue that limited resources and inadequate access to power may prevent

gender, racial, sexual, and economic minorities from engaging in sociopolitical activities (Burns, Schlozman, & Verba, 1997; Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010; Duncan, 1999; Manza & Brooks, 1998), nonetheless and not surprisingly, most social movements are born out of and nurtured by oppressed and marginalized populations (Simien, 2007; Stewart & McDermott, 2004).

Historically, women were less likely than men to be sociopolitically involved (Barkan, Cohn, & Whitaker, 1995; Wallace & Jenkins, 1995), but recent research shows the disappearance and in some instances reversal of the gender gap (Bobo & Gilliam, 1990; Harder & Krosnick, 2008; Leighley & Nagler, 1992; Paulsen, 1994; Hritzuk & Park, 2000). It should also be noted that these differences may be behavior-specific, for example, voting vs. writing a politician (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010). Differences also exist within the queer community. For example, Herek et al. (2010) found certain sociopolitical behaviors to be more prevalent among lesbian women; while others were more prevalent among gay men (Lewis, Rogers, & Sherrill, 2011). Yet some have found no major gender differences in sociopolitical behaviors between gay men and lesbian women (Jennings & Andersen, 2003; Rollins & Hirsch, 2003; Taylor et al., 2009; Waldner, 2001). Concerning race, most of what we know centers on heterosexual populations. For example, though we know Whites are more likely to vote (Bobo & Gilliam, 1990; Harder & Krosnick, 2008; Leighley & Vedlitz, 1999), Blacks and Latinx populations were more likely to show up at protest rallies (Paulsen, 1994; Schussman & Soule 2005), leading some scholars to suggest that racial minorities prefer social movements over voting as a form of sociopolitical involvement (Swank & Fahs, 2012).

Understandably, sociopolitical involvement among queer communities is fraught with problems and contradictions. For example, some may feel that by engaging in queer activism, they are denying their racial selves or communities (Moore, 2010); or they may be concerned with facing racism within the queer community (Alimahomed, 2010; Levitsky, 2007; Ward, 2008). Yet, others argue that because of those multiple forms of discrimination, queer people of color may even be more likely to be sociopolitically involved (Levitsky, 2007; White, 2006). While much has been theorized and chronicled concerning queer populations' participation in the gay and lesbian rights movement (Jeness, 1995; Kane, 2003; Wald, Button & Rienzo, 1996), far too little of that work is actually empirical (Swank & Fahs 2011;2012; Taylor et al., 2009; Waldner, 2001). Subsequent chapters in this book attempt to address that gap.

This book uses an intersectional framework to examine feelings of belonging and sociopolitical involvement among queer people of color in communities of color, in queer communities, and in queer communities of color. Using intersectionality and sociopolitical involvement as theoretical frameworks to study feelings of belonging among queer Black, Latinx, and API women and men is necessary because, unlike heterosexual people of color and White queer women and men, they do not represent the dominant group in their communities. We posit that the multiple levels of marginalization that queer people of color experience influences their engagement in their communities and as their very identities are often stigmatized and marginalized, the very nature of their engagement within their communities is sociopolitical.

Project Methodology

This research study and resulting books are based on data collected as part of the Social Justice Sexuality (SJS) Project. The SJS Project began as a knowledge-based research agenda guided by two important theoretical frameworks in the study of race, ethnicity, and sexuality: critical race theory (CRT) and intersectionality. Within the study of race and ethnicity, CRT argues that racial oppression exists not only in the form of direct racist elements, but it also exists indirectly within our everyday social structures. A key component of CRT is the collection of narratives, or stories, that people tell about their everyday lives. Read as counter-narratives to what has historically been documented, theorists contend that collecting these stories sheds light on the pervasiveness of racial oppression – and these narratives do so by focusing on how individuals make sense of their own lives. CRT narratives are often told through the voices of people who have experienced racial oppression.

The second theoretical framework employed by the SJS Project is intersectionality, which as we have described, is a way of examining how multiple forms of oppression come together. This approach has been influential in the study of race and sexuality because it further contextualizes how individual characteristics, or identities, are affected by specific and overdetermined forms of discrimination and oppression. Related to CRT, the intersectional framework highlights how multiple forms of discrimination or stigma (i.e., having a non-normative gender display, being a person of color, and being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or trans) affect individual lives within a heteronormative, White supremacist, and patriarchal society.

The SJS Project, a knowledge-based research agenda, began as a way to document and contextualize the stories of queer people of color

while avoiding a focus on discrimination and pathology. One way to do this was to continuously collect and amass data that could be used to further understand social and cultural trends. Though scholars have studied various components of the lives of queer people of color, there has never been a longitudinal approach – a systematic method of gathering data across many years. One way to grasp the utility of a knowledge-based research approach is to consider how scholars and policy-makers make use of the U.S. Census data. As a knowledge-based survey, the Census provides continuous data on things like income and education. Because queer women and men are not necessarily included in large knowledge-based surveys like the U.S. Census,⁷ empirical data on the lives of queer people have been collected using a variety of social scientific approaches that include but are not limited to autoethnography, focus group and in-depth interviewing, experiments, and survey methodology.

The social scientific picture of the lives of queer people of color often focuses on the presence of discrimination, disease, and stigma. Without a doubt, queer people face many of these and other forms of oppression. But how can other stories be told about the queer people of color experience? For example, how do individuals make sense of their own lives, and how can research be used to understand how privilege, health, and acceptance appear? That is, how can examples or stories of success help us understand such things as survival and happiness? Though these are some of the questions that guided the SJS Project, one important element was missing: Which social and demographic characteristics are important in the lives of queer people of color today? To address this question, the SJS Project embarked on a knowledge-based research agenda that employed a variety of methodologies and practices. (See the Appendix for a chronological accounting of the research methods used by the SJS Project and important phases of the project.⁸)

Book Overview

The SJS Project collected data on the experiences of queer people of color in five areas: identity (both racial and sexual), physical/mental health, family, religion/spirituality, and sociopolitical involvement. In this book, we focus on the data pertaining to sociopolitical involvement among Black, Latinx, and API study participants. Each chapter in this book is meant to “stand alone” and therefore, much of the material in chapters 2 through 4 is repeated. Each chapter examines feelings of belonging and sociopolitical involvement within a different queer racial

community. The following chapter examines sociopolitical involvement among queer Blacks, chapter 3 examines queer Latinx women and men, and chapter 4 examines queer Asian/Pacific Islanders (API). The chapters begin by providing demographic information concerning the racial community (i.e., Black, Latinx, and API) and continue with a discussion on community engagement within these mainstream communities. We move on to discuss queer communities, provide demographic information, and focus on the experiences of queers in these racialized communities and these racial groups in queer communities, as their experiences are fundamentally different. Work on community engagement often overlooks the influence that family and religious communities play in feelings of belonging and how they may influence community engagement—and in the case of our study sample, their sociopolitical involvement. As such, we also examine the role of family and religion within these communities. Following this discussion, we present demographic findings on the SJS study participants and assess their levels of sociopolitical involvement in communities of color and queer communities. We go on to show how connectedness and comfort, more so than demographic variables, influence sociopolitical involvement in queer communities. Connectedness and comfort are, in fact, the most important predictors of sociopolitical involvement within these communities. We conclude this book with a chapter summarizing and discussing our findings. We also consider study implications and how they can be used to improve the lives of queer people of color.

Notes

¹ Queer refers to those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, (LGBTQ) and to individuals and groups who do not completely and always self-identify as heterosexual. Although there are trans people who participated in the research of this book, the overall focus of the project was on sexual orientation and queer identity. While many trans people identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, etc., gender identity is different from sexual identity.

² Black is a racial group that encompasses peoples of the African diaspora. Black describes all people of African descent, including Black Americans (African Americans), West Indians, Central and South American Blacks, and those from Sub-Saharan Africa.

³ Latino is often used to describe people born in the United States and abroad, who have ancestry in colonized places in the Americas in which Spanish and Portuguese are the primary languages. These include Mexicans, Brazilians, and Puerto Ricans. The "x" in Latinx clarifies gender, making the category inclusive of women, men, agender, trans, gender-nonconforming, gender-queer, and gender-fluid people. Like the term Black, Latinx is an

umbrella term. It encompasses all peoples of a diaspora and includes North, Central, and South America

⁴ Asian/Pacific Islanders are people who have origins in Asian and Pacific geographic regions and may identify as Central Asian, East Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian, Native Hawaiians, or Pacific Islanders.

⁵ However, as the recent 2016 presidential elections shows, one's level of political participation may not necessarily relate to the desire to improve the lives of loved ones and families.

⁶ People who are trans or gender non-conforming face additional challenges as they tend to have higher rates of poverty (Movement Advancement Project, 2016), homelessness (Movement Advancement Project, 2016), poor health (Grant et al., 2010), depression (Grant et al., 2010), suicide (Haas, Rodgers & Herman, 2014), and unemployment than their cisgender counterparts (Crissman, Berger, Graham, & Dalton, 2017). Most of this is related to the stigmatization and marginalization that trans people face in both mainstream cis-heterosexual and cis-LGB communities. Additionally, trans individuals are routinely subjected to violence at rates much higher than their heterosexual and LGB counterparts (Grant et al., 2010).

⁷ To date, though the U.S. Census does not include a question about sexual orientation or identity, some scholars have used data related to household composition to identify same-sex couple households. This has been done primarily by matching the sex of the "head of household" with the sex of the only other household member in one family unit. This technique, however, has not been able to identify lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans people who are single.

⁸ For more information about the project, visit www.socialjusticesexuality.com.