

BLACK LGBTQ+ MENTAL HEALTH



Black LGBTQ+ people experience high rates of discrimination and stigma due to having more than one marginalized identity, including their racial identity and their sexual orientation/gender identity.

A growing body of research documents the impacts of such discrimination, with a recent study showing

83%

of Black LGBTQ+ individuals reporting discrimination negatively impacted their physical well-being



95%

reporting discrimination negatively impacted their psychological well-being.

One promising new area of research focuses on the intersectional experiences of Black LGBTQ+ people. Whereas previous studies have focused solely on one type of stigma (e.g., only homophobia, only racism), a 2020 study by Dr. Skyler Jackson of Yale University has captured experiences of Black LGBTQ+ people that were intersectional.



Intersectional experiences are experiences shaped by more than one domain of stigma, such as race and sexual orientation. Intersectional experiences among Black LGBTQ+ Americans can be negative or positive:

What is a negative intersectional experience?



A negative intersectional experience is any negative event that is produced or shaped by one's unique social position as Black and LGBTQ+. For example, this could include encountering a racist stereotype from an LGBTQ+ community member, facing anti-LGBTQ+ prejudice from a Black friend or family member, or feeling invisible as a Black LGBTQ+ person.

What is a positive intersectional experience?



A positive intersectional experience is an affirming event that is produced amidst the backdrop of oppression faced by Black and LGBTQ+ people. These experiences spark a sense of joy, freedom, resilience, or connection, like enjoying a Black LGBTQ+ gathering or feeling empowered by positive Black LGBTQ+ media representations.

Negative intersectional experiences can trigger stress and identity conflict, while positive ones can foster joy and help affirm one's sense of connection and support within Black and LGBTQ+ communities. Indeed, despite experiencing multiple types of discrimination, Black LGBTQ+ people are finding joy, community, self-love, and empowerment within their identities. In fact, Black sexual minorities report positive intersectional experiences nearly three times more frequently than negative experiences, and the study results suggest that increasing the positive intersectional experiences of Black LGBTQ+ people may support their health and help them cope with racism and homophobia.



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Here are some ways mental health providers can support the well-being and resilience of Black LGBTQ+ individuals:



Inquire intersectionally! Ask open questions about how your client's various identities conflict, integrate, cause stress, spark connection, or foster joy.



Be aware of how the client feels about their identity at a particular time, as their identity-related struggles may ebb and flow based on daily events



Help individuals consider ways to minimize exposure & increase resilience to negative intersectional experiences



Focus on identifying & embracing positive intersectional experiences as a source of meaning and pride; Consider ways to boost their frequency & prolong savoring of such affirming events, such as:



Writing about experiences can be therapeutic – encourage writing about negative intersectional experiences to assist with coping or writing about positive intersectional experiences to savor them

- Enjoying literature by and about Black LGBTQ+ people
- Experiencing Black LGBTQ+ representation in art, media, and politics
- Finding safe & welcoming spaces (e.g., LGBTQ+ affirming churches, racially inclusive LGBTQ+ nightclubs)
- Identifying intersectional spaces that cater to LGBTQ+ people of color (e.g., queer people of color organizations, community events for Black lesbians)

The findings of this cutting-edge research have motivated additional research on intersectional experiences among other LGBTQ+ subpopulations, such as LGBTQ+ Muslims.

Reference:

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