Sexuality and Sexual Agency Among Heterosexual Black Men in Toronto: Tradition, Contradiction, and Emergent Possibilities in the Context of HIV and Health

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Abstract. This article critically examines common understandings of sexuality and sexual agency among heterosexual Black men in Toronto. The findings are based on focus groups and in-depth interviews conducted for the qualitative arm of the broader weSpeak project, a mixed-methods study designed to engage and support heterosexual Black men in Ontario, Canada, in living more holistically healthy lives. Focus groups and in-depth interviews with 69 self-identified heterosexual Black men focused on vulnerability and resilience to HIV, but participants also shared their complex experiences and perspectives related to sexuality and sexual agency, especially in the context of systemic and structural conditions that affect their wellbeing. This article provides excerpts from their narratives to illustrate the complexities and emergent possibilities related to sexuality and sexual agency among heterosexual Black men, which may open up new ways of approaching HIV prevention and health promotion.

Keywords: Black; African Canadians; Sexuality; Health; Masculinities; HIV

Résumé. Cet article examine d'un œil critique les conceptions communes de la sexualité et de l'agentivité sexuelle chez les hommes noirs hétérosexuels de Toronto. Les résultats sont fondés sur des groupes de discussion et des entrevues approfondies menées dans le cadre du volet qualitatif du projet weSpeak, une étude à méthodes mixtes conçue pour inciter et soutenir les hommes noirs hétérosexuels de l'Ontario, au Canada, à mener une vie plus saine sur le plan holistique. Des groupes de discussion et des entrevues approfondies avec 69 hommes noirs hétérosexuels auto-identifiés axés sur la vulnérabilité et la résilience au VIH, mais les participants ont également partagé leurs expériences et perspectives complexes liées à la sexualité et à l'agentivité sexuelle, en particulier dans le contexte des conditions systémiques et structurelles qui affectent leur bien-être. Cet article présente des extraits de leurs récits pour illustrer les complexités et les possibilités émergentes liées à la sexualité et à l'agentivité sexuelle chez les hommes noirs hétérosexuels, ce qui pourrait ouvrir de nouvelles façons d›aborder la prévention du VIH et la promotion de la santé.

Mots clés: Noirs; Afro-canadiens; Sexualité; Santé; Masculinités; VIH

Introduction

Black people in Canada continue to experience disproportionately high rates of diagnosis for HIV. For example, in Ontario in 2015–2016, Black men accounted for 17% of new diagnoses among men, and Black women accounted for 49% of new diagnoses among women (Wilton et al. 2017). Because Black people account for only about 5% of the province's population, these rates represent a notably disproportionate burden of HIV among Black communities. The same pattern applies to Canada as a whole – Black men and women accounted for 17% and 36% of new infections among all men and women respectively (Bourgeois et al. 2017), although only 3.5% of Canadians identified as Black in the 2016 Census.

Heterosexual Black men are directly affected by HIV and are implicated in the rapid rate of transmission among Black women (Remis et al. 2012). Yet, researchers and policymakers were slow to understand and address HIV vulnerabilities among heterosexual Black men. We believe that this delayed engagement is partly due to prevalent discourses that essentialize Black men as a reckless, disruptive presence in Black communities and broader society (McIntyre 2016; Morgan 2018; Toronto Star 2013). This kind of discourse is illustrated, for example, in the media coverage about an African Canadian man who, in 1992, was charged and criminally prosecuted for failing to disclose his HIV status to his White female sexual partners, who were later diagnosed with the

disease. Mainstream newspaper coverage at the time, along with a popular book by a well-known journalist (Callwood 1995), portrayed the man as the African embodiment of a particularly dangerous virus that was infecting the White Canadian body politic (Mykhalovskiy et al. 2016). Overall, the relative absence of critical analysis of masculinity and its social determinants among Black men may reinforce stereotypes about heterosexual Black men. The next section explores critical social theories that inform our approach to interpreting the narratives of heterosexual Black men: hegemonic masculinities, structural violence, and agency.

Masculinity, Black Men, and Sexual Agency in Perspective

Hegemonic and Heteronormative Performances of Masculinity

Connell (2005) defined hegemonic masculinity as the form of masculinity that is "culturally exalted" in a given time and place. It promotes and justifies men's domination of women and a hierarchy of male dominance. It also equates conventional heterosexuality with manhood, and in the process, stigmatizes homosexuality. It represents a stereotypic notion of masculinity that shapes the socialization and aspirations of young males. Overall, hegemonic masculinity encompasses a set of socially constructed ideologies (Crook et al. 2009) that are widely accepted, and provide a general framework for understanding or interpreting the behaviours of men and boys – including behaviours that have direct consequences for their health (Bowleg et al. 2011).

Black men have a complex relationship to hegemonic masculinity. On one hand, as Connell (2005) suggested, Black men may aspire to the hegemonic ideal, even though they are not its main exemplars or beneficiaries. Under capitalism, White men may have appropriated the patriarchal dividend, and their success is seductive for Black and other racialized men. On the other hand, Black people's prolonged exposure to structural violence, and their ongoing resistance, shape Black masculinities in opposition to (or outside) current mainstream hegemonic arrangements (Connell 2005, citing Staples 1982; Curry 2017).

In our research with heterosexual Black men, they identified fatherhood (Crook et al. 2009) and superior financial achievement (Bowleg et al. 2011) as two specific markers of conventional masculinity. However, Bowleg et al. (2011) stressed the importance of challenging these assumptions, and developing interventions to change heterosexist norms that equate heterosexuality and masculinity. Husbands et al. (2017) also

discussed the potential for reimagining Black masculinities and Black manhood.

With regard to sex and sexuality, Crook et al. (2009) suggested a possible link between Black men's racial and sexual identities and their performances of heteronormative masculinities. Others (Martin 1996; Vannier and O'Sullivan 2011) have similarly proposed that hegemonic masculinities position men as the rightful initiators of sexual activity, which may result in some women becoming less sexually agentic in order to shadow or accommodate socially constructed gender norms (Fetterolf and Sanchez 2015).

However, scholars should be careful about understanding Black masculinity as singular, necessarily impoverished, and always in need of rehabilitation. Walcott (2009), for example, drew attention to how neoliberalism pathologizes Black masculinity. Contrary to its narrow definition as a set of policies, neoliberalism represents a "type of order" and "vision of the world" that shapes and organizes contemporary human society according to capitalist market rationality (Esposito and Perez 2014). From the perspective of neoliberalism, Black men are culpable for the economic, financial, and health disparities they endure, which puts Black masculinities in need of "programs of efficiency" and "better management" (Walcott 2009). In opposition to these dominant neoliberal discourses, we propose, along with Walcott, that Black masculinities reflect Black men's historic and contemporary encounters with structural violence. There is certainly room for interventions to promote healthy and socially enabling forms of manhood, but there is an even greater need to support Black communities in addressing the systemic and structural conditions that undermine their wellbeing.

Structural violence, HIV, and health among heterosexual Black men

Bowleg (2004) warned against positioning Black masculinity independently of the "sociohistorical context" of Black men's lives. In North America, this context includes the structural violence of institutionalized anti-Black racism and social oppressions (which are normally illustrated through disparities in health and wellbeing), as well as the ways in which Black men have responded to these social oppressions by constructing substitute or alternative performances of masculinity. Therefore, Black masculinities cannot be understood effectively outside of the structural violence that emerged through colonization, slavery, and racism (Husbands et al. 2017). This kind of awareness is vital in understanding the lived experiences of Black men, their families, and their communities. For example, though social oppression and marginalization increase the

vulnerability of Black men (and Black communities) to HIV (McGruder 2009), various sources of resilience promote their health and wellbeing. Instead, the sexual behaviours of Black people tend to be stereotypically interpreted as an essential manifestation of "Blackness" – and not in relation to the socioeconomic conditions that affect risk and vulnerability (McGruder 2009; Bowleg and Raj 2012). This is a vital distinction, especially when stereotypical narratives about Black sexualities inform social policies (McGruder 2009).

Black men do engage with the social determinants of health and the related vulnerabilities (Husbands et al. 2017), even though this kind of engagement may not always benefit them or their communities. For example, self-esteem associated with providing for one's family is an important ideological component of heteronormative masculinity (Kogan et al. 2014). However, some young Black men cope with their marginalization by re-establishing and re-affirming heteronormative boundaries, such as having multiple sex partners (Kogan et al. 2014), which may increase their vulnerability to HIV – and also make Black women increasingly vulnerable. One study found that having multiple female sexual partners and using condoms inconsistently were leading characteristics of masculinity (Bowleg et al. 2011); however, another study found that men who had more conventional attitudes about male role norms tended to have fewer sexual partners (Lefkowitz et al. 2014). Overall, current scholarship seems to suggest that the ways in which heterosexual Black men understand and experience sexual agency and intimacy depend on the degree to which they invest in hegemonic ideals of masculinity, but also on how they understand, resist, or negotiate the structural or systemic conditions that challenge their personhood and wellbeing. The following discussion explores heterosexual Black men's capacity to understand, resist, and/or negotiate forms of sexual agency.

Agency

"Sexual agency" generally refers to a predisposition to autonomously communicate sexual desire, initiate intimacy, regulate the conditions under which sexual relationships unfold, and implement protective behaviours like abstinence or condom use (Bell 2012; Fetterolf and Sanchez 2015; Jovanovic and Williams 2018). Although self-confidence and self-assertiveness appear to be necessary preconditions for exercising sexual agency, it is important to stress that sexual agency does not imply coercion.

Men tend to embody or demonstrate sexual agency to a greater or different degree than women (Fetterolf and Sanchez 2015). Among hetero-

sexually active men and women, this particular disparity may appear to substantiate or reproduce patriarchy; however, sexual agency is empowering among individuals across different sexualities, including women in heterosexual relationships, which suggests that its relationship to (or role in) patriarchy is contingent rather than necessary (Mundy 2006).

Although sexual agency implies autonomy, individuals do not exercise agency merely to satisfy their own predilections. On the contrary, agency is constrained by interpersonal dynamics, social norms and expectations, the social structure, and the legal system. Therefore, sexual agency can be considered a process of navigating broader social expectations and influences (Bell et al. 2017). This means that sexual agency is not necessarily a mark of unruliness or transgression: in context, it is a mark of healthy sexuality.

Critical perspectives on Black men and possible lessons for the weSpeak project

As outlined above, critical social theory allows a more complete or realistic representation of heterosexual Black men than the standard renditions (or tropes) that continue to hold sway. Critical perspectives can also provide a good foundation for advocacy, engagement, and transformation to achieve gender equity, health, and wellbeing. The pervasive stereotypes may actually have undermined community-based responses to HIV among Black communities by representing heterosexual Black men as being in opposition to HIV prevention, and by misconstruing the knowledge base that could inform strategic responses to HIV in Black communities.

Overall, although the concept of hegemonic masculinity may apply to Black men in North America in more or less the same way it applies to men across different nations and cultures, its salience depends on the trajectory of forces and relations through which it emerged. The structural violence of colonialism, slavery, anti-Black racism, and displacement under capitalism influence how Black men in North America understand, resist, and attempt to transcend their circumstances and (re)configure the practices and worldviews that express masculinity. The next section provides a critical interpretation of the narratives of 69 heterosexual Black men in Toronto to explore how masculinity emerges in their ideas and practices related to sexuality and sexual agency, and how it relates to their experiences of structural violence.

Methodology

We use data from the weSpeak research study to explore sex, sexuality, and sexual agency among heterosexual Black men. weSpeak is a five-year (2015–2020) mixed-methods study that was developed and implemented in four Ontario cities (Toronto, Ottawa, London, and Windsor). Its primary goal is to explore vulnerability and resilience to HIV among self-identified heterosexual Black men, and pathways to productively engage them in community responses to HIV. Here, we report on qualitative data from focus groups and in-depth interviews with self-identified heterosexual Black men in Toronto (Table 1). The research ethics boards from the affiliated Canadian universities – Ryerson, York, Toronto, Ottawa, Carleton, Windsor, and Western – approved the study protocols, along with the University of Louisville (KY, USA) and Ottawa Public Health.

Table 1: Socio-demographic profile of participants in weSpeak focus groups and in-depth interviews: Toronto

	N*	%
Age group		
16–24	25	39.1
25–44	18	28.1
45–64	18	28.1
65 and older	3	4.7
Total	64	100.0
Annual personal income ($)		
Less than 20,000	36	55.4
20,000–39,999	9	13.8
40,000–59,999	10	15.4
60,000–79,999	3	4.6
80,000 and over	7	10.8
Total	65	100.0
Primary ethno-racial identity		
African	29	42.0
Black	14	20.3
Caribbean	26	37.7
Total	69	100.0
Relationship status		
Single	34	51.5
Married/common law	24	36.4
Other	8	12.1
Total	66	100.0
Place of birth		
Canada	35	53.0
Another country	31	47.0
Total	66	100.0
Religious affiliation**		
Christian	49	74.2
Muslim	10	15.2

* Totals do not always add to 69 because of missing data;

** 66 participants responded about their religious affiliation; participants could choose more than one response.

The weSpeak project draws from a critical social science paradigm that integrates critical race theory and critical gender theories to investigate HIV vulnerabilities and pathways of resilience among heterosexual Black men (e.g., Jackson and Balaji 2011). This approach enables us to critically examine how dominant notions of Black heterosexuality and masculinity conceal the fluid meaning that is obscured by stereotypes about the behaviour of Black men. In particular, critical race theory helps clarify why Black men themselves may adopt practices and narratives that appear to support the common stereotypes, and how racism continues to influence their livelihoods and wellbeing. This critical lens helped reveal the diverse and sometimes contradictory practices and attitudes related to masculinity and heterosexuality among weSpeak participants.

Recruitment and Participants

The weSpeak team comprised a wide range of Black and racialized community stakeholders including researchers, frontline service providers, community advocates, policymakers, men who are living with HIV, and other community stakeholders. The team used a variety of strategies to engage and recruit participants: in-person outreach, personal contacts, social media, and the study website. We built on or developed relationships with key community stakeholders and potential participants through meetings and presentations, and organized outreach across Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) to reach a large and diverse cross-section of Black men. This approach enabled us to organize focus groups that accommodated the diverse backgrounds of Black men in the study area.

Between April and October 2016, we recruited 69 participants for seven focus groups (N=53) and 16 in-depth interviews. The seven groups included one for youth aged 16–24 (n=12), another for men who were living with HIV (n=10, all 25 years and older), and one for French-speaking men (n=6, all 25 years and older). Among the 16 participants in the in-depth interviews, five were youth aged 16–24 years, and another four were living with HIV. Project staff scheduled in-depth interviews with men who were unable to attend a focus group, or to explore challenging ideas that participants had previously raised in a focus group. As shown in Table 1, almost half of the participants (47%) were young (under 35 years) and 39% percent were aged 35–54. More than half of the participants reported income less than $20,000 per year, and 10% reported an income of $100,000 or more.

Data collection

The interview guide included five central topics, with the goal of exploring issues of race, masculinity, and heterosexuality as they relate to HIV vulnerability and resilience. The in-depth interviews and focus groups provided space for participants, facilitators, and interviewers to follow novel paths of discussion, while still gathering information relevant to the central themes of the study. The focus group sessions and in-depth interviews ranged from 60–150 minutes long.

A cross-section of team members actively participated in data collection; all team members received training in qualitative data collection and research ethics. Following each focus group and individual interview, the interviewer or facilitator completed a debrief form to document their initial observations about the session.

Data analysis

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. For the one focus group that took place in French, French-speaking team members reviewed the English translation for accuracy. Two team members reviewed each English or French transcript for accuracy and consistency. To support data analysis, research assistants prepared a synopsis of the content and emerging issues for each focus group.

The research team implemented an iterative data analysis strategy to ensure consistency across project sites and allow for local variations. Initially, the project team schematically documented the main theoretical and conceptual frameworks for the study, which in turn guided the development of a codebook for organizing and analyzing the data.

At each site, individual team members read an assigned number of transcripts and identified a set of likely themes. Each site team then organized, hierarchized, and consolidated the emerging themes to produce a local codebook with three levels of codes (major themes, themes, and sub-themes). Subsequently, all site teams came together to review, revise, and merge their codebooks. At the end of the process, the combined weSpeak team produced one province-wide codebook encompassing nine major themes and attendant subthemes for use across all sites. Selected team members coded the transcripts using NVivo 10 software. A second team member reviewed each coded transcript, and the two coders resolved any disagreement through further discussion. The current co-authors reviewed the coded Toronto transcripts and evaluated them for discourses related to sex and sexual agency: heterosexuality, sex and sexuality, masculinity, structural oppression, and love.

Results: Sex, Sexuality, And Sexual Agency

Based on our reading of the coded transcripts, we organized the interview discourses into five themes that structured how participants understood their sexual and intimate relationships: negotiating masculinity; love, desire and sex; agency; structural oppressions; and networks and emergent masculinities. Exploration of these themes helped reveal how participants understood and negotiated sexuality and intimacy in the context of social and economic constraints that affected their relationships. The following section presents each theme illustrated with direct quotations. Each quotation is referenced with the speaker's pseudonym, whether the excerpt was from a focus group (FG) or in-depth interview (IDI), and the participant's age.

Negotiating masculinity

Participants tended to identify with traditional provider or breadwinner roles in relationships. Bayo [FG, 42] provocatively summarized these roles as "provide, produce, and protect." Many participants stated that, in a romantic relationship, it was highly desirable or even necessary to have a greater income than their female partner. Despite this desire to hold economic power in the relationship, many participants also noted that women are increasingly outperforming men in the economic landscape. For example, Lekan [FG, 56] said: "The girl finishes university, the guy finishes at high school and he has no job." He and other participants were concerned that the role of primary breadwinner may no longer be available to them, and noted the implications for power dynamics in relationships:

> The whole feminist revolution has changed things so the dynamic between men and women has changed … It's important for us to recognize what these changes are and how they impact us and our worldview. [Darian, FG, 55]

Some participants concluded that Black women are asserting decision-making power about sex in keeping with their ascendancy as prime income earners, which is pushing heterosexual Black men toward sex outside the primary relationship. In this regard, Bayo [FG, 42] commented (apparently hypothetically):

> "She's the boss now, she's just telling me what's going on … so you start to look outside."

Participants seemed to be aware that being a "breadwinner" or earning more than their female partner is no longer a requirement for respectable manhood. They appeared to struggle with this emerging reality, but also to be open to the idea. Despite their uncertainty about this fundamental aspect of traditional manhood, they referred to the important connection between emotional fulfilment and physical intimacy in relationships. Thomas [FG, 17] suggested:

> "You're not going to marry your friends … you're going to settle with this girl and you're going to live life with her."

Participants also valued their relationships even under challenging circumstances. For example, one participant spoke of his responsibility to his former partner and children as follows:

> I've been able to be humble enough and supportive enough that I've been able to rejuvenate those relationships and keep them very strong so that we can co-parent effectively …. I try to teach my sons all the time, about when you're with a woman, to make sure that that's the one because, once that relationship falls apart and then all of a sudden you have to co-parent, the relationship gets really ugly. [Roshane, FG, 38]

Overall, participants used traditional ideas of masculinity (revolving around the idea of men being the economic providers in romantic relationships) to navigate sexuality, economic viability, and fatherhood. Still, they acknowledged emerging gender dynamics that, in their opinion, were related to women's increased economic autonomy in society at large and within intimate relationships.

Love, desire, and sex

Participants appeared to have another somewhat traditional idea about romantic relationships: that sex is the culmination of desire that comes with love. This theme emerged in various ways throughout the interviews and focus groups. For example, Marvin [FG, 39] stated:

> "The idea of love, desire, companionship. I think it's the biggest thing that moves us.… Sex is kind of that culmination of those desires."

However, participants also recognized alternative opportunities for pleasure that challenged their normative views about the relationship between love and sex in heterosexual relationships. For example, Marvin acknowledged that sexual pleasure was available without the deep emotional connection commonly associated with a girlfriend:

> ‘Cause sometimes, you can be just doing it with a girl, just ‘cause you want the pleasure of doing it. And it might not be a real intimate situation. But then if it’s like your girlfriend, you really love her and it’s a really intimate situation, like you really have a connection. It’ll be a more intimate situation.

Marvin explained his views on the relationship between love and sex using the example of pornography, commenting that porn presents an “alternative reality” where everybody appears to be “fucking,” which may also suggest that “everyone is willing to fuck in real life,” even though this “may not be the case.” Marvin admitted that sex may “quench a thirst,” but delegitimized this possibility by associating it with porn’s alternative but suspect reality.

Same-sex relationships involving heterosexual men also appeared to challenge a heteronormative view of love, desire, and sex among participants. Such relationships appeared to undermine their ideas about “heterosexuality” and the supremacy of sexual intimacy that they attributed to loving a woman. One participant ascribed an inferior status to sexual relationships that challenge heteronormative ideals:

> …to love, it’s about family, the woman. When I have sex, it’s because I love. Now, I can have sex for a different purpose, like to get rich …. So if we tell them that by having sex with a man, they can become powerful …. [Fallou, FG, 38]

However, Marvin suggested that same-sex relationships among heterosexual men may be related to a more open interpretation of heterosexuality:

> Love is a fluid thing … It means that [he] loves individuals for who they are, what they present. So, being a pan-romantic, then, is not about whether it’s a penis or a vagina, it’s about condition of the heart and the ability to engage in a feeling emotion with someone else … I always maintain that it is a fluid engagement.

If love legitimates sex with women, what does this mean for safer sex? Previous research has suggested that men and women may give up the use of condoms for love (or the promise of love), or to signify trust in a regular partner (Bowleg et al. 2015; Juarez and Castro Martín 2006). Some weSpeak participants described being flexible about using condoms, while others said that the use of condoms was non-negotiable. Situational factors that could make a difference included the calculations of risk made by both partners. For example, Todd [IDI, 22] explained that he would forgo condoms if a woman requested it, but elaborated that

"When it comes to sex I do not do anything that I feel will harm a woman or is to her detriment." Todd juxtaposed his practice against the conduct of men whom he considered "the bigger risk takers" and:

> "just pull out. … I know that there is "pre-cum", you know I've heard that. So, it's whatever risks people feel like they're open to taking. … I've heard Black men will negotiate on that. I can only just talk about my experiences: I've never tried to convince a woman not to use a condom with me. I have just never tried it.

Sexual relationships often pose a special challenge for men (and women) who are living with HIV (Cook et al. 2018). These individuals usually fear that disclosing their HIV diagnosis to potential sex partners will result in a refusal and raise the level of stigma they may endure. For example, Derrick [IDI, 47], a participant living with HIV, disclosed his self-imposed celibacy, commenting, "I don't run with no women … [I prefer to] keep to myself." Others, however, saw the restrictions associated with an HIV diagnosis as contributing to different understandings of the self and sexuality:

> So, it's not an easy thing because sometimes you see a woman you want it so bad …." But hey, you're HIV [positive]. So there is a full stop. … Being HIV [positive] has destroyed a part of my life, but … I learn to respect my body. I learn to respect my dick, not every woman you see you want to fuck. [Odaine, IDI, 49]

Overall, participants' narratives of love, desire, and sex tended to be guided by traditional ideas about romantic relationships. However, the narratives also reveal the multiple and sometimes contradictory ideas, practices and choices related to love, desire, and sex. As discussed in the next section, the contradictory ideas and practices about their romantic relationships affect their behaviours and ideas related to sexual agency as well.

Agency

Participants generally presented themselves as exercising agency and self-determination in sexual activity. Specifically, younger participants (16–24 years) expressed considerable self-confidence about sex. Older participants also referred to self-confidence in relation to interest in sex among young men. For example, Vince [IDI, 41] described interest in sex among young men as akin to a "kid" in the toy store, where "multiple toys" are available. Vince and others understood sex as something that is overpowering in its appeal: something that they could not easily

refuse or resist. Some participants referred to exercising agency by having sex outside of their primary relationships. Vince appeared to justify sex outside of primary relationships, although he acknowledged that the practice is problematic: "[W]hat she [the primary partner] won't know won't hurt … and try your best to be as creative as possible where she won't know."

Agency is dynamic – what it means and how it emerges in sexual relationships changes as people get older and more experienced, so agency should be understood in context. For example, Larry [FG, 71], encouraged younger heterosexual Black men to abandon ideas of manhood that were limited to "an area between our waist and our knees." He continued, "the village is gone, so we can't expect the village to be looking after the kids anymore." Overall, Larry felt that agency and self-determination require being responsible for one's choices. The significance of self-confidence and self-determination in romantic relationships should be understood in the context of structural oppressions, as discussed in the next section.

Structural oppressions

Participants spoke at length about their experiences of anti-Black racism, which manifested most often through racial profiling by state authorities, and also more subtly in their daily experiences of a social system that effectively worked against their wellbeing (Essed 2002). Participants commented that constant surveillance, systemic discrimination, and distorted media images affected their wellbeing directly, for example through exposure to harassment, un/underemployment, and lower incomes, but also indirectly by increasing their level of anxiety and diminishing their self-confidence. Given these structural insults, Black men may adopt or internalize strategies of coping or resistance that may be unhealthy for them and their networks. For example, Josh [IDI, 20] referred to "constantly being judged, being carded." The negative images of Blackness trafficked through many popular forms of media can also have far-reaching consequences for Black men's material and emotional wellbeing. One participant referred to the transition from boy to a young adult, commenting:

> … growing up, [I] got to wishing I was White or lighter because it just seemed like they were happier or something like that … I am learning to love seeing that black skin tone … for sure I look in the mirror sometimes and I like what I see. But other times I feel like I don't. [Todd, IDI, 20]

The experiences of Black men in the job market compound the experiences of over-policing and negative stereotyping. Devonte [FG, 22] contrasted his difficulty getting jobs during high school with the privilege of his White peers. He stated: "…all my friends are the same age as me, I have White friends, multicultural friends and they would be getting jobs. We're all the same age and they'd be getting jobs and I'm not getting jobs." One recent immigrant from Africa referred to his thwarted ambitions:

> I am a degree holder, I am a teacher, and I am an IT engineer. Being Black and not having done the education here, when you come from Africa you're going to find problems here. You're starting up here, and then they say 'oh, you have a degree from Africa, now go back to high school.' That is a very, very big step back. [Chuka, IDI, 42]

This excerpt illustrates the norms of credentialing that demand "Canadian experience" and systematically disadvantage people who have completed higher education in Africa or the Caribbean.

Both Chuka and Devonte's comments point to how Whiteness is privileged and Blackness is undervalued in Canada, with emotional and material consequences for Black men. Rodney [FG, 38] echoed these sentiments, commenting that "people who are White, that I grew up with, had this air of privilege – this right, this entitlement." Darian [FG, 55] noted that because Blackness is undervalued in the job market, Black men may lack the material resources to sustain long-term relationships – that is, they may be unable to achieve the masculine ideal of providing for a family.

Participants also understood that anti-Black racism cordons Black men, and Black communities generally, into physical and social environments that jeopardize their wellbeing, and from which they may not escape. Randy [FG, 44] compared this experience with that of insects in a jar:

> "… if you cover the jar, you'll hear them, ping, ping, ping, ping, ping, ping, ping, for a while and all of a sudden, you'll just hear, ping, ping, and then it stops. Then you can take [the cover] off, and the fleas won't jump out … They can't get out of the jar."

Within this context, issues of sexuality, sexual health, and HIV are unlikely to be integral topics of discussion in intimate or community dialogues. One participant said that people "don't want to go there" because "it's not a cool thing to discuss" [Terry, IDI, 50]. Shawn [FG, 48], a service provider, also commented that these topics are "way down the list" given the more immediate and pressing problem of structural oppres-

sion, and the tendency for mainstream White policymakers and elites to determine priorities and ways to address them.

Overall, participants' narratives suggested that their experiences of structural oppressions served as barriers to positive self-image, employment, financial stability, and their capacity to engage in long-term relationships. Participants were also aware that systemic stressors diverted attention away from crucial conversations about sexuality and sexual health. However, despite these influence of structural oppressions, participants expressed another form of agency by articulating versions of manhood that contest their marginalization and potentially strengthen health and wellbeing among themselves and broader Black communities. The following section discusses these "emergent" forms of masculinity.

Networks and emergent masculinities

Participants referred to their perspectives on responsible manhood (e.g., providing for loved ones) and how this is constrained by anti-Black racism. Their discussion in the focus groups and interviews pointed to emergent forms of masculinity that are not aligned with the culture of heteronormativity and patriarchy.

Some urged their counterparts to aspire to familiar qualities of hegemonic masculinity. For example, Eaze [IDI, 16] emphasized that heterosexual Black men should be hardworking, courageous, strong, respectful, know what's best for their families, and provide for them. KB [FG, 16] added that Black men should be independent, useful (i.e., be a handyman), "hold their own," and protect others. One participant provided an extreme example:

> … if you want to be called a man you must be married with kids. … [T]o be a man you must be able to take care of your wife, be able to provide the basic meal for his family. [Zane, FG, 31]

Some focus group participants drew on hegemonic notions of masculinity, while others challenged this view. For example, Josh [20] stated in an interview that "… there's so much women in the world, never satisfied with just one … They [men] want to have multiples …." Similarly, Trevor [FG, 50] admitted that in his youth he equated "how many women I was sleeping with, with a level of my manness and my masculinity." However, another participant rejected that type of hypermasculinity as unhealthy, even though it may allow young Black men to reclaim a sense of self and security in the face of social marginalization:

> For some guys, that's an ego booster, that builds their self-esteem. That gives them a sense of worth. I don't think that's healthy, but for a lot of guys, that keeps them going. I don't think that's something that's positive in the long-term. [Terry, IDI, 50]

There was much discussion of personal and emotional vulnerability in the focus groups and in-depth interviews. Some participants commented that demonstrating or acknowledging one's vulnerabilities could be incompatible with a claim to manhood. One example is the following exchange between Roshane [38] and the focus group facilitator:

> Facilitator: What were some of the things that you learned early on in life about being a boy or being a man?
>
> Roshane: Punch back.
>
> Facilitator: What does that mean?
>
> Roshane: That's how you survive. That's how you raise up in the ranks, that's how you get welcomed into the brotherhood.

Within this frame of reference, acknowledging one's vulnerability may even be disadvantageous in intimate relationships:

> It's like, I only hear it from Black females 'you are too nice' … I do not understand that still because, what do you like me to be like? [Leroy, IDI, 23]

A particular hallmark of Canadian racism is the pervasive "wisdom" of a set of beliefs that justify Black people's subordination to White supremacy (Maynard 2017; Teelucksingh 2018). As discussed above, Black men in North America tend to be stereotyped as wanton and dangerous. Consequently, the moral code that our participants ascribe to Black manliness (e.g., being respectful and hard-working) may be their way of resisting or contesting the terms of their marginalization. But some Black men also appear to internalize the stereotypes and project them as markers of their own Blackness. One participant commented:

> I feel like that masculinity role society has constructed it, and [Black men] subconsciously play it out. … [I]t kind of devalues them because they are basically giving in to their insecurity, giving in to external thoughts about what we are supposed to act like and how we are supposed to have relationships with women. [Jack, IDI, 20]

This sentiment portends the emergence of resourceful masculinities that support Black men, Black, women and Black communities in radically enabling ways. We observed similar emergent or resourceful dimensions throughout discussions; for example, one participant said:

> I feel like the idea of manhood, maleness and cisgenderedness is a changing, shifting thing right now, for me and the men in my circle. And something that I feel needs to be addressed … like my relationships with other men around me. I can see there's so much violence within the relationship in the way that we tend to embrace our vices, sexually and otherwise. [Leroy, IDI, 23]

Leroy later elaborated on the process of Black men freeing themselves from the colonial legacy and learning a new way of being in the world, commenting:

> There are young men right now who are deciding to embrace themselves and engage in a very humble, reflective dialogue around sexuality, masculinity, manhood … We continue to unlearn what we've learned in this particular colonial experience, and come back to a sense of responsibility, and not necessarily a gender role but … to do something for your community, your village, your family regardless of your gender.

This excerpt illustrates the challenge of unlearning what has been taught and imposed over generations, as well as the promise of Black people of all genders and sexualities coming together to empower Blackness, dismantle anti-Black racism, and build stronger communities. Leroy's comments reinforce the common sentiment among participants: although heterosexual Black men face specific challenges in negotiating sexuality and manhood, they are connected to the larger challenges faced by all Black people in Canada.

Implications For Hiv Prevention And Holistic Health

Overall, the weSpeak participants referred to a number of overlapping frameworks of masculinity and manhood: these drew from traditional and emergent forms of masculinity and also illustrated contradictions between the two. This finding suggests that heterosexual Black men do not collectively adhere to a single, overarching meaning or practice of Black masculinity/manhood. Emergent forms of masculinity can serve as the building blocks for more equitable gender relations, dismantling anti-Black racism, and building stronger communities. This has strong implications for HIV prevention because, as discussed above, the stan-

dard tropes about heterosexual Black men suggest that they are collectively disinterested in or disconnected from HIV prevention. Our findings suggest that networks of heterosexual Black men differ in terms of defining discourses, attitudes, and behaviours. Therefore, service providers and policymakers should reformulate the messages, content, and strategies for community engagement accordingly. The following discussion summarizes the different discourses that emerged from our analysis and explores how they might inform the development of tools and resources for HIV prevention, and strategies for engaging heterosexual Black men in HIV prevention in Black communities.

The need for tools and resources for HIV prevention that promote healthy sexuality and gender equity

Some weSpeak participants, mainly the younger ones, aspired to an ideal of manhood that may be consistent with contemporary patriarchy, although the structural violence of anti-Black racism often thwarts their aspirations. Black men also navigate a space between their male privilege and their systemic subordination under capitalism. In fact, for Black men, the rewards of privilege and patriarchy may be inconsequential relative to their displacement under capitalism. Our participants were intensely aware of their relative displacement, and also articulated forms of manhood that challenge familiar stereotypes about Blackness. This sort of dimensionality helps explain the broad spectrum of practices, experiences, and beliefs that inform how participants understand themselves as heterosexual Black men.

Some participants prioritized sex over intimacy, while others prioritized their responsibility to significant others and to Black communities more broadly. Even so, participants generally framed sexual intimacy as a key ingredient to emotionally fulfilling relationships with women. However, linking sex, love, and emotional intimacy was problematic for men who were living with HIV – sexual intimacy may be uncertain because of possible rejection after disclosure of an HIV diagnosis, although this does not necessarily foreclose the potential for emotionally fulfilling relationships with women.

Most participants appeared quite capable of communicating sexual desire to prospective sexual partners. However, this apparent belief in their sexual agency is much more complex than it first appeared. Some of their narratives about sex suggested that sex is something that happens to them, rather than an activity or behaviour that they can purposively regulate. Also, in discussions of safer sex, women tended to emerge as the real arbiters of sex – the female partner leads the decision about

whether sex happens, and what kind of sex. In other words, men take their cue from their female sexual partners about whether to use condoms. This finding suggests that men (and women) may have limited capacity to negotiate safer sex practices, which further suggests a need for tools, practical skills, and resources to support men and women in better navigating sexual relationships and enjoying healthy sexuality.

Engaging heterosexual Black men in community responses to HIV

Issues of sex and sexuality emerged throughout the focus groups and in-depth interviews, and provided much insight into how participants construct themselves as heterosexual Black men. However, participants emphasized a certain moral code that defines them as heterosexual Black men. Many agreed that Black men are, or need to be: providers, hard-working, respectful, and independent, among other traditional masculine qualities of respectable manhood. They generally considered Black men who acted otherwise to be victims of long-standing stereotypes, or to have internalized those stereotypes to cope with the structural violence of anti-Blackness. In short, "being Black" means defying the stereotypes and fulfilling expectations that negate anti-Blackness.

For Black men, hegemonic masculinity may be both an aspiration and a threat. They may aspire to the power that (White) men wield, and the tools to entrench that power, but the structural condition of anti-Black racism tends to thwart those aspirations. As a result, the conventional qualities which Black men seem to value (and that code them as Black men), may be unattainable or undermined in view of the multiple dimensions of injustice that typify anti-Black racism. Attempts by Black men to achieve the rewards of hegemonic masculinity may leave other socially enabling ways of "being a man" unfulfilled. Still, our participants also referred to qualities of manhood and social understanding that reject the traditional masculine ideals of advanced Western capitalism. Specifically, alongside – or in conflict with – patriarchal ambitions, they project socially enabling predispositions that cast doubt on their allegiance to hegemonic masculinities.

Conclusion

What possibilities do emergent masculinities present for engaging heterosexual Black men in community responses to HIV? What are the implications of our analysis for engaging heterosexual Black men in community responses to HIV? To date, most HIV research has constructed heterosexual Black men as disinterested in HIV prevention, and perhaps

incapable of meaningful reflection on their emotional and health-related vulnerabilities (Husbands et al., 2017). According to Curry (2017:39), these stereotypes legitimize "Black masculinity as theory, rather than as theorists' pathology." Our results support this idea: although some participants aspire to the patriarchal arrangements that facilitate White (male) privilege, they also articulated ideas about themselves and manhood that resist or disown the familiar or expected ideas about masculinity and manhood (Curry 2017).

The weSpeak research team succeeded in engaging a range of men in Toronto (and also in Ottawa, London, and Windsor) to open up about intimate and private aspects of their lives. Many of our Toronto participants told us that they welcomed the opportunity to discuss their ideas about love, sex, identity, health, manhood and other issues with other Black men in a supportive and non-judgemental environment, something they had not previously experienced. Their narratives suggest that they – and perhaps heterosexual Black men more generally – do not see themselves in opposition to productive engagement in community responses to HIV.

weSpeak participants shared a range of practices, experiences, and beliefs about what it means to be a man. Our findings support previous research indicating that heterosexual Black males vary in terms of their identities and corresponding networks. It will be important to define the content and contours of these networks with some precision, because different networks of men require different strategies of engagement for HIV prevention.

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