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Chapter 6

The Colour of Queer

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Queer theory is often posited as being one of the world's newest academic disciplines, fit for the twenty-first century, with all the opportunities for embracing progressive, modern thinking. However, while queer theory presents as being all embracing, it has in truth been limited in its discussion of 'difference' to white middle-class norms, relegating non-white voices to the sidelines and footnotes of queer academic history. In negating non-white voices, and in failing to examine the impact of a white frame for queer theory, theorists have denied themselves and their students a rich and useful perspective. Patrick Johnson, a foremost, unique and rare black voice in queer literature, conjures up a culinary metaphor to capture this: 'While queer theory has opened up new possibilities for theorizing gender and sexuality, like a pot of gumbo cooked too quickly, it has failed to live up to its full critical potential by refusing to accommodate all the queer ingredients contained inside its theoretical pot' (Johnson, 2001, 18).

When race is discussed in queer theory, it can be done clumsily (Bergman, 1991; Moya, 1997; Ng, 1997). As one example, Gates (1999) suggests that 'contemporary homophobia is more virulent than contemporary racism' (p. 28), 'Mainstream religious figures – ranging from Catholic archbishops to Orthodox rabbis – continue to enjoin us to "hate the sin": it has been a long time since anyone respectable urged us to, as it were, hate the skin' (p. 29). However, statistics and statements such as these make no sense because the race (or gender) of the people attacked in homophobic violence is not reported. Fortunately, Gates (ibid.) goes on to urge us to consider that there is no 'measuring rod' (p. 29) of oppression upon which to measure different identities, and that such a rod would break when people hold multiple identities.

It is probably unfair to fault queer theory for its relatively poor oeuvre related to race and ethnicity because as a theory its anti-identitarianism is what makes it inclusive and transferable to multiple domains. However, it is *identity politics* that tend to bring the focus back to individual identities. As Ford (2007) rightly speculates, '(i)f gay identity is problematic and subject to a corrosive critique, mightn't other social identities be as well?' (p. 478), including race. However, Johnson and Henderson (2005) argue that for queer theory to ignore the range of multiple individual subjective positions it is not only 'theoretically and politically naïve, but also potentially dangerous' (p. 5). Indeed, Johnson (2005) asks what 'are the ethical and material implications of queer theory if its project is to dismantle all notions of identity and agency?' (p. 129). Cohen (2005),

taking a different approach, suggests that queer theorists have established a dichotomy between heterosexuality and everything that falls outside of this. She critiques queer theory for neglecting to explore marginalization and privilege on the two sides of this generated dichotomy, rather than assuming that all queers are 'marginalized and invisible' and all heterosexuals 'dominant and controlling' (p. 25). Queer theory thus falls back into the familiar position it seeks to deconstruct, of 'powerful/powerless; oppressor/victim; enemy/comrade' (p. 45). This is the antithesis to queer politics' claim to interrupt dominant discourses and move beyond single-identity-based politics in recognizing multiple sites of oppression, and challenging prejudice and the agents that develop and sustain them. Therefore, for queer politics to be true to itself, it must reflect on its own complicity in (perhaps unwittingly) becoming yet another dominant discourse, with the power to subjugate others. The very idea of a queer self-identity can be construed as one that is only available to a minority of people within those who have same-gender desires/sex. This queer minority is often affiliated with those who are white, socially mobile, academic and predominantly Western (Bright, 1998). Therefore the term Queer needs to be used carefully, remaining mindful of who it represents and who has access to it.

And so, when it comes to the colour of queer, there is no glorious technicolour as we argue that queer remains framed in black and white. Most of the writing about sexuality and race comes from the humanities or in art (e.g. Gary Fisher, Joseph Beam, Marlon Riggs, Pratibha Parmar, Isaac Julien), rather than psychology. Indeed, the history of psychology/psychiatry's relationship with race and sexuality has been one of direct, and more recently, more subtle forms of oppression and pathologization. For example, the psychiatric diagnosis of 'drapetomania' once existed, which referred to the mental illness that would cause a slave to run away and whipping was suggested as treatment (Kutchins and Kirk, 1999). Today sees proportionally more black men represented in mental health wards and on psychotropic medication than their white counterparts (Bhui et al., 2003; Keating et al., 2000; Lloyd and Moodley, 1992). With regards to sexual minorities, homosexuality was considered a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association until 1973, and by the World Health Organisation until 1992. Bartlett et al. (2009) report that in their survey of 1848 therapists in Britain, 17 per cent had attempted to help reduce or change their client's same-sex attraction. These facts demonstrate not only the historical, but also the contemporary subjugation that Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) individuals and sexual minorities experience.

In this chapter we will deconstruct practices of power that perpetuate discrimination, arguing that while queer theory does this for sexual identity, within this there is little discussion of racial identity. In the majority of writing about 'race', it is usual that it is BME issues that are discussed – thus assuming that white people do not have a race or that they are the norm against which 'the other' is to be compared. We will discuss blackness and whiteness as racial categories and consider their interaction with queer, charting their historical origins and exploring contemporary issues. We shall question the notion of a hierarchy of oppression

and consider the use of language in queer communities. We hope this chapter will generate further debate and add to the value and range of existing literature.

Queering Colour

A Black and White Frame

Race is a social construction. Historically it was argued to be a biologically-based concept that was used to oppress and enslave non-whites. This happened in the seventeenth century with the racialization of slavery and the need for whites to justify their taking of power (Kincheloe, 1999). Since this time, white and black have been represented as opposites, as light/dark, angel/devil, good/bad (Haymes, 1996).

Who is Black?

The need to categorize and define who we are and where we fit in is an inevitable and largely invaluable element of our socialization. Much depends on who is doing the defining and assigning. The need to define and identify by colour historically has mattered only in terms of distinguishing and understanding what is 'not white'.

Skin colour has a long history of use as not only a mechanism of racially categorizing but also, consequently, of oppressing. The early nineteenth century saw the categorization of the three major races: Negroid, Caucasoid (or Europoid) and Mongoloid. Indeed, constructions of race were the very foundations of South Africa's system of apartheid, with pigmentation used to control access and rights throughout the political and judicial systems of the country. Floyd-James points out that 'we define no other ethnic population as we do blacks' (2001, xi) and that the word 'black' rapidly replaced 'negro' towards the end of the 1960s, when the black power movement in America had reached its peak. Therefore, to identify who is black and its corollary, who is therefore 'not white', remains for many essentially an exercise in attributing worth, with failings of character stereotypically attributed to complexions considered to be non-white; grounding along colour lines those who are considered powerful and those who are not.

Mason-John and Khambatta (1993) use the definition of black that was once used by the London Black Lesbian and Gay Centre as being those 'descended (through one or both parents) from Africa, Asia (i.e. the Middle East to China, including the Pacific nations) and Latin America, ... the original inhabitants of Australasia, North America, and the islands of the Atlantic and Indian Ocean' (p. 9). This definition is wide and embracing and has proved useful to many therapists seeking to position themselves in relation to their clients' ethnic and cultural background.

While 'coloured' was once commonly used to describe people of African descent, 'people of colour' is now more widely accepted as a term that distinguishes those who are not white. However, it has also been criticized as suggesting that whites are not of a colour and therefore not considered in debates and discussions about race. It is interesting to note that the term 'coloured' has a different meaning amongst black Africans in some sub-Saharan countries. Here, it refers to someone who is neither black nor white – a mixed-race person. This term in such contexts is not considered a derogatory descriptor. Therefore one needs to be fully aware of the contexts in which such terms are used.

Black as a colour and an identity is, therefore, a relative construct. It can be homogenized to include everyone who is non-white or it can be fractioned amongst a group of non-white people to only include those who have a black heritage from Africa, to the exclusion of all other non-white people. Therefore, for a South Asian man, he can be black amidst white people, brown amongst black Afro-Caribbean people, and chocolate or 'wheatish'[1] amongst brown people, etc. Therefore, colour can only be understood as 'différance' (cf. Derrida, 1978). Derrida's idea of différance suggests that words and signs can only ever be approximations of meaning, and that true meaning can be gleaned by understanding the difference between these words from other words, and thereby meaning being always deferred.

It is interesting to note that in the UK, derogatory terms such as 'coconut' (brown on the outside but white inside) and 'banana' (yellow on the outside but white inside) are used to mark those African/Caribbean/South Asian and East Asian individuals respectively, who are deemed by others from their own ethnic background to have been corrupted by the West in their thoughts and actions and so 'act white'. The use of certain accents, dress, and even lesbian, gay, bisexual (LGB) sexuality labels and practices, can be seen as an appropriation of western ideology and culture at the expense of one's indigenousness. It also noteworthy that British South Asian youth may make conscious attempts to distance themselves from speaking Standard English, as this form of English is viewed (particularly when spoken by a non-white person) as a 'gay' marker (Jaspal, *personal communication*, 2009). Therefore, such groups adopt ghetto-speak or ebonics. However, racialized sign systems in gay-speak identify both the signifier and the signified. Therefore, it is not only the love-object that is racialized, but also their lovers. Culinary argots such as 'rice queen' (usually, an older white man who desires East Asian men), 'potato queen' (an East Asian man who desires white men), 'curry queen' (a white man who desires South Asian men), and 'sticky rice' (an Asian man who desires other Asian men) identify men on the basis of the race of the men they desire.

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1   Hue also plays a major role amongst some brown (South Asian) people, with lighter ('wheatish') tones being considered the ideal. This ideal has created a major market for skin-whitening creams (e.g. 'Fair and Lovely') and has also been related to how beauty (particularly, female beauty) is constructed.

Who is White?

Just as there is no one way to be black, there is no one way to be white – this category includes a disparate group of ethnicities and nationalities that has expanded over time (e.g. in the US it was not until the nineteenth century that the Irish, Polish, Italians and Jews were considered white – Roediger, 2005). The concept of whiteness began following the Enlightment as colonialism and the slave trade associated whiteness with rationality, science, productivity, self-control and orderliness and those deemed non-white as primitive, lazy, irrational, violent and chaotic (Kincheloe, 1999). Whiteness is thus universalized and naturalized to become the unmarked, invisible, unquestioned and unexamined norm. White people are still taught to think of themselves as the average, the norm, morally neutral and the ideal (McIntosh, 1997).

Whiteness is thus not based on a common culture, language, history, religion, cuisine, philosophy or literature, but on a political arrangement of power and resources distributed by skin colour (Jay, 1997). However, whiteness also interacts with other areas of social difference: class, gender, sexuality – so that not all whites feel they have access to equal amounts of power (Kincheloe, 1999). Despite this, being a member of a group that also experiences discrimination (e.g. homophobia, disabilism, sexism, etc.) does not take away the benefits that come with white skin colour. When whites are taught about racism, they are taught about disadvantage for those from BME groups, however the corollary of this is not discussed – the advantages for white groups (McIntosh, 1997). Current thinking about racism is thus limited as it focuses on 'minorities' and oppression, and not privilege and advantage (Lucal, 1996). There are some universal white privileges, as McIntosh (1997) names in her now classic paper, for example:

- I see people of my race widely represented on the television and in newspapers.
- My children will be taught about people from their race at school.
- I can do well without being called a credit to my race.
- I can swear, dress scruffily, not answer mail without being seen as an example of the bad morals, poverty or illiteracy of my race.
- I will not be asked to speak for all people of my racial group.
- I can focus on racism without being seen as self-serving or self-interested.

Such privilege and qualities are transferred onto whiteness without being requested, as are fears and hostilities given a social history of racism and oppression (Jay, 1997). As Brod (1989) describes: 'privilege is not something I take and which I therefore have the option of not taking. It is something that society gives me, and unless I change the institutions which give it to me, they will continue to give it and I will continue to have it, however noble and egalitarian my intentions' (p. 280).

Since the civil rights movement, whiteness has been racialized – it is no longer taken for granted as the norm against which to assess and judge non-whites. White

people are now in the position of having to find a language to talk about whiteness, to form a new white identity that is not divorced from the political historical oppression upon which continued white privilege is based. This is not with a false hope of erasing power differences and white privilege, but it is in the hope of creating open dialogue and opportunities for social change. Zetzer (2005) concurs that through open and honest multicultural dialogue we can begin to 'transform people and systems and turn intention into action' (p. 13).

A White Queer Theory

Whiteness is not queer when it is taken as the invisible norm. The examination of whiteness within queer communities is lacking. In the early 1990s, queer studies grew along parallel pedagogical and activist/campaigning lines (e.g. Queer Nation, ACT UP, lesbian avengers). Queer studies began by privileging one identity marker above all others, and so sexuality was explored at the expense of race and gender. Feminist theorists were essential for expanding the queer critique to gender, e.g. Eve Sedgwich, Judith Butler, Teresa de Lauretis. By disrupting the notion of fixed identities and breaking apart the dominant binaries of heterosexual/ homosexual, male/female, queer studies removed ideas of 'difference'. However, in doing so it negated differences that matter, in terms of power and privilege in the wider socio-political arena. Some of the identities and social connections that are negated are a source of support and survival against discrimination and oppression: 'in those stable categories and named communities whose histories have been structured by shared resistance to oppression, I find relative degrees of safety and security' (Cohen, 2005, 35). The voices of those from ethnic minorities are poorly represented (Cohen, 2005). Because of this queer theory is shaped by a white perspective: 'the assumptions made when constructing a theory, the determination of what is worth studying and what is not and the inferences drawn from empirical findings, will all be shaped by the culture of the theory makers' (Patel et al., 2000, 36).

Jay (2005, 107) paraphrases Johnson (2001) to suggest reasons why writers and theorists do not address whiteness:

1. 'Obliviousness/ignorance (they don't know what's going on).
2. Security/Complacency (they don't have to know what's going on).
3. Individualism (they think what's going on is a result of individual effort and/or merit, and that inequalities are therefore deserved).
4. Benefits (they don't want to lose what they gain because of what's going on).
5. Prejudice (they think they know what's going on and it offends them).
6. Fear (they are afraid that acknowledging what's going on will bring harm or loss to them)'.

By negating the issues of race, queer theorists do not reflect on the influence of their whiteness to their theorizing and hence how queer theory is a white Euro-American theory (Harper, 2005). This critique extends back to Foucault who discussed the formation of the homosexual identity with an unspoken assumption that his homosexuals were white, or else their racial identity was subsumed by their sexual identity so as to no longer be relevant (Ross, 2005). Goldman (1996), as a white bisexual woman, suggests that queer theorists shy away from discussing their whiteness because it positions them as the dominant majority. Carbado (2005) warns that dominant groups (in this case white queers) will 'discount the experiences of subordinate groups … unless those experiences are authenticated or legitimized by a member of the dominant group' (p. 207). Similarly, Kilomba (2007) reminds us that 'academia is not a neutral location' … but is largely a 'white space where Black people have been denied the privilege to speak'.

The activism side of queer politics (e.g. the work of Stonewall) also tends to be 'single issue' campaigns (e.g. adoption rights), with no discussion of the relevance or influence of these issues for black queers. Smith (1999) suggests that the lack of direct attention to racial oppression discourages black queers from joining these campaigns: 'I am particularly struck by the fact that for the most part queer theory and queer politics, which are currently so popular, offer neither substantial antiracist analysis nor practice' (Smith, 1999, 18).

A Black Queer Theory

A black queer theory finds its origins in the activism of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s in the fight for equal rights for BMEs and women. Some of the strongest voices at this time were from feminists. From the late 1980s onwards, with the rise of the AIDS epidemic, a rich plethora of art and writing came from black queer men infected with the virus. More recently, there has been a refocus of desire and the black body.

Black Activism

The late 1960s saw the rise of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements in the US, and with it a push to develop 'black studies' in predominantly white higher education institutions. However, the heterosexual male leaders of these campaigns dictated the terms, which in uniting on race excluded all other identity categories, i.e. gender and sexuality (Johnson and Henderson, 2005). Fortunately, the 1970s and 1980s saw black feminists such as Audre Lorde, Angela Davies, Alice Walker, Cheryl Clarke, and Barbara Smith writing and campaigning until their voices broke through. Some of these women where also lesbians, who brought a challenge to heterosexism and homophobia within both the women's rights and civil rights movements (Johnson and Henderson, 2005).

On the whole, Black British lesbians remained silent and isolated. We were required to break our identities into acceptable fragments: we were Black in Black groups, women in the women's movement and lesbians on the lesbian scene. There was no space to be whole, to be a Black lesbian. (Mason-John and Khambatta, 1993, 11)

This aspect of their writing was against the flow of the established heterosexist black discourse which positioned homosexuality as 'a "white disease" that had "infected" the black community' (Johnson and Henderson, 2005, 4). Denigration of queer identities within the black movement is oft based on the idea that to belong to a sexual minority group is a choice (which is controversial in itself), whereas one is black from birth: 'gays are pretenders to a throne of disadvantage that properly belongs to black[s]' (Gates, 1999, 25). Indeed, Mason-John and Khambatta (1993) suggest that the lack of acknowledgement of BME voices and experiences in queer theory is a denial of the existence of homosexuality within the black community: 'Because Black communities already experience discrimination on the grounds of race, colour and language, there is a fear among the heterosexual population that to admit the existence of a taboo like homosexuality would oppress them more, dragging them further into the gutter' (Mason-John and Khambatta, 1993, 21).

In contrast to this view, Lorde described the importance of the black movement as 'the very house of difference rather than the security of any one particular difference' (Lorde, 1982, 226). It is important to remember that there is no more homophobia in the black community than in heterosexist society in general: 'saying that homophobia is more prevalent in the Black community is like saying there are more Black men who rape' (Bellos, cited in Mason-John and Khambatta, 1993, 22).

Writing about black, colour and queer is more often than not authored by those individuals who identify in those terms, under those banners. The aim of writers such as Johnson (2005) is not only to fill a vacuum but to address a range of questions, among them: how can queer theory fulfil its promise of inclusively? The hope is that the exposition on the fundamental flaw exposed by the absence of BME voices could, in due course, help in queer theory's formation as a complete disciplinary 'subject'.

The Black Body and HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS disproportionately affects gay and bisexual men and transgender people from Black and minority ethnic communities, especially in the US with African American and Latino communities most affected (CDC, 2008). In the UK, Black and gay/bisexual men are the group most affected (HPA, 2006). Many services are set up to target one or other of these groups, without a recognition that they could be one of the same (an exception to this and an excellent example of service provision is written up by Zavuga, 2006). Dada (1990) highlights the racism that lies behind the uncritical acceptance by white gay writers that AIDS originated

in Africa and that more black heterosexuals are infected. Dada suggests that this allows said writers to deflect 'blame' from the white gay community. In contrast to this lack of self-reflection, Black queer men in the US and UK have been writing, making art and being activists to addresses their personal experience of living with HIV (e.g. Gary Fisher; Gupta; Fani-Kayode).

The Black Body and Desire

The contradiction of the black body as a site for both desire and derision has been noted in sociological literature (Ford, 2008). An evaluation of the self, as viewed in the mirror, is never only a product of vision but of a perception that is coloured by the socio-political history of the self, in conjunction with racial and ethnic heritage, and the knowledge of others' perceptions of the self as a member of a specific racial/ethnic group. This kind of analytic viewing of the self is what Cooley (1902) referred to as 'the looking-glass self'.

The white colonial stereotype of a black man as an oversexed animal (and hence responsible for the spread of AIDS, as detailed above), and the transformation of his subjectship into an object – the penis – as material for fantasy (both heteroerotic and homoerotic) dates back to the times of slavery. Textual material suggestive of this bewitching allure is not only limited to the written text (novels), but is also embodied in the still images of Mapplethorpe (Mercer, 2002) and 'advertisements for Nike and other sport companies, the cinematic construction of Steven Spielberg's Armistad to the cover of black athlete's autobiographies, the black male torso as object of visual desire is everywhere' (Carrington, 2002, 21). Therefore, it is not surprising that black stereotypes are also held by black people. As Boykin (2002) posits, the black stereotype of a black man as 'uneducated and not as successful' (as a white man) is not uncommon. Racialized same-gendered desire can be considered a function of both racism (from non-black people) and internalized racism (within black people). Fetishization of the black body is another way in which racism is played out. Such fetishization also occurs for East Asian men, who are seen as feminine and subservient. Therefore, it is not only the East Asian man's body that is physically penetrated, but it is also metaphorically penetrated by the white gaze (Yancy, 2008). Thus, the white gaze may be able to *see* the black body because of its hypervisibility, but not *read* black subjectivity because of its invisibility (to the non-black person). However, if the black body does not conform to the fetish ideal, it needs to conform to the normative ideal, which is defined as white. Sandip Roy (1998) captures this view of the Asian body, even when viewed through the lens of another Asian (photographer): 'I had hoped that by controlling the camera we would be controlling the definition of erotic. But that definition had been set long ago by others; these pictures were just trying to live up to it' (p. 274).

The body is a significant cultural talisman in gay spaces. The commodity fetishization (cf. Marx, 1867/1988) of the body is a dominant theme in commercial gay venues/scenes (including cyberspace). Poon et al. (2005) found that in a

sample of East and Southeast Asian men who used gay Internet chatrooms, many participants preferred white men. Whiteness here was used as a measure of attractiveness. The commodification of the body can be seen as a form of a (meat) market economy, whereby the low supply/availability of the white body to the Asian man creates a high demand for it. Thereby, other Asian men who have sex with men (MSM) are viewed as competitors for the limited number of white men (Poon et al., 2005). One recent British study (das Nair and Thomas, unpublished manuscript) found that over one-third of their sample of East and South Asian MSM felt that they were not desired because of their race or ethnicity. Of note here is that it was not only white men who they felt did not desire them, but also men from other BME groups and their own ethnic group.

The black body therefore is never a neutral space. It is gazed upon, perceived, acknowledged, touched, torched, desired and despised depending on the racial configurations of the self and the other, located in a given space and time. The politics that govern the use/abuse of the black body are closely intertwined with the constructions of race/ethnicity and sexuality. The textuality of such a weave is never complete or without fault, and can only be perceived like an Escher sketch, where background and foreground are both independent and interlocked, and constant switching between figure and ground is required to fully appreciate its complexity and scope.

Intersectionality: No Hierarchy of Oppression

Both Saint and Smith have commented on the existence of multiple identities and the assumption that one amongst them must take primacy:

> Afrocentrists in our community have chosen the term "black gay" to identify themselves. As they insist, black comes first. Interracialists in our community have chosen the term "gay black" to identify themselves. As they insist, gay comes first. Both groups' self-descriptions are ironically erroneous. It's not which word comes first that matters, but rather the grammatical context in which those words are used either as an adjective or as a noun. An adjective is a modifier of a noun. The former is dependent on the latter. (Saint, 1991, xix)

> Perhaps the most maddening question anyone can ask me is "Which do you put first: being black or being a woman, being black or being gay?" The underlying assumption is that I should prioritize one of my identities because one of them is actually more important than the rest or that I must arbitrarily choose one of them over the other for the sake of acceptance in one particular community. (Smith, 1999, 15)

The imposition of a hierarchy of oppression has lead many queers to negotiate and manipulate identity labels. Labels have the power to potentially dilute self-

identity when multiple identities, such as woman, black, lesbian and mother, are denied visibility through a singular dominantly assigned label. Labels can persuade and validate, or condemn and exclude. They can invoke fear and pride, offer acceptance or denial. Adopting a new label can be transformative, changing not only self-perception but also how others may shift their perceptions and views. Because of this queers have not casually accepted the labels that are assigned to them (Eyben and Moncrieff, 2007).

Any project that attempts to explore the intersections between identities is therefore essentialist, and requires the grouping and categorizing of people based on various dimensions. While some identities are self-ascribed, others are imposed upon individuals by society. For instance, a woman may consider herself 'heterosexual', but may be labelled as being a 'butch lesbian' purely on the basis of her demeanour and appearance, which society may deem as falling outside the norms of femininity. However, the problem with such categorizations is that they can never be complete or static, and their relative nature makes them volatile. Any queering project, therefore, becomes another subjugating force if it compels people to conform to the narrow confines of *an* identity, or requires them to rank-order their multiple identities, without exploring the process or contexts in which such an ordering takes place.

There are intersections of identities that have a summative effect of disadvantaging individuals who find themselves in multiple positions that society has deemed subordinate: 'As a black, lesbian, feminist, socialist, poet, mother of two including one boy and a member of an interracial couple, I usually find myself part of some group in which the majority defines me as deviant, difficult, inferior or just plan "wrong"' (Lorde, 1999, 306). However, there are times where these intersections can be advantageous. Rather than considering the additive/summative nature of disenfranchisement caused by belonging to multiple categories of minorityhood, much more can be gleaned by examining the faultlines at which these minority identities are performed and contested. Fisher (2003) refers to her experiences of being a lesbian, belonging to an ethnic minority, and the manner in which multiple minority identities actually permits one to negotiate sexuality in ways which would not traditionally be considered as appropriate or proud. She suggests cultural hybridity encourages people to use the 'closet' in creative ways to achieve this. She draws on Michel de Certeau's (1984) idea of tactics that queer immigrants apply to their daily micro-practices. She argues that 'contrary to a popularized valorization of queer "outness", there is a great deal of power in the oscillation between visibility and invisibility' (p. 171). There is a pertinent point being made here: the models of coming out, affirmative gay life, and gay 'pride' may not always be applicable to black queer people (cf. Exercise 8.3 previously). In Fisher's (2003) case, she elucidates this creativity when describing a birthday party where people from various (queer and not queer) communities were attending. During such social situations she speaks of the deployment of 'a number of performative micro-operations ... including silences, fibs, contrived personal details, exaggerated gestures, seemingly innocent facial expressions, cautious

glances, polite nods of the head, and carefully orchestrated seating positions 'to live life in the hyphen' (p. 177).

These imaginative cultural performances may at times be at variance with prescribed ways of being queer. This is because most models of coming out have not factored in the race/ethnicity element and therefore do not take into account how black queer people can navigate with and through their multiple identities. Following from this, these models therefore cannot be applied directly to non-white queer individuals (who may or may not identify as lesbian or gay). In fact, there are potential threats and dangers associated with coming out in certain contexts (Cole Wilson and Allen, 1994). Thus, when examining the differences between various metaminorities (minorities within a minority population, das Nair, 2006), we need to move on from asking what configuration of minority statuses are more 'worse off' than others (Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach, 2008), to exploring how subjugation because of these statuses are derived, inculcated, propagated, and maintained and how these individuals creatively use these multiple identities to celebrate these differences holistically.

Many people from ethnic minority groups who love and/or have sex with someone of the same gender would not use the label lesbian or gay; this might be because the terms are associated with the West or with danger. For example, the term 'lesbian' can be associated with feminism and used to make a political statement rather than just to express a sexual/emotional preference (Reinfelder, 1996). The term 'lesbian' has also been seen as a white term, with alternative words available in different languages and cultures, such as Zami, dyke, wicker, khush (Reinfelder, 1996). In addition, the term bisexuality may not be used by people who live a primarily heterosexual life, while also loving and being sexual with people of the same gender. Reinfelder (1996) suggests that the absence of a label might actually make same-sex love and sexuality more tolerable in some communities (e.g. for women who are married and have children but also have women lovers. Sex is equated with the penis and so 'no harm is seen in two women sleeping together' (p. 3)).

If we recognize the multiple and intersecting parts of people's identities, there can be no hierarchy of oppression. Such a politic is possible and captured within the black feminist group, the Combahee River Collective's opening position statement: 'we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. This synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives' (Smith, 1983, 272).

The rejection of categorical labels to describe sexuality fits within queer theory, which replaces 'socially named and presumably stable categories of sexual expression with a new fluid movement among and between forms of sexual behavior' (Cohen, 2005, 22–23). Thus by resisting a fixed definition, the ability to be categorized and deemed 'other' or deviant from the accepted norm is resisted (Cohen, 2005), and the power and privilege inherent in such categorization is

highlighted. However, as previously discussed, 'queer' runs the risk of becoming the new monolithic identifier negating other aspects of selfhood. In addition, the rejection of labels which contain power, such as 'white', negates reflection on the positions and privileges they allow. In negotiating and flexing the labels available and interactions between them, a critical analysis of the power present or absent within remains important.

Conclusion

There is no a single fixed black, white or queer identity; these are social constructs that shift over time and place, in line with in and out groups and the allocation of power and resources. We have argued that for those denied access to this power, privilege and resources there is no hierarchy of oppression. We join the voices of previous writers (e.g. Smith, Lorde, Johnson) in suggesting that to make single-identity issues a focus of resistance is to ill-serve ourselves and others with dangerous consequences. This move away from a focus on a single identity marker fits neatly within the thesis of queer theory. However, we warn that this does not mean that multiple identity markers are not always present, those in the foreground depending on the current context, and their interaction should remain examined. There is heterogeneity of experiences that black and white queer people have on the basis of their sexuality and/or race. The intersections of multiple minority identities could both be a site of (further) subjugation/domination or an opportunity to negotiate creative ways of being both black/white and queer. We suggest that further analysis of race and its interaction with queer theory is necessary to deconstruct the mainly unexamined frame of whiteness and incorporate the voices of blackness.

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