

External vs. Internal: Sources of Resiliency Among Emerging Adult Black Gay and Bisexual Men

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Introduction

The purpose of this research was to examine the main sources and origins of resiliency that are present among Black gay and bisexual men. Research among Black gay and bisexual men has increased over the decade (Barbaran, 1993; Miller, 1999; Miller & MacIntosh, 1999; Utsey, Bolden, Lanier, & Williams, 2007) and much of that research has focused primarily on individuals living with HIV (Malebranche, 2008). However, less work has been done on resiliency for this population. Resiliency refers to one’s response to adversity and ability to positively adapt to difficult situations (Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker (2000)). Thus, the current study aimed to provide more findings that highlighted areas of resiliency for gay, bisexual black men outside of their struggle with HIV.

Demographics

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	22.8	1.7
	<i>n</i>	%
Ethnic Identification		
African American	10	50%
Black	4	20%
Mixed	5	25%
Nigerian American	1	5%
Sexual Orientation		
Gay	14	70%
Queer	3	15%
Bisexual	2	10%
Pansexual	1	5%

Sources of Resiliency

Internal Sources	Quotes
Mind	My mind drives me to pursue the things that I want. It keeps me going...Because I feel like the only way you can help and hurt yourself is how you think. I try to think positively...
Racial Identity	Because I am black and I have already had to go through a lot of things, and my grandparents had to go through things, even saying it reminds me, I still have it.
Myself	I was born this way. I definitely always felt that way.
External Sources	
Queer Spaces	Just knowing that even though physical access to black queer spaces isn’t always there, knowing that that community exists in general, and being able to just see that legacy. I am part of something – my thoughts aren’t the original ones, other people have felt just like me.
Trust	Trusting the process, and just trusting the universe and trusting the fact that I am here for a purpose, I am going to make the most of it.
Family	My nephew. He’s the only reason why I am really fighting. I gotta take care of my health and wellness, and so when I’m feelin depressed, that’s what encourages me.

Method

We conducted twenty separate semi-structured interviews with gay and bisexual Black men ($M_{age} = 22.8$ years, $SD = 1.7$). Participants were asked about their experience with their multiple identities, and their ability to be resilient through adversity. Researchers used grounded theory to analyze the interviews and coded interviews according to an established code book.

Results

Participants indicated varying sources of resiliency, which they utilized to overcome hardships. Internal sources (i.e., I was born this way) and external sources (i.e., music, my grandmother’s spirit) were conveyed by participants as mechanisms to overcome adversity. Our results suggest great diversity in the sources of resiliency expressed by participants..

Discussion

The present study adds to the limited research on Black gay and bisexual men. The study found that in conjunction with the many sources of adversity came many sources of resiliency as a means to persevere through adversity. Our research found an array of sources of resiliency among our participants. Both external and internal sources of resiliency were predominant in our sample. Our research suggests that for black, gay and bisexual men, when confronting adversity external and internal sources of resiliency are sufficient tools to face and persevere, and can be found anywhere. By way of highlighting this information, our findings seek to increase social understanding of the means through which these emerging adults overcome adversity, in effort to decrease social marginalization, stigmatization, and discrimination.