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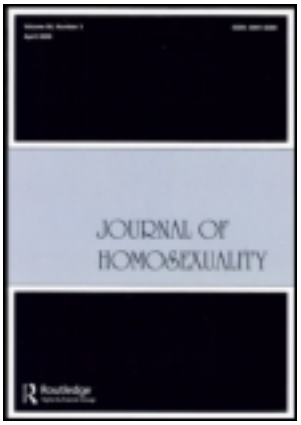

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Race Relations and Racism in the LGBTQ Community of Toronto: Perceptions of Gay and Queer Social Service Providers of Color

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Race Relations and Racism in the LGBTQ Community of Toronto: Perceptions of Gay and Queer Social Service Providers of Color

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This article explores race relations and racism within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community of Toronto, Ontario, from the perspective of seven gay/queer social service providers of color. Social constructions of race, race relations, and racism were placed at the centre of analysis. Employing interpretive phenomenological analysis, findings indicated that intergroup and broader systemic racism infiltrates the LGBTQ community, rendering invisible the lived experiences of many LGBTQ people of color. The study contributes to a growing body of research concerning our understanding of factors underpinning social discrimination in a contemporary Canadian LGBTQ context.

KEYWORDS race relations, racism, gay and queer social service providers of color, interpretive phenomenological analysis research, qualitative, Canada

Race has become metaphorical—a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological "race"

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> ever was. Expensively kept, economically unsound, a spurious and useless political asset in election campaigns, racism is as healthy today as it was during the Enlightenment. It seems that it has a utility far beyond economy, beyond the sequestering of classes from one another, and has assumed a metaphorical life so completely embedded in daily discourse that it is perhaps more necessary and more on display than ever before. (Morrison, 1992, p. 63)

Evidence is strong that racism exists within the predominantly White lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) communities in Canada (Boodram, 2003; Crichlow, 2004; Fung, 1996; Teengs & Travers, 2006; van der Meide, 2001, 2002; Walcott, 2006; Warner, 2002; Woodruffe, 2008). However, few (if any) systematic, meaningful social sciences investigations have been done to explore the issue. A preoccupation with the discourse of HIV/AIDS is paramount among White researchers and researchers of color. While an important contemporary challenge to confront, privileging HIV/AIDS within socioepidemiological, public health, and social service research may marginalize or suppress other realities that are central to the lived experiences of LGBTQ people, especially those who embody multiple social identities and for whom HIV/AIDS is not the primary locus for identity politics. A review by B. Jackson et al. (2006) on the weaknesses in the dominant framework of population health research and policy in Canada provides some insight into why this preoccupation persists.

In examining how the social determinants of health for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, Two-Spirit, intersex, and queer (LGBTTTIQ) people have been addressed within the Canadian public health policy, B. Jackson et al. (2006) noted the challenge faced by LGBTTTIQ health providers and researchers who often have to contend with the stringent and sometimes restrictive rules of major health funding bodies. For example, according to the authors, the demand placed on health and human services agencies to demonstrate their worth (i.e., credibility) in order to receive funding put many in an untenable position. The lack of meaningful funding can affect their ability to do research and prevention work and to deliver important health and social service programs. Although the authors did not explicitly address the implications of this funding scheme on ethnospecific organizations, it can be extrapolated from their discussions that these organizations are caught in a dilemma. Without sustained funding to do the required work and research, establishing credibility becomes difficult. The small-scale operation and limited funding infrastructure of many ethnospecific organizations form significant barriers to their recognition by funding bodies as credible institutions worthy of investment. The competitive nature of funding schemes is an additional barrier, as ethnospecific organizations are expected to compete with large, well-funded, mainstream, White-dominant HIV/AIDS agencies (e.g., AIDS Committee of Toronto)

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for the limited funding available. Furthermore, because many health-based funding bodies operate from a Western biomedical framework, ethnospecific organizations that depend on them for financial support are siloed into providing epidemiologically based services and research that primarily focus on HIV/AIDS (Black Gay Research Group Summit, 2012; Rainbow Health Network, 2011). This situation has had the unfortunate consequence of reprioritizing the issues to which such organizations attend, and has contributed to their neglect of other important social issues, such as the compromising effects of racism on the health and overall wellbeing of LGBTQ people of color.

While it is not the intention of this article to argue nor quantify the extent to which racism exists within the LGBTQ community in Toronto (or elsewhere in Canada), the authors take as their point of departure that racism is inherent in the LGBTQ community and reflects systemic and discriminatory practices of the wider Canadian culture. Racial and ethnic diversity is a fact of life in Canada. Nevertheless, contemporary systemic practices of discrimination manifest in such areas as law, education, employment, health care, housing, and politics. These practices maintain subordinate and dominant categories in racial relations, and limit the life chances and opportunities of racial minorities (Henry & Tator, 2010). According to a United Nations Human Rights Council report on the state of minority issues in Canada, notwithstanding the Canadian government's efforts at supporting diversity and promoting multiculturalism, racial minorities believe that the government has "failed to respond adequately to their problems or to devise meaningful and enforceable solutions, leaving them and their communities feeling discriminated against and neglected" (McDougall, 2010, p. 35). Given the probability that this racism has been reproduced in mainstream, White, LGBTQ communities, this article addresses two central and important questions: a) How are the issues of race relations and racism perceived by gay/queer-identified social service providers of color in Toronto? b) What are their views on steps that can be taken to begin to meaningfully address these issues?

The individuals interviewed for this study were uniquely positioned to reflect on the topic, given their dual roles as ethnoracial LGBTQ social service providers within mainstream, White, Canadian society and as gay- or queer-identified community members. Their insight about the phenomena under investigation provides a preliminary basis for the understanding of contemporary race relations within the LGBTQ community in Toronto, and a direction for future research related to this topic area.

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SUBJECTIVITY AND REFLEXIVITY: LOCATING OURSELVES IN THE RESEARCH

The researchers live in Canada, a colonial settler state in which Aboriginal peoples continue to be denied rights to their ancestral homeland. Thus, we are at once implicated in the very issue we seek to address, and we are situated differently in our awareness of race and racism. We wish to state that one author is Black and the other White, as this helps locate us within our research.

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Sulaimon

The first White people I ever came in contact with were the White flight attendants that greeted me and my family when we landed at Frankfurt Airport in Germany, en route to Canada. I was 11, and the year was 1990. The period of British colonial exploration and conquest of my homeland, Nigeria, had ended fairly recently, in 1960, when it became an independent nation. Even today, the historical legacy of British colonial rule remains. Nigeria continues to be a nation riven by regular bouts of bloody religious and ethnic violence—the roots of which can be traced to the British colonial administration, which sought the cooperation of Indigenous African leaders and chiefs as a way of promoting British administrative and economic interests. As a technique of domination, this divide-and-conquer approach partitioned Africans from themselves and altered the socioeconomic and political landscape of the country. The effect of this strategy can be seen today in the continued strife between northern and southern ethnic groups in the Nigerian territory.

I do not know the extent to which British imperialism and the promise of modernity and opportunity in the West influenced my parents' decision to immigrate to Canada. However, I am acutely aware of the challenges my parents and I faced after arriving in Toronto. Indeed, we soon discovered that Canada can be a very challenging place for people of racialized backgrounds, especially if they are visible minorities, since Canada's colonial past is still reflected in many of its social strictures. For my parents, the acculturation process was stressful, as they were confronted with the difficulty of finding meaningful employment; learning the social, legal, and economic customs of our new country; and developing knowledge of available services for easing our family's transition and immersion into the Canadian way of life. Like other immigrants to Canada, my parents also faced the challenge of not having their foreign credentials recognized, racial or ethnic discrimination, language barriers, and a weak or nonexistent social network (Reitz & Banerjee, 2007).

For me, adjustment difficulties manifested themselves at school, where I often got into fights with White classmates. Despite the value my parents placed on education, I came to believe that school in Canada was an intrusive and horrifying place. It was here that I realized what having a "thick skin" meant. The children were abusive physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Not a day went by that I was not terrified and left in fear of my life and safety. Although there were other Black children in the school, I was picked on more because I had the darkest skin. I was called "monkey," "darky," and "faggot," without ever having disclosed my sexual orientation. The foreignness of the word faggot was yet another hurdle I had to overcome, since I had grown up in a country where such labels were not associated with same-sex eroticism.

As I made my way through middle and high school, I grew increasingly curious about my sexuality and had a need to surround myself with others like me. Later, I was introduced by a Filipino friend to the Toronto gay and lesbian community—where I was immediately subjected to similar experiences of racism. Politically, the 1990s in Canada were a time when equality rights for LGBTQ people were almost nonexistent. The gay and lesbian community did not seek to include all LGBTQ people. Their inclusion could have acted as a catalyst, strengthening the community's goal of working for collective social rights. Instead, I witnessed then, as I do now, the exclusion of LGBTQ people of color from the mostly White community and, thus, from the larger sociopolitical agenda and interests of the dominant White group, which has till now failed to substantively integrate LGBTQ people of color in its work for social justice.

Cameron

My first recollection of racism was hearing my grandmother—who moved to Canada from Scotland in the 1950s—speak about people of color using derogatory language. As a child, I often asked my parents why she used such words. Their response was always, "Granny doesn't know any better. So just leave it alone. She isn't going to change." Then, as now, however, I continually sought to challenge the norm and to discover why people act the way they do.

My epistemological and analytical framework takes antiracism and anticolonialism seriously as a queer-identified settler and feminist. My antioppressive framework is shaped by my own experiences. As a child, I was made fun of for having a learning disability and for being poor; in high school, I was taunted and physically beaten because others perceived me as being gay. Names like faggot, sissy, retard, and queer were tossed my way because of the things I liked and the people I hung out with. To this day I resist labels such as gay, because of the violence I experienced when I was younger.

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Toward the end of high school and in my early years as an undergraduate, I started to think about my own desires and coming to terms with my sexuality. I thought of sexuality within very narrow confines—through the lens of Whiteness. I was too naive in those earlier years to take race and racism seriously; I did not think they mattered. When I came to Toronto for graduate studies, I finally was forced to think about transnational feminism, globalization, and my own relationship to Canada as a White settler. I was introduced to Jasbir Puar's (2002, 2006, 2007) work, which challenged and ultimately changed my perspective on sexuality and desire, and led me to incorporate an antiracist and anticolonial analysis to my research, praxis, and teaching.

When I find myself engaged in conversations around sexuality, I cannot but consciously include critiques of how current LGBTQ social movements and public-health regimes repudiate Indigenous and people of color. As a settler in what is now known as Canada, I have a responsibility to make visible the erasure of Indigenous people through the privileging of Whiteness and settler colonialism at systemic, communal, and individual levels. Here, I am reminded of bell hooks's (1988) statement:

> While I think it [is] a meaningful gesture for young white women in a white-supremacist culture to seek to hear from black women, to wish to listen and learn from black women . . . [turns] the spheres of discussion on racial topics . . . into yet another arena where we as black people are called upon to take primary responsibility for sharing experiences, ideas, and information . . . [This] places black people once again in a service position, meeting the needs of whites . . . [T]he ideal situation for learning is always one where there is diversity and dialogue, where there would be women and men from various groups . . . [but] we should all be capable of learning about an ethnic/racial group and studying its literature even if no person from that group is present. (p. 47)

Using my privilege as a White settler, I have the opportunity to speak up against racism and race relations in the LGBTQ community, which supposedly unites its members through their similar experiences with heterosexism. I enter into the antiracist and anticolonial debates through my queerness, acknowledging the ways in which White, gay, male voices continue to dominate gay and lesbian studies, and queer studies. My intervention is to make visible how queers are settlers (A. Smith, 2010) and to recognize settler colonialism, which acts to make Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty invisible.

Despite our different positionalities and experiences, the authors share a common understanding that contemporary (individual, institutional/systemic, and cultural/ideological) racism relies on an ongoing colonial project in which "White lies, maneuvers, and pathologies . . . contribute to the avoidance of a critical understanding of race and racism" (Leonardo,

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2004, p. 141). Thus, we are concerned that by not addressing this issue our silence may implicate us in the ongoing project of White racial supremacy and domination rather than in the ongoing struggle for racial justice. Moreover, as we are unsettled by arguments about the ahistoricity of racism as an artifact of the distant past, our goal in this article is to write against such rhetoric and argue that the LGBTQ community in Toronto (or elsewhere in Canada) is not untouched by racism. On the contrary, contemporary racism, albeit more decorously, is an intrinsic feature and reality of this community's culture and structure.

We begin this article with a brief consideration of race, racism, and race relations as both concepts and ideologies. We trace the historical formulation of race and the concept of racism in order to understand their contemporary meanings in a LGBTQ context. Next, we discuss critical race theory—the theoretical framework used in the research study—and its applicability to the investigation of everyday experiences, including racism experienced by ethnoracial LGBTQ people. Then, we describe the study's research approach, methods, and analysis, and address its limitations. Finally, we discuss the study's results, using data from interviews with self-identified gay- or queer social service providers of color, and provide a conclusion.

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RACE, RACISM, AND RACE RELATIONS: CONCEPTS AND IDEOLOGIES

Historical and contemporary debates about the problematic of race relations point to the precariousness of employing race as an analytical concept: "Any analytical use of the idea of 'race' disguises the fact that it is an idea created by human beings . . . under certain historical conditions and for certain political interests" (Miles, 2000, p. 137). Race, it is argued, is an ideological and social construction; any biological ascendancy formerly proposed for it has been largely discredited by science. Critics of scientific theories of race have pointed out that if race were given a scientific status as an analytical concept capable of explaining social processes, then it ought to embody certain verifiable, identifying criteria (see Miles, 2000). For these critics, any claim of race as having an autonomous effect on social processes demands an intelligible sociological explanation.

Authors including Gilroy (1987) and Anthias (1990) have argued for the retention of race as an analytical category, albeit from two distinct intellectual positions. For Gilroy, the idea or concept of race has a descriptive value, for the insight it offers about the racialized relations of power. Anthias (1990) has advocated retaining the concept of race, because it offers "a particular way in which communal or collective differences come to be constructed

and understood" through the signification of "immutable fixed biologically or physiognomically based difference" (p. 22).

In constructing race as a biologically constituted analytical category, Anthias (1990) explicitly legitimized the nineteenth-century positivist conception of race, which conjectured that humans belonged to biologically distinguishable and classificatory groups or races. However, Anthias rejected the superior/inferior hierarchy ordering of races that underpins much of the "dominant ideas of European bourgeois civilization and aesthetics" (Castagna & Dei, 2000, p. 23). In doing so, she necessarily transformed race into an active subject capable of an end in itself—the ideological, political, and material consequences of the race concept lends itself to unequal distribution of power and privilege.

Gilroy (1987) and Anthias (1990) concern themselves with the ideological, social, and material aspects of racism because, for both authors, race and race relations are important analytical concepts for understanding the social relations between races. However, Gilroy's and Anthias' position diverges greatly from that held by critics of scientific theories of race, who, for example, have concluded: "There are no 'races' and therefore no 'race relations'" (Miles, 2000, p. 135). For Miles (1984), the racial categorization of individuals and communities is hidden within class conflicts, and manifest through processes of racialization: "Race is thus an ideological effect, a mask that hides real economic relationships" (Black & Solomos, 2000, p. 7).

Miles' (2000) contention, it should be noted, was that racism—not race—should be the object of investigation. He observed that the race problem (or to use his own words, the "racialization of social relations" (p. 135)) could only be redressed once all meanings associated with "race" and the very concept of "race" itself had been eliminated. However, as Goldberg (1993) succinctly pointed out: "Racism of any kind must conceptually presuppose reference, however, veiled or implicit, to race" (p. 94).

We describe these two divergent perspectives on the issue of race and racialized phenomena in order to situate, for the reader, commonly evoked sociohistorical and political perspectives on the subject. We do not wish to imply that individuals must fit neatly into one or the other of these two schools of thought. For those who align themselves more closely with the first school of thought, race and racial characterizations are ideologically, politically, and socially constituted. As has been argued elsewhere (see Castagna & Dei, 2000; Fellows & Razack, 1998; Lopez, 1995; Omi & Winant, 1994), despite the social construction of race and racism, the concepts have social significance and meaning in that they shape the life outcomes of people of color. That is, people experience advantages and disadvantages according to their ascriptive racial categories, with persons of color believed to endure this injustice more profoundly. In effect, then, "racism is not just an ideology, but a material reality and a structural system that sorts resources unequally according to race" (Hunter, 2002, p. 120). Correspondingly, for

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those aligning with the second school of thought, the race concept has no theoretical or operational value. Any reference to the word reifies the biological determinism argument that perceives differences in intelligence among groups and proceeds to categorize them accordingly (see Fluehr-Lobban, 2006, for a discussion on problems related to the "measurement" of race). Precisely for this reason, critics of scientific theories of race caution against privileging the race concept so that it is given a scientific, analytical status. Yet, as Castagna and Dei (2000) powerfully remind us, "to deny the race concept is to deny the lived historical realities of many people" (p. 19).

Clearly, debates about the ontological status of race and race relations raise more questions than they answer. These issues become more complex when we examine them in relationship to sexual orientation and for individuals who identify with both ethnoracialized and sexualized identities. For example, how has sexual orientation been implicated in the social construction of race? How have the discourses of race, sexual orientation, and class been mutually constitutive? Is class or race a more important factor in the oppression of racialized sexual minorities?

The complexities of identity politics, in which an individual can lay claim to multiple social identities, necessarily make these questions difficult, if not impossible, to answer. Yet, as Solomos and Back (1999) pointed out, "the politics of identity is fast becoming an important area of contemporary debate" (p. 71). Significantly, these authors insist, "race is foremost a political construct . . . [and] racialized assertions need to be located within processes of social regulation and identity formation" (p. 73). Situating the analysis of contemporary meanings of race and racism within specific empirical and sociohistorical contexts, they suggest, allows for an alternative racialized discourse to emerge. As Goldberg (1993) has noted, "it follows that the prevailing meaning of race at any intersection of time and place is embedded in and influenced by the prevailing conditions within the social milieu in question" (p. 80).

Thus, in examining the issues of race relations and racism within the LGBTQ community in Toronto, we aim to uncover the "metonymic elaborations" (Solomos & Back, 1999, p. 73) used in the conceptualization of racism. Or, in view of arguments that call attention to the "multifarious historical formulations of racism" (Goldberg, 1990, p. xiii), how are racism and race relations contemporarily perceived by gay/queer-identified social service providers of color?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Our theoretical framework in this study is critical race theory. A unique feature of this framework, distinguishing it from other theoretical approaches, is its insistence on a theory practice—or praxis—that goes beyond trying

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to understand the effects of racism on oppressed groups to also changing the very conditions that allow it continue. Critical race theory was built upon the insights of critical legal studies and radical feminism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). It was developed in the mid 1970s as a response to critical legal studies, which inadequately engaged with issues of race and racism (Han, 2008a). Today, it is known as a movement committed to "transforming the relationships between race, racism, and power" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 2). In many respects, its proponents are fundamentally opposed to the liberal (and in recent years, conservative) position that emphasizes a step-by-step, incrementalist progress, and procedural rather than substantive rights. Critical race theorists argue that liberalism's and conservatism's color-blind approach to the problem of racism has limited applications in the short term, and in the long term has the effect of keeping racial minorities in a subordinate position.

Among critical race theorists, stories and narratives are frequently used as a means to better express and understand the experiences of oppressed individuals, groups, and communities (Graham, Brown-Jeffy, Aronson, & Stephens, 2011; Parker & Lynn, 2002). Quite often, the insidious nature of racism has the tendency to silence its victims and alienate members of excluded groups, both from each other and from the rest of society. As Barnes (1990) has pointed out, "Critical race theorists . . . integrate their experiential knowledge, drawn from a shared history as 'other,' with their ongoing struggles to transform a world deteriorating under the albatross of racial hegemony" (pp. 1864–1865). In working toward social justice, therefore, stories and narratives are seen as having the potential to empower those whose voices have been and continue to be marginalized as well as "turn the margins into places of transformative resistance" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 37).

With a commitment to increase understanding of the social relations of privilege and racial subordination, as well as to combat racism in all its manifestations, especially the subtler forms, adherents of this perspective subscribe to a set of systems of belief, as follows:

1. Racism is an everyday occurrence for people of color—a way of life by which the experiences of racial discrimination serve to maintain the interest of the status quo.
2. Racism supports the material and psychic interest of both the majority group and working class, which makes eradicating racism difficult.
3. Race and races are held to be socially constructed with no biological corporeality; however, that Western culture continues to give currency to these concepts is at once interesting and problematic.
4. Differential racialization, the privileging and disfavoring of various ethnoracial and cultural groups at one time or another, is seen as an

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attempt by the majority group to advance its social, political, economic, and cultural agenda.
5. Because people are multiple beings and are situated across a continuum of social axes, caution should be exercised to avoid essentialist thinking in favor of an intersectional approach.
6. By implication, due to their experiences of oppression and discrimination, members of marginalized groups have a unique voice and competence to speak about race and racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

The application of critical race theory has significant import for our research study and the arguments emerging from our data. In seeking to better understand race and its role in society, this approach uses theory in ways that are untraditional thus allowing readers to get close to the people being studied. Essential is the need for the reader to be able to connect with the problems faced by those being written about and to make connections to their own life problems. In this view, critical race theory is characterized by an ongoing endeavor to contextualize the lived experiences of people of color—it is a critical, interpretive approach to research that takes as its starting point where marginalized and disenfranchised people of color are—through narratives and counterstories that expose how White privilege and White supremacy operate to foster and maintain the marginalization of subordinated racial and ethnic minority groups.

RESEARCH APPROACH, METHODS, ANALYSIS, AND LIMITATIONS

We employed a phenomenological approach to understanding race relations and racism within the LGBTQ community of Toronto, paying particular attention to how gay- and queer-identified social service providers of color have perceived and experienced these phenomena. Broadly defined, phenomenology is "a study of the advent of being into consciousness, instead of presuming its possibility as given in advance" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 61). It is both retrospective and recollective in nature and, thus, is concerned with the meaning people attach to their lived experience, both real and imagined, and how these experiences are transformed into consciousness. A fundamental epistemological assumption of phenomenology is that our knowledge of a given phenomenon is directly related to our experience of it. That is, "every intentional experience, regardless of how vague or ambiguous it may appear in its origin, intimates something and designates something" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 56). Therefore, what is not apparent to the subjective consciousness is reasoned to fall outside of one's lived experience and possible knowledge claims.

In designing the study, we drew upon our knowledge of Toronto's ethnoracial and mainstream health and social service providing agencies that catered to members of the city's LGBTQ community. Participants in our

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study were drawn from these groups. They worked at these agencies and were purposively selected for inclusion according to the following eligibility criteria: a) they must self-identify as gay or queer, with an explicit focus on sexual orientation and not gender identity and expression (a rationale for the exclusion of transgender and transsexual individuals), and belong to an ethnoracial minority group; b) they should have some insight about race relations and racism in the Toronto LGBTQ community; c) they must identify as social service providers; and d) the service they provided must be non-HIV in focus. The inclusion of the fourth criterion proved limiting, given the sheer number of agencies and groups whose work either touched or was primarily focused on HIV/AIDS. We, therefore, decided that potential study participants who met the first three eligibility criteria but who worked for an AIDS Service Organization (ASO) could also participate in the research.

Once the research participants were identified, an interview coverletter, consent form, and copy of the interview schedule were distributed before any interview was conducted. The documents outlined the purpose of the study; criteria for participation, including discussions about confidentiality and research ethics; and a request for written consent to participate in the study. Data collection took place at the interviewees' workplaces, during or after business hours; coffee shops; and bars in downtown Toronto's gay and queer village on Church and Wellesley Streets. The interviews lasted between one and two-and-a-half hours. No incentives were offered for participation.

To maintain participants' confidentiality, we used pseudonyms and removed all identifying information. Among participants represented in this study, five different racial and ethnic groups were reported. Research participants self-identified racially and ethnically in the following ways. Two participants identified as Latin American (Mexican and Venezuelan); two identified as South Asian (Malaysian and Indian/Pakistani); one identified as Black (Bermudian); one identified as East Asian (Japanese); and one identified as Middle Eastern (Jordanian). Participants ranged in age from 25 to 56 years, with a mean age of 38, a median age of 36, and a standard deviation of 7.63. Table 1 provides a snapshot of demographic characteristics and profile of the respondents.

TABLE 1 Participants' Demographic Characteristics and Profile

Pseudonym	Age	Sexual-orientation/ gender identity	Ethnoracial group	Country of birth
Hao	25	Gay/queer	East Asian	Japan
Kassim	50	Gay/queer	South Asian	Malaysia
Luis	35	Gay	Latin American	Mexico
Marco	36	Gay/queer	Latin American	Venezuela
Omar	38	Gay/queer	Middle Eastern	Jordan
Rogar	56	Gay	Black	Bermuda
Samir	26	Gay	South Asian	Canada

Note. Age is in years. All participants self-identified as gay and/or queer; none identified as transgender or transsexual.

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We used face-to-face, in-depth, semistructured interviews as our methodology for data collection. This particular method was chosen because it lent itself to "collecting information that discloses the richness of the participant's, or informant's, experience" (Marlow, 2005, p. 169), and was consistent with the qualitative nature of this study. Seven interviews were completed with these gay- and queer-identified social service providers of color. In qualitative research such as this, the collection of information from a small sample size is not uncommon (Christian, 2005; Marlow, 2005). Rather than aiming to generalize research results, as in the positivist and quantitative approach, data generated from qualitative research seek to provide a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of the phenomena under study, from the participant's subjective experiences.

The interviews included some discussions about the perceived challenges facing the LGBTQ community; current relations among White and non-White community members; interracial relationships, and their influence on perceptions of race relations and racism; and past or present efforts to address race-based discrimination. All interviews were conducted in English, with respondents exhibiting different levels of facility with the language. One interviewee's first language was not English, for example, and the interviewer (the first author) was not always able to comprehend his responses directly. However, through continuously asking questions, the researcher was able to obtain clarification on concepts and meanings that were not always clear at first. Additional questions emerged in the course of the interviews, adding to the preestablished ones on the interview schedule. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The analytic strategy for this study was based on interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; J. A. Smith, 1996; J. A. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; J. A. Smith, Flowers, & Osborn, 1997; J. A. Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999). IPA enables the systematic analysis of participants' experiential data to understand how participants make sense of their lived experiences. We used transcribed interviews as the primary data source, following four specific steps in analyzing our research data. We began the analysis with a close reading of all transcripts in order to identify meaning units—that is, important experiences or key ideas or phrases corresponding to the participants' perceptions of race relations and racism. The process generated notes that were helpful for our initial thinking and interpretation of the data. As a second step, we edited these notes and used them to identify initial themes, taking steps to ensure concordance between participants' accounts and researcher-constructed thematic categories. Next, we compared and contrasted the resulting initial themes from the transcripts and produced superordinate themes, which were then compared to respondents' data to ensure accurate portrayals of participants' experiences. As a last step, we organized data themes into a coherent narrative form. To augment the validity and trustworthiness of the study data, written summaries of the interview

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transcripts were made available to the research participants. This process of "member checking" (Glesne, 2006, p. 38) was critical to assuring the accuracy of the participants' narratives in the final research outcome.

Our research carried some limitations. First, it was limited to seven people of color who were gay- or queer-identified social service providers. Some lived within the boundaries of Toronto's Church and Wellesley gay village. It, therefore, cannot be determined if perceptions of race relations and racism as characterized in the study were widely shared by other gay- or queer-identified social service providers of color who lived outside the borders of the village. A second limitation was the lack of heterogeneity. The study focused on race relations and racism within the LGBTQ community from the perspective of gay and queer social service providers of color only; contributions from White LGBTQ social service providers would have enhanced the study. Importantly, future studies should also consider the perspectives and experiences of lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and transsexual social service providers of color. A third and final limitation reflects the generalizability of our findings. As a qualitative study, the researchers focused on understanding the participants' subjective experiences of the phenomena under study, and not on generalizing the results of the research.

All our findings are preliminary—more research is needed in Canada in this area of inquiry. For example, there is a need for research that broaches the topic of how LGBTQ people of color cope with White racism. Such an assets-based approach to assessing the group's responses to the stressful effects of racism would serve as a critical intervention and complement to the existing literature, which has focused almost exclusively on deficit. Because research questions are necessarily raced (given the epistemology foregrounding researchers' work, as discussed above), certain topics and issues will be addressed and others will not. As a result, there is a need for conceptual innovations that would permit a more complex understanding of race and race relations in Canada, and avoid what D. Smith (1987) termed "conceptual imperialism" (p. 88). Particularly in the context of LGBTQ communities in Canada, the anthropological conceptual framework of moiety cultural analysis (Wolcott, 2003)—the benefit of which is to "expose metanormative social processes and help explain the complexity of bifurcated social systems" (Brooks & Jean-Marie, 2007, p. 758)—may offer an interesting approach to understanding the racial dynamics of domination and oppression in a contemporary Canadian LGBTQ context.

RESULTS

Community Participation and Exclusion

The research participants challenged the pervasive, dominant discourse of a single cohesive community, thereby cautioning against the erasure of the

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diverse and complex experience of people of color. They called attention to the need to unpack the term "community," as they sought to reconcile their multiple social positions within the predominantly White LGBTQ community. At the same time they offered a contextualized account of their perceptions of race relations, racism, and the challenges to community participation among racialized sexual minorities. In this context, the participants perceived that to understand the embedded power that the term community denotes within the predominantly White LGBTQ community was to understand the problematics of race relations and racism in the LGBTQ community. For example, one participant, Omar, said:

> The White gay community holds with it a lot of power. The gay male community is so strong and there is so much power of that group of people. It is very difficult to break in, challenge things, and change it. People have done so much in the White gay community, and we went through so much struggle. People feel that this is what we fought for; we do not want to shake it and change it for people of color.

As Omar suggested, the voices that have dominated LGBTQ activism, past and present, have been White. In their effort to address social inequality (i.e., heterosexism and homophobia) and enact social change, the LGBTQ community became homogenized. A false sense of cohesion was fostered when resulting social and political struggles ignored the oppression that continued to occur within this space. Omar recognized the need to rupture the power imbalance that enabled discrimination to continue on the basis of race and other identity matrices.

Similarly, Rogar opined that Pride festivities perpetuated understandings of a cohesive community, thereby masking differences among LGBTQ people. In acknowledging the complexity of challenges facing the community, he called attention to the need for LGBTQ members to address these issues in concrete and meaningful ways, given their real effects and consequences on bodies codified as different (i.e., people of color):

> Events like Gay Pride, similar to Caribana (which last only couple of days), give a false sense of community cohesiveness. The challenges facing the gay community are much more complex than these events can ever address. The absence of social support [for LGBTQ people of color] within the gay community contributes to isolation, marginalization, and a lack of sense of belonging.

Beyond attempts by the majority group to homogenize the different experience of ethnoracial and cultural groups through the promulgation of a unified community in the symbolic event known as Pride, the participants spoke movingly about the pervasiveness of racism. As one participant, Luis, noted:

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> There is a premium placed on the Anglocentric standards of beauty within the gay community, such as having blue eyes, blonde hair, and a nice body. Certain individuals and groups receive advantageous treatment because of their perceived conformity to White Euro-American ideals. Some people are marginalized because they belong to a visible racial minority group and, thus, are deemed to fall outside of the set standards. As a result, these individuals and groups experience diminished sexual currency and gay capital.

The participants also spoke about the predicament encountered by organizations of color when dealing with mainstream, White-run LGBTQ organizations, further pointing to issues dealing with categories, power, and the potential for social exclusion. As Rogar explained:

> The White LGBTQ community in Toronto is not a community of hope, love, and acceptance. Why are there are no Black-operated businesses in the community? At major events, LGBTQ ethnoracial/cultural groups often have to fight with event organizers for a decent place to advertise their services. These groups resign to whatever location is offered to them, given the potential for their exclusion from such events. Pride organizers have very little regard for, or no awareness of, cultural competency.

Inequality and Equality

In their discussion about inequality and equality, participants often made reference to either racism or discrimination as barriers to their (and others') full participation within the community. They spoke refreshingly and distinctively on the issue and how the normative conceptualization of discrimination might inhibit a richer, more nuanced understanding of the unequal relations among White and non-White members of the community.

At the outset, respondents clearly perceived that race relations and racism within the LGBTQ community had not always been problematic. Their critical insight, however, provided a glimpse into how current relations came to be. According to Rogar:

> Relationships between White and non-White LGBTQ people have not always been divisive. Post-Stonewall, police raids into LGBTQ establishments (e.g., bath houses) in the city of Toronto brought Black and White people together. These efforts were short lived, as attention shifted to the disproportionate impact of HIV/AIDS on gay White men . . . [away from other] broader social justice issues. The reinforcing idea, then, is that the HIV/AIDS-related stigma is more important to overcome than the effect of racism.

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For Rogar, the inequality experienced by people of color, Blacks in particular, was intimately linked to race. Despite the perceived saliency of the issue, he believed it was not being adequately addressed:

> Racism is not being adequately addressed in the community. When issues arise, they are approached in a piecemeal fashion and not as part of an integrated component of a strategy. The current attitude in the community is that [racism] is not an issue until it becomes an issue. Early initiatives to deal with racism unfolded to combat HIV/AIDS. Communities of color need to develop a strong backbone.

Luis offered a different explanation of the issue, suggesting that discrimination, not racism, was the problem faced by Latin-American LGBTQ people in Toronto:

> The Latin-American LGBTQ community does not talk about racism, per se, as much as it talks about discrimination. In Latin-American countries, racism is constructed as a Black and White issue. In contrast, discrimination relates to unemployment, language barriers, access to social services and support, and so forth. These are the issues most affecting LGBTQ people of Latin-American origin in the LGBTQ community.

Despite having identified discrimination and not racism as being an important challenge facing Latin-American members of the community, Luis proceeded to describe one form of racism as operative within the LGBTQ community—sociopolitical racism:

> [Sociopolitical racism] relates to individual censorship of an otherwise free expression of prejudice. Because of the politically correct culture we live in, many in the community observe the politics of race by avoiding race-based discussions. As a result, this evasion has led to the perception by most—especially the majority race—that racism does not exist. I was at a gay night club once and was approached by a White man. As I would soon learn, this individual's attraction toward me was due to my skin color. Once the two of us began talking, it became apparent to him that I was not White, as my light skin suggested, but Mexican. The discussion ended as quickly as it had begun, I suspect because of my accent. Although the man left without another word, I do not object to his action. Things happen and you wonder if it is because I am Latino or Black, but you can never be sure. I try not to mark everyday experiences as either race-based or racism. One needs concrete facts to substantiate claims of racism or discrimination.

The Internet acts as a space where race becomes compartmentalized and stereotyped as an easy, digestible identity, where some gay men of a particular race can navigate a sexualized and aesthetically driven terrain. For

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example, another participant, Samir, spoke about the sexual racism he saw affecting the gay male community:

> I understand that there is a concept of preference and people will defend themselves by saying it is a preference. When I go online some guys will write "absolutely no Asians" but you never see "absolutely no Whites." These messages that I read every day become so dehumanizing. This is why I think it is sexual racism; people are being put into boxes.

Samir's narrative points to a conscious awareness among people of color that racism exists and fuels the language surrounding erotic desire. Disparaging comments on social networking spaces sexually subordinate Asian men to White men. Utterances such as "absolutely no Asians," for example, perpetuate common Orientalist stereotypes of Asian men while disavowing them altogether.

Said's (1978) theorizing of Orientalism provides some insight into why this Orientalist narrative still prevails. He suggested that, through the practices of representation, the West defines itself by invoking an Other, which exists outside of the West's defined boundary. Representations, in this context, are powerful border-making practices that imagine the world's populations and territories as divided between the West and its Other (the Orient). Orientalist stereotypes within Toronto's gay and queer culture continue to evoke representations of Asian men as docile subjects complicit to White men.

Another kind of example of sexual racism was mentioned by Marco:

> I have a good friend and he is gay and Chinese. He met this old guy, a White Canadian professor in his work, and is very much into Asian guys. I think that is racist. It is like a fetish. This White Canadian professor is famous because he organizes dinners at his place just for young Chinese men. I think that is a good example of racism.

Marco brings our attention to the overt sexualization of men of color, in this case Chinese men. The imagined and often material stereotypes of Chinese men continue to be represented within Toronto's gay and queer culture. White men, like the professor in this narrative, need to be cognizant of their desires as being entrenched within a normative Orientalist discourses that fetishisize Chinese men. This fetishization of Chinese men continues to place White men in privileged positions and Chinese men in positions of subordination.

Significantly, each of the respondents discussed their perceptions of how the LGBTQ population viewed mixed-race relationships and how such views might shape perceptions about racism within the community. One perspective of interracial relationships was explained by Hao:

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> Many Asians prefer dating White guys because being with White is a status and when they are growing up there is Whiteness attached to their culture. So for Asian men White guys are attractive, not Asians. So between Asians it is a big issue because most people prefer White guys and Asian men have internalized racism.

Asian men's internalized racism leads them to see Whiteness as attractive; therefore, in the hopes of imagining themselves as normal, they seek out White male partners to legitimize their LGBTQ identities—meanwhile perpetuating racist stereotypes of Asian men.

Another participant, Kassim, spoke to his understandings of interracial relationships in the following way:

> I think interracial couples really have to be aware of the dynamics and dominance of power and privilege. Being in an interracial relationship makes me aware of my own imprint of colonialization and how I was brought up to think in terms of White supremacy, White power, and lighter skin. I try my best to educate others when they are interracially dating in terms of their dynamics. What I find is that in all of the interracial couples I know, most of the White guys want an open relationship and most of the men of color want a closed relationship. Men of color come from value system of monogamy. When you live in Western culture, the gay culture suggests that you keep dating and hope to find the right guy. If you are comfortable in the relationship you are in why have it open, just so you can meet people to have fun?

Kassim's experience of being in an interracial relationship highlights the hypersexual stereotype White gay men take on in their relationships with men of color. Sexual attitudes, stereotyping, and behaviors may all be shaped by considerations of power—for example, Kassim's narrative engages with the relative positioning of White men who choose a sexual or romantic partner according to their ascribed racial status.

The respondents spoke of the effort needed to begin to address racism within the LGBTQ community and to work toward the goal of equality. In their view, this meant having frank, open, and ongoing dialogue; but such discussion was currently not happening. For example, Rogar said:

> There have been efforts made to engage the larger [White LGBTQ] community on the topic of racism; these efforts have not resulted in progressive social change. This is partly because Black people, as a group, have not had the opportunity to strategize about a social justice framework for achieving social change. It is difficult for the LGBTQ community to talk about racism; for White individuals, it is the fear of being perceived as racist. Also, because the topic conjures up different emotions in people, there is little incentive to deal with it directly. [Racism] pushes people away . . . which then leads to the issue not being

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> resolved. Consequently, people learn only to tolerate one another without much effort to understand each other's differences, as well as work toward changing racist beliefs. For people of color, the topic is difficult to broach because of the fear of upsetting someone in the process. Compounding this fear is the role that people of color are expected to assume in educating the dominant group about racism and its existence within the community. People of color do not want to take on this role any longer.

Sexuality

The participants spoke of sexuality as an expression of agency or power; in their sexuality they both acted and were acted upon. They related sexual ways of coping, resisting, and trying to regain a sense of power and control over their lives. One participant pointed to the problematic nature of majority–minority race relations in his discussion about the contestation over space in places like gay night clubs. As the participants' accounts evidenced, for same-sex people of color the night club remained a site to be navigated. Rogar said:

> Although there has been greater awareness of exclusion among White community members, it is not evident that there has been much change. Power is exercised by the majority group in a public space, as a White person might be careful to not be seen in close proximity to a Black or person of color. In the past, I have engaged in various resistance tactics, including having sexual intimacies with White men and men of color in these settings. The nature of powerlessness in this context is the prevailing sexual preference for White partners, among LGBTQ people of color, in order to gain power.

Rogar went on to comment, in explicit terms, how even in people of color-centered spaces, racial minority groups were never free from acts of racism by majority groups. Whether or not these majority individuals were consciously or unconsciously aware of their action was beside the point:

> At Black gay-themed events such as Blockorama, Black people encounter acts of racism. Problems arise when a gay White person introduces himself to a gay Black person as: "Damn you're hot—you must have a big dick." This outward appearance of sexual racialization and eroticization permeates the LGBTQ community and is not adequately addressed by Black and mainstream advocacy/activist groups. Such statements have the tendency to reinforce the viewpoint that racism exists during the day and integration occurs at night. Efforts to deal with race relations in the community have been perfunctory at best, and do not go beyond hi, my name is . . .

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The participants alluded to economic inequality between the majority and disadvantaged minority groups, not just discrimination on the basis of skin color. Luis, in particular, spoke to the pernicious nature of this injustice in his narrative about sexual immigration. He explained:

> Sexual immigration . . . affects a number of LGBTQ Spanish-speaking people in the city of Toronto. It is forced prostitution for survival, and stems from unfavorable immigration policies and uneven relations of power. Sexual immigration occurs when one partner—often a person of color—is neither free to choose his/her sexual partner, nor consent to a mutually agreed-upon sexual practice. Economically disadvantaged individuals are placed in untenable positions and forced to enter into relationships with financially secure White partners in exchange for sponsorship stay in Canada. Part of the problem is the prejudice that same-sex people of color experience in their places of origin, with many fearing persecution if returned to their former environments.

Some comments reflected a call for a more humane treatment of LGBTQ people of color by the majority group, both around equity and participatory parity. Omar said:

> We need to take the conversation about race and sexuality outside of academic community circles. We need to address the issue of how race and racism within the queer community is alienating so many people. There are so many people who are finding safe spaces and good places in the city, but so many people are invisible and being alienated by the pressure to be White-washed and to be part of a culture that they do not relate to and do not understand. We need to understand that not everyone speaks the same language and we cannot always speak in a gay and White Anglo way. We need to complicate all of these labels that we use to define our sexuality and understand that people who speak different languages have different ways of understanding their own sexuality and the sexuality of others. Until we do this, we will continue to reproduce the same research and keep it in the same circles and I do not know how impactful that will be.

DISCUSSION

Research from the United States, where a large number of studies on LGBTQ populations have been undertaken (e.g., Chae & Walters, 2009; Diaz, 1998; Diaz, Ayala, & Bein, 2004; Diaz, Ayala, Bein, Henne, & Martin, 2001; Greene, 1997, 2000; Han, 2001, 2007, 2008b; Icard, 1996a, 1996b; K. Jackson & Brown, 1996; Loiacano, 1989; Parks, Hughes, & Matthews, 2004), and to some extent Canadian research as well (e.g., Boodram, 2003; Crichlow, 2004; Green, 2008b; Husbands et al., n.d.; van der Meide, 2001, 2002; O'Neill, 2010;

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Teengs & Travers, 2006), suggest that in North America, racism and discrimination within White LGBTQ communities negatively affect people of color. Likewise, these findings imply that race relations between Whites and non-Whites are fraught with tension and ambivalence. In Canada, where there is a dearth of empirical research on race relations and racism in predominantly White LGBTQ communities, the present study examined perceptions of race relations and racism among gay- and queer-identified social service providers of color in Toronto. In doing so, this work traversed academic research that neglects to locate race and racism at the centre of analysis. Such researches tend to subsume these topic areas under the discourse of HIV/AIDS, in effect circumventing the issue entirely or addressing it peripherally.

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Dominant Stock Stories, Misrecognition of LGBTQ People of Color

Overall, interviews with the research participants involved in the study held consistent with available research findings. Among research participants, there was the recognition and awareness that LGBTQ people of color face unique challenges in that they must successfully navigate two (or more) identities in environments that are not fully accepting of either (see Akerlund & Cheung, 2000). Although participants questioned the metanarratives of the accommodating, diverse, racially integrated, and inclusive community promulgated by the majority gay White men and women, one participant, Rogar, took issue with this idea. He suggested that the notion of community cohesiveness as fashioned by Pride festivities, for example, was false. He felt that the lack of social support exacerbated the isolation and marginalization experienced by LGBTQ people of color in this setting. The falsehood Rogar attached to Pride can be seen as an attempt to expose the subtle forms of racism within the LGBTQ community, as Han (2008a) brilliantly captured.

Focusing on the role of gay stock stories in the marginalization of gay Asian men in the United States, Han (2008a) effectively revealed the many ways in which subtle racism manifests within the gay community. His essay suggests that the larger stock stories told by the majority gay White men and women in gay magazines and evidenced in theme festivities such as Pride are designed to portray the community in the best possible light—as communities in which all are welcome regardless of race.

> The highlighting of men and women of color in the "giant 2006 Pride special" is ironic given that a typical issue of the *Advocate* shows virtually no people of color . . . Majority gay White Americans have unquestioningly accepted the stock stories of a multicultural gay community that embraces all sexual minorities regardless of race. (Han, 2008a, p. 16)

For Han (2008a), as was the case for participants in this study, the message conveyed by this representation (and others like it) is far from accurate. The continual masking or concealing of the reality of racism makes it unlikely that the issue will get addressed. Frankly, such a practice not only perpetuates the misrecognition of people of color, it also discourages the creation of support services, which the participants in this study signalled are needed. Exposing the myth of a racially integrated community as an issue in this way, thus, serves to shatter any previously perceived unity or cohesiveness within the LGBTQ community. By doing so, the participants were able to present a counterstory to the stock stories told by the majority gay White men and women. At the same time, they underscored the cultural, ethnic, and racial heterogeneity of the LGBTQ community and pointed to the need for a commitment to end racial discrimination.

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White Privilege: Whiteness as the Norm of Beauty

Based on the participants' narratives, the social value placed on Anglo- and Eurocentric standards of beauty, and the negative perception of those who do not conform or embody these standards, affect an individual (or group) on many levels. One's opportunities (i.e., ability to obtain a decent location at Pride for service promotion or to own a business in the community) might be lessened, for example. One might even risk social exclusion from the community and have certain privileges and social advantages denied. The nature of relationship one might encounter (i.e., diminished sexual currency and gay capital) might suffer. As Luis explained, more than just about preference, diminished sexual currency and gay capital operate either to include or exclude certain subjectivities from LGBTQ spaces; at the same time, they privilege a nonracialized currency of erotic capital. An eroticized representational ideal of White gay men, moreover, confers on them the means to "seek its rewards, including rights of sexual choice, social significance, and group membership" (Green, 2008a, p. 27). By contrast, the diminished sexual currency of non-White members at best conspires to deny them full citizenship and, as found in this study, at worst constrains them from equally negotiating safer-sex practices, for example, putting them at high risk for contracting sexually transmitted diseases.

From a critical race theory perspective, and as these participants further suggest, such processes of inclusion/exclusion reflect the view that racism and racist practices are ingrained in social structures. They enable select individuals and groups to gain social acceptance, from which "outsiders of color" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 78) are disaffirmed. For example, one interviewee felt that he was more readily accepted into the White LGBTQ community because of his light skin color. However, this same interviewee went on to recount an incident in which a White gay man at first indicated his attraction to him, but then withdrew when he heard his accent. Indeed,

any behavior, belief, value, or visible characteristic that might deviate from the White Euro-Canadian standards, as this study suggests, appears to be a decisive factor in whether a person is made to feel included in or excluded from the community.

A study conducted by Poon, Ho, Wong, Wong, and Lee (2005) reached a similar conclusion regarding the association between the currency placed on the Western notion of ideal male beauty and its effect on the self-conception of men of color, in this case Asian men. Their findings suggest that the idealized conception of (White) male beauty has a negative effect on how Asian men view themselves and others. As well, they intimated that because of low self-esteem, internalized oppression, and pressure to fit in, among other factors, some Asian men may become hostile toward other Asian men who they perceive as competition for the limited pool of White partners who are attracted to Asian men.

Minwalla, Rosser, Feldman, and Varga (2005) studied the identity experiences of progressive gay Muslim men of color in North America. The study revealed that the involvement with White men sometimes gave the study's participants a sense of elevated status, power, and validation, in a phenomenon known as *validation theory*. Participants in the study used validation theory "to describe how being White—or to be in relation to that which is White—involves a gain in currency, power, or validation" (p. 122). Notwithstanding this claim, some participants questioned whether the involvement of gay Muslim men of color with White men always had to do with validation, suggesting that romantic love might be a stronger predictor for the men's relationship in the first place.

The Social Discrimination of Racism in LGBTQ Communities

In relation to the second theme, participants viewed inequality (i.e., racism and discrimination) as a serious impediment to the participation of people of color in predominantly White LGBTQ communities. Despite the seriousness of the issue, efforts to address racism and race relations have been haphazard (Community Advisory Panel, 2011). Among the participants, different explanations were offered to elucidate why such is the case. Some participants observed that because of the politically correct climate in which LGBTQ people live, White members of the community are often afraid to articulate what is on their mind for fear of saying something wrong. As a result, issues and concerns that should be addressed openly begin to manifest into conscious or unconscious acts of racism. Most disconcerting is the fact that, rather than being a collective effort, the responsibility to identify and address racism is transferred onto people of color. In this way, White people absolve themselves of any responsibility.

One participant, Rogar, said that although there had been efforts in the past to address racism, they did not result in social change. He remarked

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that part of the problem was that people of color, especially Black people, had not had the opportunity to coalesce and strategize about how racism should be addressed. He concluded that in the absence of a Black-centered space needed for the development of a social justice framework, issues of racism and discrimination would continue to be subsumed under HIV/AIDS. If the absence of a Black-centered space, as the participant suggested, undermines efforts to address racism and discrimination, why has such a space not been established? Findings from the first Canadian Black Gay Men's Summit—Cultures of Sexuality and Black Men's Health (Giwa, 2010) could provide some insight into why this is so. The summit found that empowering gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (GBTQ) Black, African, and Caribbean men to embrace their own health and wellbeing was critical to their claiming their rightful place as a sociocultural group. However, several factors hindered these healthy processes: lack of political motivation, concurrent political oppression (in the form of institutionalized racism), historical issues of alienation inside and outside the Black community, and lack of trust among GBTQ men. Such factors were seen as hindering GBTQ men's efforts to mobilize collectively against the social oppression of racism so as to forge a collective vision that would address all aspects of their health: social, economic, spiritual, and psychological.

Related to the first point discussed above, a study by P. A. Jackson (2000) on the marginal position of gay Asian men and White gay culture's representation of them, reached a similar conclusion: namely, that there is a pervasive refusal on the part of White gay male and lesbian culture to engage with issues related to racism in the community. According to P. A. Jackson (2000), this refusal is due to "White liberal guilt"—the "fear of saying something untoward or becoming enveloped in debates about the politics of voice" (p. 183). Moreover, he suggested that Whites who choose to actively engage with these topics are often accused of having only a fetishistic attraction to people of color. Thus, ironically, in an effort to avoid being labeled as someone with a pattern of attraction based on racist ideas, many Whites perpetuate the racist representations of gays and lesbians of color through their silence.

In examining if and how interracial relationships influence perceptions of race relations and racism in the LGBTQ community, three salient themes emerged in the interviews. First, interracial relationships were understood to negatively perpetuate community members' perceptions of racism, because of the staunchly held view by some community members that people of color enter into such relationships for economic privileges and social status. Unsurprisingly, speculation abounds about the motives of a person of color in relationship with a White person; unwarranted judgments may be made, and feelings of isolation, exclusion, or rejection by the wider community may result. Second, interracial relationships were seen to involve processes of communication and negotiation between partners as a way to navigate

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the racist and heterosexist environments in which their relationship takes place. Participants who were involved in interracial relationships continued to facilitate dialogue with their partners about sexual roles, stereotypes, and oppression. Third, interracial relationships were perceived to positively influence perceptions of race relations and racism, because they demonstrated that it is possible to transcend the issue of race and racism. Previous research contradicts the latter viewpoint.

Some of the participants in Crichlow's (2004) seminal work on Black heterosexism and homophobia, *Buller Men and Batty Bwoys*: *Hidden Men in Toronto and Halifax Black Communities*, perceived interracial (Black–White) relations as traitorous precisely because Black people engaged in relationships with Whites "cannot fully commit themselves to the struggle for Black solidarity" (p. 162). However, as Crichlow later reported, some of these men were themselves in mixed-raced relationships. It is noteworthy that the participants in Crichlow's study were all Black, whereas in the current study only one of the participants identified as Black. The discrepancy in this finding could be explained by the different experiences of racism, discrimination, and homophobia. It is possible that the combination of racial discrimination experienced within LGBTQ communities by participants in Crichlow's study, coupled with the stigma attached to their sexual orientation within their own racial and ethnic communities, may have led them to speak as they did. For example, such communities may have the perception that same-sex orientation among Black men is a disease of the White man. Moreover, because of a need to protect the disclosure of their sexual identity in their own racial/ethnic community, these men may have chosen to engage in relationships with White men because of White men's perceived social distance from their racial and ethnic communities. In the current study, however, one of the Latino participants with a light-to-pale skin complexion indicated that his integration into the LGBTQ community has been affirmative. He observed that this experience had in turn shaped his view of race relations and racism in the community.

The Discursive Sexual Performance of Difference

A final theme of the study was sexuality. The way in which sexuality was manifested within the Toronto LGBTQ community was to some extent an expression of power. One interviewee, Rogar, mentioned the fact that he had entered into sexual relationships with White men and men of color in gay nightclubs as a "resistance tactic." He shared this information in order to illustrate the way power was displayed in public arenas. He claimed that White gay men were more likely to keep a greater distance between themselves and gay men of color than they were from other White gay

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men. This finding contradicts Takagi's (1996) assertion that in social spaces such as a bar and dance club, men of color may feel pressured to behave according to the dominant culture because these venues cater mostly to the mainstream White gay community. Moreover, where an individual is uncomfortable acting out the dominant culture, he may also feel timid about interacting in this setting (Poon et al., 2005). This discrepancy could be explained by the singular motivating factor of the research participant in the current study who sought to subvert the taken-for-granted power of the dominant race by engaging in similar sexual activities in spaces codified as White.

Another way in which power has and continues to be sexually expressed within the LGBTQ community, according to the interviewees, was through the racist stereotypes evoked by White people and people of color. For example, within the LGBTQ community, certain sexualized partner preferences receive oppressive nicknames. Hao explained:

> There are three terms [gay men in Toronto] use: Potato Queen is for Asian guys who only like White guys, Rice Queen is for White guys who like Asian guys, and Sticky Rice is for Asian guys who like Asian guys.

The popularity of these terms suggests that, with respect to sexual experiences within the LGBTQ community, some racialized sexual minorities are objectified and oppressed through the use of Orientalist terminology to describe partner sexual preferences. Conversely, the use of the term "Sticky Rice" by gay Asian men with each other implicate these men in helping to maintain their own marginalized status.

In a similar vein, another interviewee, Marco, claimed that some immigrants within the LGBTQ community felt forced to seek out financially secure White partners in order to remain in Canada: "Some Latino immigrants have suffered sexual abuse in terms of a charge for housing, food, and/or company. I know a refugee claimant that looked for a White boyfriend as a cover just in case he lost his status." While the careful selection of a White partner as decoy might temporarily avert unwanted gaze and surveillance, the conditions in which some LGBTQ immigrants find themselves predispose them to violence and risk factors that might lead to the contraction of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Under this circumstance, their power to negotiate in their best interest is compromised because of the dependence on the White partner to ensure their survival and stay in Canada. By assigning significance to the White race, moreover, LGBTQ immigrants help to "maintain a reality based on dominant group expectations of what that reality should be" (Han, 2008a, p. 14).

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RECOMMENDATIONS: COLLECTIVE ACTION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

In keeping with the action-oriented goal of critical race theory, research participants provided some recommendations on steps that could be taken to begin substantively addressing the issues of race relations and racism within the LGBTQ community of Toronto. Several participants acknowledged the difficulty of identifying solutions given the perceived general apathy of the community (especially its White members) to the issue. Nevertheless, three salient recommendations emerged from the data:

1. To eradicate racism, awareness and collective mobilization are needed.
2. Culturally representational narratives of LGBTQ-identified people need to be broadened, so as to include affirming representations of people of color that do not subordinate, objectify, or exociticize them.
3. The content of mainstream publications needs to be diversified, to include discussions about racism.

First, it was suggested that many AIDS Service Organizations (ASOs) were building networks with other like-minded agencies in other to raise LGBTQ community members' and service providers' awareness about the diversity within the LGBTQ community in Toronto. Such effort was seen as necessary, especially where service delivery is concerned. Without awareness of the diversity of the community, there is the potential for outreach services to not be delivered in a culturally sensitive manner. The participants further pointed out that one challenge to sustaining a level of concerted action to address racism was the apathy that permeated the LGBTQ community. For example, Samir said: "If people are apathetic then you're beating a dead horse and you can't really do anything about it." Addressing race relations and racism, therefore, requires a commitment from various individuals and community groups and a willingness by the mainstream White LGBTQ community to address its role in perpetuating racial inequality. It is only through working collaboratively that the problem will get addressed.

Second, participants called for a reenvisioning or reimagining of social relations in which historically marginalized groups would no longer be viewed through stereotypical lenses or narratives. For example, Marco said: "We can show a well-educated Mexican living with a White Canadian with a low income. Or . . . a top Asian man and at the bottom a Black man." As these participants suggested, the responsibility to alter the lens through which certain subjectivities are constructed and perceived falls directly on the shoulders of White and non-White LGBTQ community members. For instance, the sexual repositioning of the Asian and Black man is a repudiation of the stock stories promulgated within the White-dominant LGBTQ

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community, in which Blacks are often constructed as tops and Asians as bottoms.

Third, participants called attention to the need for more diverse content within mainstream LGBTQ publications, especially on the issue of racism. Such action could increase mainstream LGBTQ awareness of the problem, moving the discussion from being the preoccupation of a few people to something communitywide. Ultimately, eliminating racism in the LGBTQ community, according to the participants, would necessitate changes being made on individual (i.e., behavior and cognition) and systemic (e.g., more affirming images of racialized people in LGBTQ media) levels.

CONCLUSION

This article explored some paradigmatic concerns perceived as undermining efforts to create a more positive, inclusive, LGBTQ community in Toronto. The themes of race relations and racism were placed at the centre of analysis. It may seem terribly ironic that members of the LGBTQ community, who of all people should know the evils of oppression, could perpetuate it against members of other oppressed groups. Yet, based on the stories that were told and revealed in this article, such is the nature of racism that runs through the mainstream LGBTQ community in Toronto. It bears mentioning that the stories shared here were not intended to dramatize the participants' lived experience. Rather, they give a place from which to begin to understand the complexity of the challenges faced by LGBTQ people of color in predominantly White LGBTQ communities. At the same time, they help create a space for collective action. As one participant, Luis, insightfully noted during his interview, "not talking about racism is not an option." The results of this study support such critical observation and suggest the need for a creative way forward, one that could allow the community to begin the cooperative work of addressing the many issues articulated by participants in this study, especially those concerning race relations and racism.

The strength of this article lies in the tensions, contradictions, and complexity of the participants' narratives of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion from the predominantly White LGBTQ community in Toronto. The preponderance of research on LGBTQ people in Canada has continued to focus largely on White members of the community. Where people of color or race have been included, the model of inclusion was additive. We, therefore, suggests a more complex approach to thinking about race and race relations, one that considers the "interlocking" (Collins, 2003; Erel, Haritaworn, Rodriguez, & Klesse, 2010; Fellows & Razack, 1998; Razack, 1998) relationships of racism and other forms of oppression as a means of addressing the inequities experienced by LGBTQ people of color. Elaborating on our idea of the need for a creative way forward: It is critical that we acknowledge the

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importance of individual and collective activism as crucial to addressing the experiences of racism that were shared by participants in this study.

We share with Kivel (2002) the view that uprooting racism is a collective, social responsibility that cannot be addressed solely on an individual, intrapersonal level. Because we are all implicated in each other's oppression, it will take a collective effort to dismantle the racial barriers that have been erected to divide us, and which manifest in such areas as the "educational, political, legal, medical, housing, and employment systems" (p. 4). In acknowledging the importance of a structural-systemic view of change to confronting racism, the authors believe in the power of an individual's conscious unlearning and challenging of racism to transform society. Individual- or intrapersonal-level change must not be offhandedly dismissed in favor of a system-level change as the only tried-and-true approach to racism. As a society, we must open ourselves to many possibilities for eradicating racism, as change can arrive from many different directions.

With this in mind, what are individual forms of activism that LGBTQ individuals can engage in to address racism? Below is a summary of suggested actions White and non-White LGBTQ people can undertake in their efforts to create a community free from racism and discrimination of all forms, especially those based on race:

- *Get informed about racism.* Understand what racism is and how it impacts White and non-White members of the LGBTQ community alike. By understanding the historical and contemporary ways in which racism is produced and sustained in Canada, LGBTQ community members will gain a more accurate picture of why racism needs to be eradicated.
- *Speak up!* Voicing concerns about racism should not end at an intrapersonal level, but move to the interpersonal. LGBTQ community members need to speak to each other about racism. Speaking up can be done by calling people out on their racist jokes or erotic vocabulary, writing a letter to a local newspaper or magazine, organizing a protest, or talking to an executive director about racism within an organization's structure or policies, or to colleagues on the frontlines. Ultimately, LGBTQ community members need to propel their agency towards eliminating racism and White privilege.
- *Listen.* When community members from ethnoracial groups are speaking out against racism, White members of the community should not write them off as angry or divisive. Respect and support their leadership, perspectives, and experiences. There is a reason why LGBTQ community members of color are frustrated and angry with the current LGBTQ community and space must be created for these concerns to be heard.
- *Get involved.* Getting involved allows for LGBTQ community members among different gender representations, sexualities, abilities, and racial or cultural identities to dialogue and come together. This involvement can

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occur in many different ways including: sitting on a board of directors at a local not-for-profit organization, volunteering at fundraising events, joining a workplace equity union, or getting involved at a local community agency. Such involvement enables community members to come together, learn from each other, develop connections and friendships, and ultimately aid in building solidarity against racism in the LGBTQ community.

At the community level, LGBTQ people enjoy the benefit of having same-sex orientation and gender identity/expression recognized as human rights in Canada, via the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982). The passage of Bill C-389 by the Canadian House of Commons on February 9, 2011, while one step removed from becoming law, affirms the need to extend equal protection to transgender and transsexual people from discrimination on the basis of gender identity and expression. The Charter's recognition has brought about a multitude of legal and social privileges that were once the province of heterosexuals only. Bill C-389's protection of transgender and transsexual people from unconscionable acts of discrimination will go a long way towards ensuring their full equality.

While the appearance of a collective struggle for equal rights has contributed to the LGBTQ community's image as progressive, the systemic, everyday racism that occurs in these spaces promotes the interests of White members as well as individuals whose skin color and physiognomy permit them to pass as White. At the same time, it excludes the material and symbolic experiences of oppression encountered by LGBTQ people of color. Because "the end result of these [exclusionary] experiences is daily acts of violence, oppression, and intolerance" (Crichlow, 2004, p. 45), there is a collective need for LGBTQ people—both White and non-White, but especially those belonging to the dominant racial group—to take the issue of racism more seriously than it is currently, and to make visible the discontinuities within the LGBTQ community in order for equitable social justice to prevail.

In concrete terms, the general tendency of LGBTQ community members and leaders to lump all issues and concerns under the banner of "sameness" leads to the homogenization of LGBTQ people, the result of which is a failure to account for differences among them (Butler, 1991). In seeking a unified, albeit false, view of a community where people share similar life circumstances, differences in the "needs, concerns, and experiences of disadvantaged [racial and ethnic] minorities are ignored yet need to be taken into account in a color-conscious world" (Fleras, 1998, p. 223). LGBTQ struggles, therefore, need to be conceptualized outside of liberal-democratic regimes that centralize the debates within rights discourses and do not operationalize discussions around the systemic privilege of White supremacy and racism. These discourses continue to marginalize and make invisible the struggles of LGBTQ people of color.

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