Introduction

The Black church\(^1\), acting as a liberating agent in the daily struggles of Black people, is cited as being the keeper of culture for the Black community. It is often the first place that Blacks will come to learn values and morals and provides a safe haven from dominant White society. The church’s rich tradition of combating social ills, organizing, and making strides towards self-determination has made it a home for many Blacks. The church’s strong disapproval of homosexuality has left its Black gay members in the hard position of having to choose between who they are and who the church wants them to be. Gays have always been a very visible part of the black church. Their contributions and worship, while appreciated, are hardly ever discussed. Ironically the Black church consciously or unconsciously, has adopted a “don’t ask, don’t tell” position in its approach towards homosexuality.

In the last year our country experienced one of the most colossal political periods. The look of leadership was changing with a Black man and a White woman running for the highest office. And the fight for same sex marriage was at its prime. The effects of this period brought all types of issues to light and inspired even the most apathetic person to get involved. The heightened political climate has pushed gay issues to the forefront of public speculation and as a result created an uproar of emotions. These emotions were evident when the Black church was blamed for the passage of Proposition 8 in California and when actor Isaiah Washington, from the

\(^1\) When referring to the Black church throughout this paper I am not attempting to paint a monolithic view of Black churches but rather implying that Black churches share similar values and approaches toward theology and problems facing the Black community. For a list of the seven major historical Black denominations see Appendix A.
ABC television show *Grey’s Anatomy*, used an anti-gay slur toward a co-star at the 2007 *Golden Globes*. Although Washington has since apologized, stating that the use of the anti-gay slur “is unacceptable in any context or circumstance” and that “I can also no longer deny to myself that there are issues I obviously need to examine within my own soul, and I’ve asked for help,” opposition against homosexuality can be seen in every facet of society. Homosexuals have been and will continue to be the victims of some unspeakable acts of violence, discrimination and disrespect. If you happen to be Black and gay, then the load you bear is twice as heavy. Not fully accepted for their skin color, Black gay people are also not easily embraced by members of their own community.

It is in this context that I have embarked upon this project. My paper seeks to explore the myriad of public opinions on homosexuality and the Black church, using YouTube as my medium for discovering those opinions. While analyzing the larger topic, my paper will look at the historical and contemporary significance of the Black Church as well as heterosexism and how this concept plays out in the Black community. What I discovered is that the Black church operates out of a very conservative stance on issues surrounding gender and sexuality. I will argue that this stance is both outdated and neglects the reality of the population of most Black churches. LGBT people have always been a visible part of the Black church and whether or not church members will admit it, the LBGT presence has always been

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tolerated. However, the more contemporary disapproval of homosexuality has created an “us” and “them” dichotomy, as well as pushed the discussion beyond the church. The larger public dialogue demonstrates that change is inevitable and despite the church’s teachings there are many people who 1) disagree with theological teachings that speak against homosexuality, 2) do not view homosexuality as a threat to either the Black community or the Black family and 3) acknowledge the strife between the dual identities that Black LGBT people have.

In order to understand the current debates regarding the presence of homosexuality, it is important to first understand the historical importance of the church to the advancement of Black people’s liberation from dominant White society. The Black church is arguably one of the most central institutions to the Black community. Providing a crucial element for the survival of African traditions and ideals, the church in its simplest form is a symbol of hope, love and strength for the Black community. According to the authors of *Black Church in the Sixties*, “The black church was one of the few black institutions left relatively free by whites in its development and modification,”\(^3\) and as a result has been shaped by the race and has the unique privilege of being able to address issues that face the Black community with minimal backlash from White society. The Black church’s responsibility stretches further than just providing spiritual nourishment for the Black community. Reverend Jeremiah Wright, Pastor Emeritus and former Pastor of the

Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, is well known for his African rooted spiritual teachings. His congregation prides itself on being “Unashamedly Black and Unapologetically Christian,” serving as both a place of Black worship and a space to address injustices facing the Black community. In Mighty like a River, Rev. Wright lists the goals of the Black church as:

- Commitment to God
- Commitment to the Black Community
- Commitment to the Black Family
- Dedication to the Pursuit of Education
- Dedication to the Pursuit of Excellence
- Adherence to the Black Work Ethic
- Commitment to Self-Discipline and Self-Respect
- Disavowal of the Pursuit of Middle-classness
- Pledges of Community Spirit
- Personal Commitment to Black Value System

From the list of goals we see that the Black church’s first commitment is to God but most of its duties are to ensure the overall well-being of Black people. Described as a nation within a nation by E. Franklin Frazier, the Black church is involved in every aspect of Black life from birth to death.

While the services the church renders have changed with time, from teaching members of the Black community nonviolence as an act of resistance to establishing schools, there is one thing that has remained constant: the intense focus on freedom:

“During slavery it meant release from bondage; after emancipation it meant the right

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to be educated, to be employed, and to move about freely from place to place. In the twentieth century freedom means social, political, and economic justice.”

This is perhaps one of the most significant reasons why the Black church has continued to be a major component of Black culture; it provides the Black community with the hope of a better day, where Black people will be free from earthly suffering. Many Blacks have been drawn to the Black church because of the refuge it gave from a dominant society that left Blacks at the bottom of societal hierarchies. Although a little outdated, Hart Nelsen and Anne Kusener Nelsen’s words in *Black Church in the Sixties* are still relevant to the black church in today’s society, “the opportunity found in the Negro church to be recognized, and to be ‘somebody,’ has stimulated the pride and preserved the self-respect of many Negros who would have been entirely beaten down by life, and possibly completely submerged.”

The intense focus on freedom found in the Black church not only drew people to the Black church, it propelled and lifted the community. Slaves brought to the United States and forced to convert to Christianity embraced ideals similar to that of liberation theology as a way to makes sense of the hardships they were facing. Liberation theology emphasizes the need for justice and social order for the poor and oppressed. Hence we see slaves’ rejection of the White slave master’s Christian teaching of the Bible to justify the enslavement of Black people. Blacks’

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understanding of the Bible led them to see God as redemptive and to believe that he would free them from the obstacle of slavery. Leonard Gadzekpo, author of “The Black Church, the Civil Rights Movement and the Future” states that “the early Black Christians who founded the historic black churches did so by breaking away from white Christian denominations because ‘white society would not tolerate the presence of Blacks as equals in common public worship’. 9 Blacks need for something that was inherently theirs led to the creation of Black Liberation Theology in the mid eighteenth century accredited to Dr. James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore. 10 This theology while informally around long before Cone’s first presentation of the theology focused on giving Black people a language that mirrored their politically forward agenda, included a focus on freedom and stressed the importance of a communal experience with God. 11

During the Civil Rights era the Black church continued to be instrumental in the push toward freedom. The church gave Blacks a place to organize and spread their message; it was often the only place that could hold a huge number of people at once. Blacks did not have to worry about being denied access as often occurred in White-owned public venues. The church also taught skills to the community, such as tutoring Blacks to pass the reading and writing test given to Blacks before they were allowed to vote. The church provided shelter and food to the unfortunate, boosted

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the moral and esteem of the community, and gave hope to the hopeless. The Black church was crucial in building solidarity and cohesion among the Black community while simultaneously doing all it could to support civil rights activism.

The same theme has continued to resound in the Black church as the commitment to equality, justice and solidarity has made it one of the most socially progressive institutions within the Black community. The church has created educational programs that seek to supplement the education students receive in school. In Philadelphia, Bishop Richard Allen of the first African Methodists Episcopal (A.M.E.) church in the world started a day school for children and an evening school for adults. Economic programs have been created that seek to teach Blacks about their finances, investments and how to acquire assets. More recently the story of the Jena 6 stirred up a lot of activism within the Black community. Jena, Louisiana, a town that has less than 4,000 residents, became the source of public outrage in 2006 when six Black boys were arrested and charged with attempted murder, following the racist harassment of these Black students that culminated in a schoolyard fight. The Black community was outraged at the injustice taking place in Jena. Many Black

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13 Problems started to arise after a Black student asked the principle of Jena High School if he could sit under a tree that was known as a hangout spot for White students. The principle told the boy that he could sit under the tree so the boy and his friends sat under the tree. The next day students found three nooses hanging from the tree. It has been reported that the boys who hung the nooses did not know what they stood for and as a result did not receive harsh punishment. It is hard to believe that upper-class high school students do not know the historic significance of a noose. Hanging a noose is a federal hate crime, nevertheless these boys were not punished accordingly. The taunting of Black students continued until one say some Black students decided to fight back, sending the White student involved to the hospital, he was released later that day with only minor cuts and bruises. The six boys ages 14-17 were charged with attempted murder and faced about 20 years in prison for a simple school fight.
churches got involved and raised money to send to the families of the boys in the case. The Black church will forever be an agent of change and hope for the Black community. Always keeping its hand on the pulse of the Black community, the Black church involves itself in the health, education, politics and success of Black people.

Interestingly, when there is a crisis that involves the Black community, everyone is called to do their part. There is no preference given to certain groups of Black people; it does not matter what your education level is, your sexual orientation, your gender or age. Help is help and for that moment the Black community is a collective whole working for the betterment of their own. However, soon after a crisis is over one must deal with the reality that although the church is amazingly progressive in certain matters, that is not the case when it comes to sexual orientation. The Bible says “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling,” (1 Peter 4:8-9) but for most LGBT people the love is only skin deep. The cost of being out in the church is high, full of separation, nasty looks, fake smiles and a lot of tongue biting. The very presence of the Black LGBT person challenges the conservative and at times homophobic nature of the Black church.

To examine the love or lack thereof that the LGBT person experiences in the Black church, it is instructive to look at a prayer from Jeremiah Wright in which God is directly identified with the Black population\(^\text{14}\). What is so powerful about this prayer

\(^{14}\) See Appendix B for A Black Prayer
is that it is directed exclusively to Black people and shows how Black identity is
equated with the image of God. Homosexuals have been accused of not being in
God’s image and of “choosing” an identity that goes against the one God intended
for man, which is that of a heterosexual. While this prayer serves as a source of
strength and recognizes the duty that everyone has to lift as they climb, it does very
little to show the differences within the Black community. The prayer paints the Black
community as monolithic, where all Black people have the same goals, values, beliefs
and lifestyles, which is just not the case. However, the strong alliance within the race
has led many people to reject anything that would tear down that strong foundation.
When examining this prayer one sees that the destiny of Black people is to love God,
themselves and the Black community as God loves them. Where do homosexuals fit
into this equation? It can be said that God does not hate the sinner, he hates the sin,
and therefore the Black church is not teaching hate or intolerance of the sinner (gays
and lesbians) but of the sin (homosexuality). This raises the question of whether or
not homosexuals are only worthy of half the love, because you cannot love the sin,
and whether this can be used as an excuse for the treatment of the homosexual as a
step-sibling. Sexual orientation is more than just a sexual attraction to another
person; it is as important as any other part of a person’s identity and dictates the way
in which society looks at you and the rights that are granted to you. Heterosexuals
are not forced to deal with daily reminders of their “inferiority” because of their
sexual orientation, but unfortunately homosexuals do not have that privilege.
Those same people who stood hand in hand, singing and fighting the injustice that affected all Black people in the 50’s and 60’s, are now being oppressed by their own. Oppression is pervasive and impacts us all. When one makes the decision to take away the light of another, all of our lights shine duller than before. Looking at the goals/values of the Black church as outlined by Reverend Wright, it becomes evident that these goals are more important than the overall inclusion of all Black people in the road to liberation. Keith Boykin, who has interviewed a number of Black LGBT people for his book One More River to Cross, concludes: “Many black homosexuals seem to want nothing more than to be full members of the black community, and many already consider themselves to be so.”\textsuperscript{15} For the Black LGBT person, liberation is linked to their whole identity, not just the Black or gay side. Just as it is not possible to separate being Black from being human, it is equally impossible to separate being Black from being a member of the LGBT community. The Black LGBT person constantly has to re-define his or her spirituality in order to fit in with the only community that s/he has known. It is essential to bear in mind that while not all Black people are homophobic and not all agree with the oppression of homosexuals, they all must take responsibility for how they directly or indirectly contribute to these oppressive forces.

One way to see how people contribute to the forces that seek to either liberate or oppress LGBT people is through their participation in dialogue about the

topic in open spaces. The church is a confined space in which there is an
overwhelming amount of pressure to conform to the majority’s thoughts on
homosexuality amongst other topics. However, outside of the church and more
specifically on YouTube, there is more freedom of thought.

Methodology

YouTube is the number one video site in the world; it is used for
entertainment, recreational pleasures and most marketing efforts. YouTube is a
phenomenon that has made a large impact on our culture and challenged people to
think of how they view the power of multimedia outlets. From its creation in
February 2005, YouTube has been a favorite of internet users young and old for its
ability to easily upload and share videos with the rest of the world. Operating in more
than five languages, YouTube has gained success by making video sharing one of
most popular pastimes in today’s internet driven society. The brain child of three
PayPal employees, Chad Hurley, Jawed Karim and Steve Chen, YouTube received its
big break in November 2006 when Google Inc. purchased the site for $1.65 billion,
making it one of the most expensive purchases of Google Inc. to date.\textsuperscript{16} Today, on
average YouTube streams 24 hours worth of videos every minute.\textsuperscript{17} The Nielsen

\textsuperscript{16} The Associate Press. “Google Buys YouTube for $1.65 Billion.” \textit{MSNBC}.
<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15196982/>

\textsuperscript{17} Janko Roettgers. “YouTube Users Upload 24 hours of video every minute.” \textit{NewTeeVee}.
<http://newteevee.com/2010/03/17/youtube-users-upload-24-hours-of-video-every-minute/>
Company ranked YouTube number one in “U.S Online Video Brands, Home & Work” reporting that the site had 5,914,160 video streams in February 2010.18

YouTube’s myriad of videos has also made it a popular website for use in academia. Institutions like Pitzer College in California introduced a course called “Learning from YouTube” into its curriculum in 2007. YouTube EDU, new to the YouTube family, offers accredited universities the opportunity to apply for a channel on which professors can upload lectures and other materials for anyone to learn from.19

Described as evoking a “participatory culture” by authors Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, YouTube provides its users with the space to narrate their own cultural experiences and political ideologies, giving life to their own conceptions from the convenience of their home in a free and easy to use forum. Through the process of posting, consuming and commenting on clips, YouTube users are constantly engaging in and challenging difference. This creates the possibility of having a global discourse on discussions that may have not been presented to them otherwise. YouTube serves as a modern day diary for many of its users where they are free to engage in struggle, acts of empowerment, and self-expression. The videos have the power to shape and change the perspectives of millions.

19 YouTube Edu <www.youtube.com/education>
In an effort to be unbiased in my choice of clips, I started with the *Black Church Summit 2007* clip. It was a logical starting point because the *Black Church Summit* brought together people from all walks of life to discuss the presence of homosexuals in the Black church. The summit raised the question of whether or not God loves us all (homosexuals and heterosexuals) equally. Eloquently spoken and dynamic in its message, the summit urged the Black church to take on a spirit of inclusion and fight homophobia within the Black community. After viewing this clip, I chose others from the list of relevant clips on the right side of the page. I also searched “homosexuality and the black church” in the search engine. This method allowed me to view a plethora of clips addressing this topic from a variety of perspectives.

Through my analysis of YouTube it became evident to me that there is a grassroots movement to challenge the traditional teachings of the church on homosexuality. Through viewing clips and the comments that people made on the clips, I can see the ways in which YouTube has changed the way we will discuss this topic by opening up who is involved in the conversations and similarly by giving people the freedom to say whatever they want. My analysis will mostly focus on opinions that demonstrate the progression of thought away from the conservative position of the church. Nevertheless, I will include opinions that are more in line with the church’s position, especially the more radical opinions.
The major themes are 1) Conformity: clips that speak either directly or indirectly of people who have been “delivered” from homosexuality and as a result live a heterosexual lifestyle. 2) Identity: clips by homosexuals who express their thoughts on being Black and homosexual, heteronormativity and religion. And 3) Theological Justifications: clips that discuss the church’s role in either supporting or combating homosexuality within the Black community.

**Conformity**

A great number of clips dealt with conformity. The most interesting are the clips in which people describe how they were released from the “bonds of homosexuality.” In a three-part clip entitled *Same Sex Attraction*, a woman by the name of Dr. Ronda Johnson shares the story of how she was freed from the homosexual “spirit” that ran through her family for generations. What is shocking was not the fact that she lived as a lesbian for 15 years before her change, but how she was changed. Dr. Johnson describes going through a depressive state which led her to begin to attend church. She recalls praying during a fasting period, asking God to change to her if she was not living a life pleasing to him. After a violent encounter with her girlfriend she attended Sunday church service with her mother she says that the pastor called her out during service, telling her that God said she was ready. The people around her started to lay hands on her as the pastor walked toward her: “that demon was like a cat in a bag trying to get out, and I could feel it way down in my stomach and it was just going. And the closer he [the pastor] got, the higher it got to
where all of a sudden my mouth popped open.”20 Whether or not an event like this can actually happen, it is exasperating that homosexuality is viewed as something that needs curing. Painting it as a problem that can only be solved by divine intervention implies that homosexuality is a deliberate action that a person takes against the will of God.

While Dr. Johnson’s story represents an individual case of conversion there are many ex-gay ministries and organizations that claim to assist in the “healing” of homosexuals to live as heterosexuals. Most organizations claim that by introducing those struggling with their sexual orientation to what God really says about homosexuality and various therapy methods they will help them find God’s grace and true plan for their lives. Instead of encouraging the family of the homosexual person to provide a loving and supporting environment, they stress the importance of remaining firm in the stance that homosexuality is not only sinful but that it must be changed.

Exodus International, a non-profit multi-denomination Christian organization, has charged itself with “challenging those who respond to homosexuals with ignorance and fear, and those who uphold homosexuality as a valid orientation.”21 As one of the largest Christian organizations addressing this cause, Exodus International has over 200 ministries throughout the United States. They provide people with help to live a life of “wholeness,” claiming that the bottom line is that you don’t have to

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21 “Who We Are.” Exodus International < http://www.exodusinternational.org/content/category/6/24/57/>
be gay and can live a life far better. From books, national conferences, DVDs to links to camps, and other resources for people to use to cure their homosexuality. Exodus International and other organizations like it instill fear and shame in the hearts of many homosexuals leading to a suppression of their sexual identity not necessarily a change of orientation. LGBT people are faced with homophobia on numerous levels from governmental policies to community values. Thus, LGBT people struggle with accepting their identity in a positive manner. The personal conflict they face can lead to internalized oppression, more specifically internalized homophobia (IH). IH refers to LGBT people who internalize negative cultural and social messages about what it means to be a LGBT person. IH can lead to unhealthy and at times destructive behaviors. LGBT people may blame themselves and seek ways to fix their sexual orientation in order to lead a more socially acceptable life.

Their ingrained belief that homosexuality is sinful makes them more susceptible to conversion therapy. Similarly, the bullying and isolation experienced by many LGBT people accounts for why gay youth are 2 to 3 times more likely to attempt suicide than other young people. The rhetoric and treatment of homosexuality as a disorder is completely unfounded. There is no scientific research to support the idea that conversion therapy will make someone not gay.

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22 “Thinking of Leaving Homosexuality?” Exodus International < http://www.exodusinternational.org/content/view/327/147/>
Homosexuality is no more of a disorder than heterosexuality is. The American Psychological Association does not view homosexuality as a choice that a person makes nor does it think it can be voluntarily changed. They go on further to state that conversion therapy does not work, “the reality is that homosexuality is not an illness. It does not require treatment and is not changeable.”\textsuperscript{24} Despite this, those who lobby for conversion continue to push their message of change and hope to thousands of teens.

Most famous for this in the Black community is Donnie McClurkin, a very successful gospel artist who has sung for President Obama and received praise from Oprah. Within the last few years McClurkin announced that he suffered with his sexual identity for the last 20 years.\textsuperscript{25} He has since re-dedicated his life and considers himself delivered from his homosexual orientation. Proud of his “ex-gay” status McClurkin has made it his mission to help other people live a life he deems as pleasing to God. His influence over people within the Black church is by no means minor. YouTube Clip \textit{Donnie McClurkin Gets Real Part 2 and 3} looks at a speech the singer and now pastor gave addressing the youth at the Church of God in Christ 102\textsuperscript{nd} Holy Convocation. During his speech he talked about his struggle with sexuality and finding himself (sexually) through other men within the church. By sharing his story he wanted to break and destroy the curse of the “enemy” that he feels has infected


so many of today’s youth, homosexuality. He called all young people to “run now” to the front of the church where he would lay hands on hundreds of teens who stood crying and praying with raised hands towards the God that Donnie McClurkin said would deliver them as He did for himself.

In between his moments of speaking in tongues, McClurkin told the congregation how important it was that as an elder he testifies to the youth. He constantly referred to homosexuals as being broken and argued that parents enable the curse of homosexuality by making excuses and accepting the youth for who they are. Overall, the clip told the young people who were at the conference and those watching from home that the only way to ensure the preservation of their souls is to repent and ask for forgiveness. He framed homosexuality as a naive act plaguing young people, which is both insulting and makes it seem as if one does not have a full grasp of what they like and do not like until they are “older.” Yet, there is no definition given of when one is old enough to know, which implies that there is never a time to be homosexual. His perspective neglects to take into account homosexual people who believe they are born with a predetermined sexual orientation. He never addresses the idea that God could have created people as homosexuals. Maintaining the stance that homosexuality is decision a person makes only feeds the biased and excluding behaviors of Black heterosexuals who feel as if acceptance does not have to be extended to LGBT people because they have chosen this “lifestyle” for themselves. And as McClurkin pointed out in reference to Tonex, “I can’t condemn
Tonex, I got to love him but I must tell him the truth’ meaning homosexuality is wrong and those who live as homosexuals are doing themselves and the rest of the community a disservice.\textsuperscript{26}

Tonex is an internationally successful gospel recording artist who has climbed music charts with his fun, soulful music and ostentatious performances. In the YouTube series \textit{The Lexi Show (Tonex) Parts 1-3} Tonex shares his story of love, loss and truth. When discussing his attraction to men there is a clear difference between his sentiment and those of other leaders within the Black church. Instead of characterizing his sexual orientation as a struggle, he firmly states that it is not something he has struggled with nor is it something that he has felt the need to label. The second difference is how he framed the molestation that he faced as a young child (sexual abuse was a recurring theme in all of the mentioned clips). Dr. Johnson and Donnie McClurkin both stated that the acts of sexual abuse they experienced had a bearing on why they had same sex attractions. In the case of Dr. Johnson, she mentioned having relations with men but always being attracted to women since she was a child. After a bad incident with a man she decided to embrace the feelings that she always had for women.\textsuperscript{27} Donnie McClurkin had two incidents in which he

\textsuperscript{26} “Donnie McClurkin Gets Real Part 2.” \textit{YouTube}. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b3PWB4aDSHU&playnext_from=TL&videos=jIJY1JYLMCs>

\textsuperscript{27} “Same Sex Attraction # 1.” \textit{YouTube}. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3-SCTOuBnw&playnext_from=TL&videos=pE5Z2ITyBNNk>
suffered sexual abuse, at the age of 8 by his uncle and again at 13 by an older cousin.28

Tonex, on the other hand, did not see it that way: “yes I was molested, true [...] however, I’m not blaming those situations on the choices I made later [...] I take ownership.” His statement was particularly profound because unlike many of the clips that I found by people in ministry, he did not cite molestation as a cause for homosexuality. While there are many people who for one reason or another find it easier to be with a member of the same sex due to a traumatic experiences such as rape, it is by no means every gay person’s reality.

Those who find the courage to embrace their homosexual identity and reject the idea of conforming to a heterosexual life find themselves facing a different set of challenges. In Tonex’s case his career has severely suffered because of his sexual orientation. He is now finding that his once controversial but accepted music is now being shunned by Black church members. Dr. Johnson and Donnie McClurkin’s stories of transformation may give hope to some but for others it furthers feelings of loneliness and depression. It continues to push homosexuals to a place where they feel the need to conform in order to avoid the hostile and often estranged relationships with families and friends, who see them as perverted and sinful.29


A Worldwide Discussion of Conformity on YouTube

Same Sex Attraction

Between the three clips in the Same Sex Attraction series there were 6 comments and 960 views. According to the information posted on the clips the series is most popular among males 13-17. Despite the lack of comments on these clips there were two comments that I found particularly interesting. One of the comments posted by millionairediva said, “I really needed to see this...I am currently struggling with my sexuality and I want to be delivered from this sin of homosexuality...good to see that there is hope.” The other comment posted by mistertrevor did not agree with the clip. He expressed that:

The church needs to accept the fact that 1. Homosexuals will be homosexuals 2. That a “deliverance” message only perpetuates self-destruction and depression 3. That people who do not live with same-sex attractions cannot possibly minister effectively to those who do. Condemnation and rejection only alienates homosexuals from church when there are scores of other sins that run rampant among the congregants and have for generations. Love thy neighbor as thyself and let God do the rest!

Interestingly, the publisher of this video post, who is also the host of the television program on the clip, chose to only comment on millionairediva’s comment, saying “That is precisely why I had these 2 guests. They have lived that lifestyle for many years and now they have made the choice to allow the Holy Spirit to set them free. They are living proof that God is still able to set you free from anything (sin). There is

30 “Same Sex Attractions #3” YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQrzAWz5I4&feature=related>
31 “Same Sex Attractions #3” YouTube
no condemnation involved - only conviction by the Holy Spirit.”

This struck me because most of the clips that had comments were posted by other people. Rarely did the author respond to the comments people made. I would have liked to see her respond to mistertrevor because it would have provided her with an opportunity to reach an audience other than people who share her views. Another element worth mentioning is the use of the word “lifestyle” by YouTube users. When this word is preceded by homosexuality it connotes an alternative orientation than that of heterosexuality that one chooses for his or her self. Lifestyles are adapted by people and thus can be changed at any point such as living a healthy lifestyle. Using “homosexual lifestyle” sustain thoughts that homosexuality is not an orientation that people are born with. It can further imply that at any point homosexuals can choose to be heterosexual, providing just the justification needed to withhold equality.

“Lifestyle” is an inadequate and inappropriate description for homosexuality however, many YouTube users employ the word without full comprehension of the weight that accompanies its use.

Donnie McClurkin Gets Real 2-3

Between the two clips in the Donnie McClurkin Gets Real series there were 811 comments and over 53,390 views. According to the information posted by YouTube, the clips were most popular among males 35-44 and females 35-54. The discussion that has grown out of these clips can be easily sorted into two categories:

32 “Same Sex Attractions #3” YouTube
those who agree and those who disagree. Most of the comments that expressed an opposing view had a sympathetic tone for homosexuals who watch this clip and feel bad about their identity.

*JaydeeVonJ* (Pennsylvania): Once someone starts telling someone that the way they are is wrong because they don’t believe in it is when one is crossing over into someone’s (my) world. I’m not going to go into a holy debate but this is our world. We shape what happens in this world. So many people say this Gods, Allah’s, Vesta’s, Vishnu’s, Ba Xian’s, Hathor’s or Ra’s world. Who is right? In the end it is our world. We control what happens. We sign bills and laws, we go over seas and kill others. I wish people could just learn to love themselves and accept themselves for who they are. Many feel the pressure from their peers and parents and society to change because they think it’s not normal. Many things aren’t "normal" in this world. Until people learn that people are just people, we’ll continue to attack gay people and constantly tell them that we don't like them because we don't agree with them. It’s all bull poo.³³

What is unique about this comment is JaydeeVonJ briefly touches on the issue of validity and truth. There are more religions in the world than we can count. And for the most part they all believe that their religion is the ultimate truth. Although there might be acceptance of the fact that there are different religions there seems to be a lack of concern when it comes to imposing ones religious convictions upon another who does not share the same religion. Just as we interpret religious text and use it to shape our beliefs, we as JaydeeVonJ says create legislation and are ultimately in control of granting equality to people. JaydeeVonJ’s liberal views were not shared by everyone like those by ForeverFearlessMe (Jamaica): “Get Real. You can try to persuade yourself and the people around you as much as you like. but what is wrong is wrong. I used

<http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments&v=b3PWB4aDSHU>
to have this stance that I didn't mind their human beings it's their choice but now I sometimes wish God did not give this choice."  

Similar thoughts shared by *lilwilly07* and *JJay479* express gratitude and support to Donnie McClurkin for sharing his message of change.

*Lilwilly07* (USA): God Bless you sir, I was too delivered from the bondage of homosexuality. I had to come to acceptance that the Lord loved me but at the same time he wanted me to STOP doing what I was doing. It had nothing to do with not being accepted I could care less it had to do with my Spirit/Soul not being at peace while I was doing what I was doing! God's Word is his word and I have to accept it for what it is! (1 Corinthians 6:9)

*JJay479* (Sydney, Australia): Donnie is spot on, God didn't create us to be gay so that He could send us to hell! As a result of being abused the natural feelings we are supposed to have become distorted therefore perverting it then thinking you are created to same sex...Praise God Donnie brought up a topic which seems to be taboo in the church yet sooo common..60% of families suffer from incest and sexual abuse. Donnie is not making any excuse He is being BOLD and touching on where no one else seems to want to go!

*JJay479* spoke about abuse in his comment, a direct response to a comment Donnie McClurkin made about his sexual abuse as a child. The author claims that sexual abuse blocks natural feelings of heterosexuality leading the victim of sexual assault to an “unnatural” life as a homosexual. This statement first assumes that all homosexual people were at some point sexually abused. It must then also assume that heterosexual people who have been victims of sexual abuse also resort to homosexuality, which is not true. The use of sexual abuse as a cause of homosexuality is misleading and there were many viewers who not only agree with this idea but also doubt Donnie McClurkins’ conversion:
SylviaCalhoun (Florida): at the end of the day, if u were raped by a man and didn't like it, u would naturally want a woman....point um tryna make is i feel he was already attracted to men before he got touched, so he uses it as a crutch.....nevertheless I don't approve of a grown man touching no child period.37

Kevseb66 (USA) @sylviaCalhoun: Mr. McClurkin wants the public to believe his gayness is a sickness passed to him due to gay sex superimposed upon his otherwise heterosexual feelings. I seriously doubt it. He's frustrated & angered cause his gayness hasn't disappeared & he's taking it out on gay people. It would make better sense if his energy was directed toward ministering to others who have survived sexual abuse instead of fixating on homosexuality.38

This particular theme of discussion is progressive in the sense that for many it is uncomfortable to speak about sexual assault. And for those who are not victims it is even harder to find ground upon which to comment on something as personal and emotional as sexual abuse. Discussions of sex and sexuality in general are at times hard to find within the walls of the church. Thus YouTube, as well as the public forums, is providing a place for people to question and engage in topics that some churches may find difficultly in discussing freely.

Lexi Show (Tonex) Parts 1-3

Between the three clips in the Tonex series there were over 4,000 comments and 411,215 views. According the information posted by YouTube, the clips were most popular among males 35-44 and females 35-54. Viewers of this clip did not express much support for Tonex, although many of them seemed very familiar with his work prior to him coming out. Some went so far as to say that they knew he was gay all along despite his marriage to a woman for 4 years. A few people commented

38 “Donnie McClurkin Gets Real Part 2,” YouTube.
on Tonex’s honesty like marcusrobinson (California): “wow this is the realist interview I’ve seen from a gospel artist ever...Thumbs up!” Yet instead there were a great number of comments that expressed hostile attitudes toward Tonex.

*bis2saydat*: Tonex just leave the gospel world alone... just like I believe about secular artist and folk like Steve Harvey; do you... but don't come around us and expect our financial support or otherwise when you don't espouse our ideology... when are we going to get tired enough to say, "enough is enough".... a whole lot of folk are going to hell because true believers won't take a stand... come on people... we can at least tell the truth and not be indicted by the likes of Tonex because he's talented.

*Olajidew*: Very soon pedophile and [sodomy] bestiality people will start coming out to say God made them that way. That they were born a pedophile so they can't help their sexual preference. Zoophiles would be saying the same. Every bad behavior or sin will be shouting for acceptance. I sing and preach the word of God does not mean God honors me as a person, no God only honours his infallible word.

*Daballitition @BobR1955*: God ain’t make Tonex gay...That was Tonexs’ choice. How can God make something that He considers an Abomination.

*klimaxxx06*: I remember when it was ok to call a sissy a sissy...these are the last days...this stinks in God’s nostrils..FAGS in the church runnin wild. Lord have mercy.

It is discouraging to know that there is no place in the gospel world for LGBT people who stand strong in their identity, according to bis2saydat. Tonex’s understanding of God has not changed since embracing his attraction to men, neither has his commitment to his faith. Yet according to Olajidew his religious convictions are enough to gain respect from the rest of the church community. Nor is it enough to

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<http://www.youtube.com/comment servlet?all_comments&v=Yg5EhnbZqkA>

40 “The Lexi Show (Tonex) Part 2,” *YouTube.*
<http://www.youtube.com/comment servlet?all_comments&v=Yg5EhnbZqkA>

41 “The Lexi Show (Tonex) Part 2,” *YouTube.*

42 “The Lexi Show (Tonex) Part 2,” *YouTube.*

43 “The Lexi Show (Tonex) Part 2,” *YouTube.*
receive honor from God, in 1 Samuel 2:30 God says “…those who honor me, I will honor […]” is Tonex not honoring God be dedicating his life to using his talents to praise God? Nevertheless the angry and hostile comments continued, there was one person who commented a few times on why he feels the church needs to accept all people. While he was not alone in his thoughts he was one of few who continued to engage in conversations with people who disagreed with him. His willingness to participate in often extended dialogues with his opposers shows the potential of YouTube as a platform for discussion and education rather than just a destination to view videos.

*Kumtekmeon:* I am not surprise at your association of my words to demons. JESUS too was labeled of Beelzebub BECAUSE He acted outside of man's established doctrines! You are fighting for the continuation of HATRED toward gays. You enjoy reading how 12yo kids commit suicide because their own treated them like sub-humans, because they are tortured by their peers in school etc. You enjoy reading how women are being put through corrective rape: You have a strange love! God is for those who obey his will! "The Lexi Show (Tonex) Part 2," YouTube.

*Kumtekmeon @rfrf101:* I REFUSE to sit by and allow you homophobic Pharisees to use your manly doctrine to hurt another gay soul! For centuries the church has turned parents against their children, encouraged self-hatred, low self-esteem, suicides, attacks, murders all in the name of MISINTERPRETATION! Well like Abel our blood has CRIED OUT from the ground and God has risen a new standard. God is for ALL THOSE who believe! Your works will not take you into heaven, LOVE is what will do so. Go pray for some!!!

Many LGBT people feel like they do not have a home within a church. They experience pressure to remain in the closet or change their orientation. For those who find solace in their personal truth it can be very lonely, as is the case for Tonex.

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It is hurtful to know that the only reason a church may seem welcoming is to minister to you in hopes of saving you from the homosexual “spirit.” Overall the discussion surrounding conformity continues to evolve as new people chime in with their perspectives. From most of what was found the people who comment on YouTube clips generally believe that through prayer, repentance and fasting a person can rid themselves of homosexuality. There does not seem to be much interest in the conversion therapies pushed by organizations like Exodus International. They cite the Bible as the source for their beliefs and are at times hostile if not threatening to those who support and are LGBT. Nevertheless, there are those who do not subscribe to those ideas and through replying and creating their own response videos, are engaging in an interesting discussion on conversion tactics, acceptance and the role of religion in homosexual’s lives. They address the topic in more sympathetic tones and urge people to look at the issues from an equality and civil rights stance. Thus while YouTube has given these viewers a place to chime in on conversations that are similar if not the same as discussions taking place in society.

Identity

Identity is probably the most encompassing of all of the themes that I found in the YouTube clips. If asked many people will say that their sense of identity is very important in their personal success and happiness. For gays and lesbians being able to embrace their identity in its totality is essential to their survival and sanity. But

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46 In Same Sex Attraction Dr. Rhonda Johnson refers to homosexuality as a spirit that she rid herself of.
even this is taken away from them as they are encouraged to remain invisible, second class citizens by those who claim that they are abominations and will be sent to hell. Pastor Darryl L. Foster, from the clip entitled *Homosexuality and the Black Church*, which looks at homosexuality from the perspective of 3 church leaders, took a similar position to Dr. Johnson (from the *Same Sex Attraction* clip), stating that a gay person would need to be changed in order to live a life pleasing to God. Having found out that Pastor Foster lived the life of a gay man for over 10 years, it is ironic that he holds the most conventional stance on homosexuality while his counterparts took a more liberal stance. His statement perpetuates that belief that gays will only experience the grace of God when they repent, creating a feeling of unworthiness and low self-esteem among gays and lesbians who believe that to be true.\(^47\) The all-too-common argument that homosexuality is “not of God” fails to appreciate the diversity God created in the world and has provided people with an excuse to not acknowledge the LGBT community: “the church for the most part has made no attempt to understand them [homosexuals]; along with the rest of society, it has viewed them with great contempt, closing its doors to them, failing to recognize them as children of God.”\(^48\) The Black gay person can never find complete comfort in being a member of a church that believes that their identity is demonic, and as a result this religious experience that was supposed to be liberating and fulfilling becomes a mixed blessing.

Rev. Deborah L. Johnson in the *Black Church Summit 2007* clip previously mentioned, says that “it does something to the soul to hear that your very presence is satanic and that you have no right to exist.” Nevertheless, this is the reality of many Black gays and lesbians. As their Black identity is belittled by White society, their homosexual identity is equally demonized by the Black community. This mentality within the Black community is slowly destroying the spirits of Black gays and lesbians. They are misunderstood and ridiculed by other Black people who should be able to relate to the feelings of not belonging because of something they cannot change, seeing as Blacks have often been ridiculed for being black which is something they also cannot change. Michael Eric Dyson in the same clip said: “Black people’s heterosexuality has been rendered symbolically queer in a dominant White supremacist society. We should be the ones most able to identify with queer folk because we’ve been queer from the get-go.” Dyson is referring to is the way in which Black people have been portrayed by dominant society. Since as far back as slavery there has been an attack on Black people’s sexuality.

The attack on Black bodies enabled Whites to break down the Black psyche, exploiting, and humiliating both Black women and men while putting a greater emphasis on the superiority of Whites. Thus we see the rise of a variety of images like the mammy, jezebel, and the welfare queen, which all seek to regulate Black maternal behavior. The Jezebel may not be as obvious as the other two in terms of

49 “Black Church Summit 2007”, YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXHFAlzj2Gw>
50 “Black Church Summit 2007”, YouTube.
51 “Black Church Summit 2007”, YouTube.
motherhood but a Black mother who is also seen as a Jezebel is seen as being unfit because of her extracurricular sexual activities. She was thought of being so concerned with men that she could not focus on her children. The counterpart of the Jezebel is the image of Black men as being oversexed out of a need to keep up with Black women. Not much later came the stereotype of Black men having an abnormally large penis. Such a stereotype reinforced notions of Black men’s sexual aggression and proficiency. This hypersexualization has fed White women’s fears, nurtured rape myths and been used as an excuse for lynching.

These negative portrayals of Black people as sexual deviants have impacted the Black community in such a manner that we are still dealing with the stigmas of having our sexuality publicly dragged through the mud. Kelly Brown Douglas, like many Black scholars, notes the significance of understanding White people’s role in creating the current state of Black people when it comes to addressing matters of sexuality. In her book *Sexuality and the Black Church* she says, “it is clear that the intrusion of White culture upon Black sexuality has interfered with the Black community’s ability, in the main, to freely engage sexual concerns.” This distorted view of what is proper has greatly disabled the Black community from effectively addressing its sometimes homophobic attitudes, making sexuality the “last taboo” in the Black

community.\textsuperscript{54} Angela Davis characterizes homophobia within the Black church in terms of responding to White oppression:

\begin{quote}
The fear of homosexuality perpetuated by the church is related to a generalized fear of sexuality. This fear of sexuality takes on new meaning when considered in light of the fact that the freedom to choose sexual partners was one of the most powerful distinctions between the conditions of slavery and the postemancipation status of African Americans.\textsuperscript{55}
\end{quote}

Understanding the Black community’s relationship to white imposed sexual morals provides a clearer picture as to why the Black community is often thought of as being extremely homophobic and at times downright unwelcoming to homosexuals.

The Black community is by no means any more homophobic than any other community. However, the emphasis in the Black community on freedom made it necessary for Blacks to position themselves in any places that would give them privilege. The main area available to them was to enter heterosexual relationships, and marry. Thus, not only have White images of Black sexuality affected the way the Black community addresses sexuality in general, but they have shaped how the Black family is viewed. The family structure is the place in which people are expected to be taught morals and values, so to accuse Black people of being sexually deviant is to suggest that there is something inherently deviant about the family structure. In order to combat the attack on the Black family, the Black community adopted White


familial values. The adaptation of these values neglected the unique structure of the Black family due to the absence and distance of members which dates back to slavery.

The traditional nuclear family is defined as mother, father, and children who all live together in their own home with the father as the breadwinner and the mother responsible for maintaining the care of the children and the home. This definition neglects to acknowledge not only gay and lesbian families but Black families where the extended family is just as important as the immediate family.

Acceptance of White family values eroded the family structures that Blacks had relied on for years to ensure their survival.

This association of deviance is another reason why preserving the family structure is such an important task for Black people. Cheryl Clarke argues that homosexuality poses a threat to “the continued existence of the heterosexual family, because homosexual unions do not, in and of themselves, produce offspring – as if one’s only function within in the family [...] were to produce offspring.”\(^{56}\) The truth is that heterosexuals are very capable of ruining their own relationships. Furthermore, there are millions of heterosexuals who for one reason or another do not produce offspring. There are a lot of things that can be blamed for the failure of heterosexual family structures other than homosexuality. Furthermore, people make choices every day and those choices are what lead to destruction. The Black community has

attempted to rid itself of all things that are deemed evil and immoral. They have advocated White family norms in hopes that their family structure would make them more acceptable to White society. This tactic is problematic because it neglects the uniqueness of Black families and rejects Black homosexual families.

Homosexuals are not a threat to any family structure and acknowledging and accepting their families does not mean homosexuality will “spread” and “infect” the masses. There is no doubt that the Black family structure has changed over the years and this change has undoubtedly included homosexual families. The family structure is the foundation upon which character, values and lives are molded. If we strengthen that then our whole community grows stronger. The Black church has played an important role in maintaining and encouraging the family. In moments when there are issues surrounding infidelity, unemployment, and economic hardships, Black people have always had the Black church to rely on. The church has rendered services and guidance to bring its members out of these hard times. It is imperative that gay and lesbian families have access to these services. The church needs to engage itself in a discourse that will empower and celebrate the diversity of family structures present within the Black community. They must learn to distinguish the people from their sexuality.

All of these factors makes the identity of Black LGBT people a complicated one. Most people find it hard to see past the sexual aspect of the relationship shared by same-sex couples. The church sees any form of sexual activity outside of marriage
a sin, making homosexuals guilty of sinning on a number of levels since they are not granted the right to marry in most states. Homosexuals have the hard task of combating the idea that their sexual identity is all about sex. The making of the homosexual identity is full of strife, strides and creativity. It is almost impossible to peruse YouTube on this topic and not find clips by homosexuals about homosexuals, defining their identity on their own terms and in their own words.

Zulumaster, in her clip titled *Religion and Homosexuality Poem*⁵⁷, showed just how complicated and sometimes confusing it is to be a lesbian. She discusses how religion has been used by so many people in her life as a scapegoat to cover their embarrassment of her. The poem draws a picture of how lonely and it is when everyone turns their back on a person because of their sexuality. There is a part of her poem in which she talks about reliance on scripture in the disapproval of homosexuality:

> My mind is reflecting me through rainbow colored eyes
> Still everyone is the color of darkness
> And they want me to hide too
> They’ve built a system and called it King James they want me to abide too
> But I can do God without YOU

Her words reflect the many gays and lesbians who feel like they have to go outside the church to find their personal relationship with God. Towards the end of her poem she discusses that it would be the easier and more desired choice of others around her to not be gay but she can only choose to be herself. The struggle of embracing one’s identity when it contradicts the one everyone around you is emotionally taxing.

⁵⁷ See Appendix C for full poem
to say the least. The church’s position on homosexuality has turned away many people who feel as if their identity is being attacked when they go to church. The church does not want people to be homosexual however they want LGBT people to attend their services. No one wants to put themselves in an uncomfortable situation, but for gays to have a church life they have no choice but to attend.

*Young, Black and Gay in America Parts 1-2,* posted by Xem is another clip whose focus was on gay identity. Xem categorizes his clip as a commentary on the state of the Black gay community which he delivers to his audience by looking at everything from AIDS to the ballroom scene. His clip starts by talking about the hard tasks of having to choose if you will come out of the closet or not. He makes the point that heterosexuals do not have to make those types of decisions. For this reason heterosexual people will have a hard time fully understanding what homosexuals go through to exist. His commentary also discussed the very widespread debate on whether or not homosexual people are “born that way.” He believes that they are and to say that people choose to be gay makes no sense to him because “no one chooses to be ostracized and ridiculed.”

Xem shared his memories of sleepless nights in the 8th grade praying to God to take his desire for men away. He stated how he went out of his way to be with women even though he was not born with that attraction. There are copious clips that mimic the same sentiment of homosexuality not being a choice. Out of all the clips that were watched for this project there was none published by a homosexual
person that said they chose this sexual orientation for themselves. In fact most
expressed concern over the opinions that people used to explain homosexuality such
as the opposite sex parent’s absence from their life. In the case of Xem he talked
about having a loving relationship with his mother and father, in which he spent a lot
of time with his father.

Xem believes that by not providing welcoming spaces for people to embracing
their sexuality the chances that homosexuals will fall into a dangerous lifestyle
increases because they are searching for the acceptance they are not getting from
their communities. He goes further to cite the high numbers of Black men suffering
from HIV, an epidemic that in his opinion is happening because they do not have a
support system to guide them in the right direction. Xem’s clips shares a lot of
personal narratives that he uses to discuss larger issues.

One of those issues being gay marriage Xem expressed his desire to marry
and share his life with someone. He, like many people, finds it unsettling that gay is
always used a precursor when speaking of same-sex marriage; he preferred simply
“marriage.” E. J. Graff in, What is Marriage For? describes marriage as a social battle
ground in which the rules are constantly being redefined to fit each culture, era, class
and economy.58 Marriage was once seen as the only legitimate circumstance in which
procreation could take place. We have since moved away from sex being just for
procreation to sex as mainly recreational. Marriage is not necessary for sexual

intercourse so there has to be something to keep people interested in marriage.

Today that focus for the most part is love, marriage has become a public way for two people to express their love and commitment for one another. If the validity of marriage is judged solely on love then gay and lesbian couples should be able to marry and express their commitment to each other. However, that is not the case and many gay and lesbian couples must resort to private displays of commitment or “civil unions” because gay and lesbian couples are not acknowledged by our government as legitimate couples. Most of the opinions on Xem’s clip viewed LGBT couples and families as being just as valid as heterosexual relationships.

A Worldwide Discussion of Identity on YouTube

The Black Church Summit

On this clip there were 118 comments and 9,057 views. According to the information posted by YouTube the clips were most popular among males 35-44 and females 45-54. The discussion that has grown out of this clip was very interesting in the sense that there was a lot of anger expressed. The most appalling comment was left by TruthHurtzAllDaTime (USA), in regards to Rev. Deborah Johnson, who said:

Isn't it amazing that this self-righteous nigger slave thinks she has the right to quote a misinterpretation of the ancient Egyptian scriptures by white supremacists who are still oppressing us today? Go ahead because you're a prisoner to white supremacy and the Ashkenazim. You are not a servant of Christ Consciousness. 59

This comment is confusing because it speaks of the originality of the Bible which many Bible scholars argue has been mistranslated from its original Hebrew translation. But this author neglects the fact that many people believe that the Bible as a whole is a mistranslation and accuses Rev. Johnson of not being well versed in the Bible and misinterpreting it. The Bible is just a text so it cannot be misinterpreted, people misinterpret the text. And who is to say that Dr. Johnson’s interpretation is not the truth and TruthHurtzAllDaTime is mistaken? Truth is personal and subjunctive, and since science has discounted religion on many levels religious truth lies in the heart of the believer.

In all the comments posted by this particular author never does he/she share their theological training but discredits the Reverend’s theological background as being invalid because of her views. Furthermore there is much to be said about a person who still refers to Black people as “niggers” and uses anti-Semitic references both of which are not necessary to get a point across. While YouTube provides a place to express a person’s thoughts, comments like the one above pushes one to think about whether or not YouTube is helping to create meaningful, productive dialogue or providing people with a screen to hid behind and a result keeping them stuck in their own boxed perspectives.

A rather long conversation started between two YouTube viewers who had opposing views on this clip. While this type of dialogue is not out of the ordinary, it is
interesting because of the length of the conversation. Quite different from blogs where participants are encouraged to leave thoughtful and provoking comments. YouTube users are free to comment whenever and how much they want therefore most people do not engage in extended conversations. In this particular conversation the authors grow frustrated with one another and instead of simply stopping they go on arguing. The conversation goes on for a couple of pages yet finds no real conclusion:

SouthernGent55 (USA): You obviously are ignorant of the truth of The Word of God. My simple question to you is this: If God condemns homosexuality, and He clearly does, how can a mere man justify this deviant and sick behavior? [...]60

MarvelousMarQ (USA): Deviant and sick behavior? Wow, you went that far? I assume you do realize that a majority of the leaders, evangelists, singers and such in the church today ARE homosexuals, right? Or do you have the selective holy ghost and [...] refuse to see the truth61

SouthernGent55 (USA): Yes, deviant and sick behavior! Furthermore, your statistics are severely lacking as the "majority" of ministers, etc are not homosexuals! I do believe however, that in Pentecostal churches such as COGIC, holiness churches, and the charismatic movement has many sissies and pimps in them! So I will give you that, but the vast majority of ministers that I know are for real and authentic!62

MarvelousMarQ (USA): Wow, so angry. Hopefully you are this angry at the fornicators, adulterers and those who have children outside their marriage and don’t forget the men who pay for their concubines to have abortions so the wife and the church doesn’t find out. It amazes me that black men especially are so hateful toward homosexuals under the guise of "what the WORD says” [...] Praying for people is better than hating them.63

SouthernGent55 (USA): But who’s angry and hateful? The gay community has latched on various wordind so as to garner sympathy and compassion, and therefore, when

anyone simply says marriage is between one man and one woman for life, we are then called "haters", "intolerant", and "angry". No, I think not! I think that there are millions of people around the world that love the God-ordained institution called "marriage". We love what God did, and will stand firm against a perversion of marriage. We don't hate anyone!64

MarvelousMarQ (USA): [...] Perversion of marriage?" That is going a bit far when over 50% of marriage ends in divorce. How about all the reality shows that mock marriage? Are you saying it is ok for heterosexual people to mock marriage because they are heterosexual?65

SouthernGent55 (USA): You sound just like gay people. Yes, for homosexuals to get married, that would constitute a "perversion" of what God purposed as He alone has the authority to define what marriage is and He has! While it is true that marriage for some has fallen on bad times, it doesn't change anything in terms of what God intended and purposed for the human race. Gays cannot be married in the sight of God, plain and simple. you're not going to change God's mind as He is unchanging and immutable.66

MarvelousMarQ (USA): Lol now I am accused of being gay because I choose NOT to belittle people but to show love and let God do the work He sent His Son Jesus to do through me? Wow, well you know what all I can do is let God be the judge between you and I. I don't debate the Word of God nor will I use my time to show negativity toward people who I know NOTHING about. God is YET in control- no matter what anyone else says. I just pray when you stand before God that you stand before Him with clean hands. Be blessed.67

SouthernGent55 claims in response to MarvelousMarQ that homosexuals do not make a large majority of church goers. He limits their existences to spaces he deems as having welcoming attitudes such as the Church of God in Christ, however COGIC is also the church that Donnie McClurkin belongs to where he spreads his message of repentance and change. At the least uninformed in his statement, he goes on to further insult LGBT people by calling them “sissys“ and grouping them in the same category with pimps. Due to the nature of the business pimps are involved

64 “The Black Church Summit 2007.” YouTube.
in they receive little to no respect from people. There is no correlation between pimps and gay people. As a group they do not deserve to be categorized as “unreal and inauthentic” as SouthernGent55 states.

MarvelousMarQ urges SouthernGent55 to realize that there are far worst people in the world. Instead of paying any real attention to these topics of acceptance brought up by MarvelousMarQ, SouthernGent55 only looks for opportunities to rebut and discredit; when that does not work for him SouthernGent55 results to accusing MarvelousMarQ of being gay just because they do not see eye to eye. This excerpt is significant because the two viewers touch on a variety of subjects yet neglect to go into depth on any of them. So while both parties may have successfully gotten what they wanted to say on the screen neither are successful in invoking change or even deep thought in the other person.

Homosexuality Poem

There are 246 comments and 23,628 views on this clip. According to the information posted on the clips were most popular among females 18-34. Unlike many of the comments posted on the other clips in this category, the author participated a lot in the conversation. This gives the viewer more of an insight into who the author is. Most times the audience is not given any information on the author, unless you visit their “channel” and even that may contain no information.

Lyricist4Christ1 (USA): One poet to another: I dont like it. y would you write about that. not tryna to bring you down, but God never meant for anyone to be gay. who ever raped who is just as wrong as the person being gay its all sin, but no one is
perfect, everyone sins, sometimes without even knowing it. But there is a difference in messin up & just rollin around in sin [...]  

zulumaster (Michigan): if u were truly a poet and knew what that meant then u would know ure comment on someones self expression was ignorant. first of all i never been raped, im simply tellin the story of a reality that happens everyday. Why would I write about this? Yea you truely couldnt be a poet. You dont have to like it. Thats the point. No one does. For you to believe you know what the Lord wants for my life right now its blasphemous. So you should definitely check yourself. This is my work. Listen or Don’t.  

In many circumstances the information that authors post on the clips, especially artistic pieces are assumed to be based upon the experiences and/or opinions of the author. However, in this case Zulumaster clarifies the use of rape in her poem. Zulumaster’s work is being critiqued and even though the critique is not in a positive matter she has the opportunity to rebut the critic and even explain her work. In other forms this process may take longer or not even happen. Another set of comments that were interesting dealt with Biblical authority and knowledge. Meaning that to some people there are certain things that you should know if you read the Bible and follow its word. Zulumaster embarked on this topic through a series of comments with Hfcm 2155 here is part of the discussion:

Zulumaster (USA): If you only read the Bible for your research then you arent too much of a researcher. Once u have researched the origin and can translate passages from hebrew then u can talk to me about what it is I should believe. B/c everything passage that condemns homosexuality was never written the way you see it. So YOU do YOUR research and when you find the truth come back to me and we will talk about it. Because this mind already knows. I have already done my research. thanks come again when you have.  

70 “Religion and Homosexuality Poem.” YouTube.
Hfcm2155 (USA): Not only can I translate it from hebrew but from greek translation it is all says the same thing, its not the translation its about us coming in line with it. I guess you think I’m picking on you and I am not sis. The bible was translated to english for the sake of the english king. It all says the same. even if you read the torah since you big on hebrew’ God condemn homosexuality. I want to see what your reading and let us compare. Roman chapter 1 was A/D and Revelation 20:8 A/D was the last book of judgement and came out of the mouth of JESUS CHRIST. 71

The conversation between these two spanned more than 20 comments which for YouTube is a remarkable because it shows dedication on both parties. Since YouTube viewers are not forced into interaction with the material posted on the site, most people will post their comment and then move on to the next thing that catches their interest. Yet this particular conversation took up more than two pages and even drew the attention of other viewers as they posted comments in response to issues brought up in the conversation. Several of the comments received passive feedback through the “thumbs up” and “thumbs down” buttons.

Translation came up over and over in many of the YouTube comments. The ability to translate the Bible from its original language to English is an indicator of educational status and in most instances a reason to command respect. Since there are no educational requirements to participate in discussions, viewers have seemed to create their own unwritten hierarchy of status. Most of the hierarchy is based upon a person’s knowledge of the Bible. For example it becomes impressive that a person has knowledge of the Bibles original language or can cite scriptures. Even the use of words that demonstrates an extensive vocabulary gives a person move status. In other arenas these things may not be as impressive yet on YouTube you are only as

71 “Religion and Homosexuality Poem.” YouTube.
important as you post so boosting up the comment make be the difference between
it being overlooked and receiving feedback from other viewers.

Similar to the importance of context it is also significant to examine the
construction of the comments. The majority of the comments are poorly written,
ignorant, make claims without any supporting evidence and in most instances are
grammatical nightmares which makes them hard to follow. Considering today’s
texting culture where it is appropriate to abbreviate words and shorten thoughts it is
not completely surprising that the same rules have been extended to informal spaces
such as YouTube.

Young, Black and Gay in America Parts 1-2

What is most interesting about this series is the response it got back from the
YouTube viewers. The clips got 86,400 views and over 400 comments. The filmmaker,
Xem received an overwhelming number of comments from people expressing their
love, concern and admiration for him. They were all very encouraging, which was
surprising because on other clips that I watched where gay men talked directly to the
camera, the results were different. On those clips they would often get negative
feedback and people would criticize their ideas, but this was not the case with Xem.

yaywhewclips242 (USA): I'm 43 (not young), WHITE and gay. It's a tough road for
anyone. Try being a gay single and NOT being a spring chicken w/ washboard abs and
bubble butt! Thank GOD I have sort of supportive parents (they know I'm gay but
don’t want me to flaunt it) my sister is the most supportive. I tell my straight co-workers: “It’s easy to be gay and it’s hard to be gay.”

denisethepainter (LaFrance, Canada): If you were my son, I'd be very PROUD. You are who you are & this must be celebrated. Anyone who fails to recognize your merit as a human being is not worth impressing in the 1st place. Hold your head high and be proud of the man you've become.
Sincerely-Denis LaFrance, Canada

estudantedefacu (Brazil): Congratulations, man. Besides being beautiful, you’re smart and sharp. I’m from Brazil and the same thing happens here. Good to know you are proud of yourself and that you know how to hold your head up high. And, yet, you don't fall into naïve selfish statements revolving around "me, myself and I". We need to be together as a community whenever we can. Best wishes from Sao Paulo.

mancheeks64 (Pamona, CA): Very well done sir. I have favorited these videos in hopes that I could take time to, first remember to watch, then watch them. And I am so happy I did both. You give me hope in my young black gay community. I am a 45 black, gay man who has a deep love and concern in my heart for my "babies" as I like to call you guys. Much love. Your a fine example for others.

Why is he so accepted when the ideas that he expressed are essentially the same ideas that other people expressed: acceptance, understanding and inclusion without judgment? After watching the clips a couple of times it became evident that Xem represents the norm: he is educated, well spoken and very laid back. Xem’s clips had the most civil comments out of all the clips I watched. People seemed genuinely concerned for his well-being both physical and spiritual. Part of this the way he appealed to his viewers that made a great number of them refer to him as “son” or to express the pride they would have if he was their son. His videos are personal and did more than complain about injustice, he shared his life with his viewers. His

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72 “Young, Black & Gay in America Part 1.” YouTube. <http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments&v=g9cL9VmLHU>
73 “Young, Black & Gay in America Part 1.” YouTube.
74 “Young, Black & Gay in America Part 1.” YouTube.
75 “Young, Black & Gay in America Part 2.” YouTube. <http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments&v=ihNJKLcBlnY>
vulnerability and transparency increased his ability to gain acceptance from viewers.

The characterization of gay men as being loud and very flamboyant was not Xem at all. His calm nature even earned calm comments from people who disagreed with his views:

msneashaj (USA): “Hello son how are you? you are a well spoken young man and I’m not mad at you but my take on homosexuality it a choice just like almost everything in life the devil is out to deceive the minds of people having them to believe what they believe is the truth but its really a lie, your not born gay its a spiritual struggle like everything else in life I’m not judging you but just telling the truth, the devil is out to destroy. 1 Timothy 4:1 please read this is in love”

1995mzbrent (Kansas City): “man what i feel about gay people is im not going to judge them you know let them be who they are you know dont tease them becuz u dont know what happen to them never judge them you know i not tryin to be rude or to be offensive gay is the wrong way to live G.O.D donsent like it not saying he dosent love you he loves us for who we are but you know he just dosent like our ways and the way we live G.O.D didnt make adam and steve or madam and eve its supoose to be adam&eve or its hell time"

At first glance some people would not consider Xem gay. His views and appearance is not overwhelming or imposing, making it easier for people to overlook his sexual orientation. When Black gay men vogue, dress flashy or use gay lingo, people are turned off by them instantly. They see them as going against the standard set for masculinity, making them a threat. Another way to conceptualize this is to look at the lesbian. The fem’s (feminine lesbian) sexuality is seen as merely a part of her. She is not trapped in any one community; she can easily pass for being a heterosexual woman and more often than not is not a victim of hate crimes because her femininity does not fit the stereotypical look of a lesbian. The fem is more than

76 “Young, Black & Gay in America Part 2.” YouTube. <http://www.youtube.com/comment servlet?all_comments&v=ihNJKLcBinY>
77 “Young, Black & Gay in America Part 1.” YouTube. <http://www.youtube.com/comment servlet?all_comments&v=g9cLK9VmlHU>
capable of operating outside of the gay community, as opposed to the stud or more butch lesbian whose sexuality can be seen through her masculine mannerisms and clothing. The stud is often ostracized and considered the black sheep of the heterosexual community along with the feminine man because she is seen as rejecting womanhood which no doubt includes motherhood. Because women are seen as bearers of culture and the mothers of civilization, to identify as a lesbian sometimes wrongly implies a relinquishing of maternal responsibility. Therefore acceptance for the lesbian is much harder than gay men whose gender renders them a certain amount of privilege.

These categories make fitting in hard for Black gay people. Acceptance should not be given to a person based upon their ability to fit into a box labeled normal. Many gay people believe that they were born the way they are and they did not choose to be gay. Thus, they do not see themselves as being abnormal. Their mindset directly conflicts with the church’s teachings on homosexuality because it brings up either one of two situations. One, either God is a God who does not make mistakes and has made homosexuals the way he wanted. Or two, there was a mistake made along the way, making God a little less perfect than people think. Whatever the case may be, homosexuality challenges the very foundation of the Black church and our very patriarchal society.
Theology

Most people who take an oppositional stance on homosexuality cite the Bible for their disapproval. This is a battle that the homosexual, no matter how versed in the content of the Bible, will never be able to win. Interpretations of the Bible leave homosexuals in the hard position of having to be in either constant defense mode or hiding their sexuality for the sake of acceptance. Peter Gomes in *The Good Book* reminds us that “the bible wasn’t set out to be a textbook of morals and philosophy and political economy. We have placed that burden on it, quite foreign to its nature.” Mr. Gomes makes a very valid argument yet there continues to be people who follow the Bible as a literal reference as to how they should live their lives. The best example of the use of scripture in the church’s fight against homosexuality is displayed in the clip entitled *Homosexuality and the Black Church*. This three-part clip featured Pastor Darryl L. Foster of *United Church of God In Christ*, Rev. Dr. Kathi Martin of *Victory Church* and Rev. Dennis Meredith of *Tabernacle Baptist Church* (all located in Atlanta, Georgia) and discussed their views on homosexuality and religion. As I mentioned before Pastor Foster, a former homosexual, believes that homosexuality is wrong as stated in the Bible. Dr. Martin and Rev. Meredith held more liberal views, Martin a lesbian and Meredith the father of a gay man.

Rev. Meredith quoted John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have

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everlasting life.” He makes the point that “whosoever” is inclusive of all people, including homosexuals. Dr. Martin shared a similar opinion, stating that we are all made in God’s image and thus allowed in his house. Pastor Foster welcomes gays in his church, stating “the doors of a church are not to be policed.”79 He soon followed by saying when one accepts God the rules change and it is about what God wants, not what we want. Suggesting that at some point homosexuals will need to change their sexual orientation.

While a great deal of their discussion surrounded issues of inclusion, the comments suggest that viewers were most interested in the group's discussion of scripture. This discussion - though focused on some of the more popular scriptures in the bible - demonstrated the difference of views within church leadership on scriptural meanings. There are many church leaders who see the Bible as a living document in which the stories should be applied to today’s society. Those people may be more prone to following the Bible more literally than others who see the Bible as a historical document in which it should be a reference for life not to be followed word by word. Dr. Martin found it interesting that certain scriptures are discussed and taught while others are not. She argued that much of the scriptures cited in the fight against homosexuality have nothing to do with homosexuality and more to do with things specific to that time, like Sodom and Gomorrah, which she said is about being hospitable. Rev. Meredith argued that Jesus did not deal with

79 “Homosexuality and the Black Church” YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uoFKvVmlCA&feature=related>
homosexuality; we have projected these ideas onto Jesus out of our own homophobia. Pastor Foster countered by urging them to realize that using the argument that Jesus did not say anything about homosexuality allows us to come up with our own rules about things. Isn’t a large part of the religious experience creating a personal relationship with a higher being? If it is then wouldn’t it be important that people examine the sacred text and draw their own conclusions about what it means to their lives? If that is the case there should be more fluid guidelines used when learning and teaching from the Bible.

Pastor Foster continued to reiterate a very structured way of looking at religion. One in which there is no room for exploration and questioning, painting religion as a top-down experience where people cannot effect change, which is just not true. Black religion in general has undergone many changes and just as Black people adapted the ideals of Black Liberation Theology there has been the creation of other theologies that help to express the experiences of Black people, such as Womanist Theology. There needs to be room in the church for various perspectives, all of which should be given the same respect when analyzing the Bible and its meanings.

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah is often at the center of discussion on the Bible and homosexuality. Some people argue that this passage deals with homosexuality because the word “Sodom” is closely related to “sodomy,” which means anal or oral copulation with a member of the same or opposite sex.
Theologically the word Sodom carries no weight and to go back and forth with linguistic debates are a waste of time. Regardless the religious correlation made between Sodom and sodomy leads people to see the burning down of Sodom and Gomorrah is seen as being a result of the homosexual activity that took place. Some theorists have argued that the story actually has very little to do with homosexuality. One argument is that the real sin is abuse and disrespect against strangers. In *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality*, Dr. Helminiak states that “the sexual assault only serves to highlight the wickedness of the townspeople […] the people are condemned for their meanness, cruelty and abuse.” Secondly, the term “homosexuality” did not exist during that time period; we see the emergence of this as a popular term during the 19th century. Moreover, the 1611 Kings James version makes no mention of homosexuality. The first use of the term is in an English Bible is in the Revised Standard Version in 1946. Other passages such as Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, also cited when talking against homosexuality, are seen as being relevant in that particular cultural situation.

Nevertheless, scripture can be used to justify a position on almost everything and is not always valid in every situation. A prime example of this is the use of the Bible to justify slavery. Fredrick Douglas, a slave, described a situation in his 1845 autobiography in which his slave master converted to Christianity and then “found

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82 See Appendix D for a list of some of the most common scriptures cited for dissent against homosexuality.
83 See Appendix E for list of common scriptures used to justify slavery.
religious sanction and support for his slave holding cruelty’.\textsuperscript{84} Scriptures like 1 Peter 2:18-29, which tells slaves to accept the authority of their masters, and Exodus 21:20-21, which discusses appropriate punishments for slaves, have not vanished from the Bible. According to the Bible, slavery was a popular practice and is not condemned. We have taken it upon ourselves to remove these passages from our theological teachings. Reverend and Professor Peter Gomes argues that the text in the Bible has remained the same however our hearts and the way we interpret the texts has changed. He says that our moral imagination allows us to translate those teachings into more acceptable images for the world we live in. Similarly, there are passages in the Bible that speak to the subordinate position of women; very few of these passages are taught in abundance. Women often account for more than half of church populations. Many women hold senior level positions and show caution in delivering messages of subordinance. There are times where messages of submission may be appropriate like in relation to their marriages and personal relationship with God. Still telling women that they are less than men is an outdated concept. Just as those scriptures are dated the same can be said for scriptures that speak against homosexuality.

\textit{A Worldwide Discussion of Theology on YouTube}

\textit{Homosexuality and the Black Church 1-3}

This series of clips featuring the three church leaders from Atlanta, Georgia got 63,418 and 948 comments in total. The comments on these clips were pretty similar to each other. They were mostly from people who believed homosexuality was a sin and expressed that view through the use of the Bible. Those who did not quote the Bible were vile in their disapproval.

Upyonder416 (USA): two pastors of satan. i pray that the clay drop from your eyes. the two are you are leading some of gods people to hell. in the name of jesus christ stop it.85

The few comments that did show some sort of sympathy and or concern about homosexuals were shut down immediately such as flik4fun’s (USA) comment that was given bad reviews by other viewers:

If everything should be followed to the letter; then in our world their should only by men pastors and preachers, and women should sit down and be silent. everything else that exists today that opposes the letter should be X’d out and we should go back and set up our world system off of a system that is 3000+ yrs old. Hebrews Ch. 8 vr. 7 – 1386

Another example of this pattern of attack can be seen in the multiple comments following londondawg’s (London) statement on his experience as a gay man:

Whats worse: 2 men, loving one another, working hard to live a fulfilling and loving life with their friends and family, because they were born attracted to the same sex. OR people who think it is okay to murder, kill, rape, abuse one another over a matter of opinion. I only pray the lord would show everyone that we exist from nature and that he loves us all equally. It would wipe the smiles off of all of you and then we’d see who would need to repent for their sins!87

85 “Homosexuality and the Black Church Part III.” YouTube. <http://www.youtube.com/comment Servlet?all_comments&v=a8ChCIzc2a4>
86 “Homosexuality and the Black Church Part III.” YouTube.
87 “Homosexuality and the Black Church Part III.” YouTube.
Londondawg simply wanted to make a point that many LGBT people make, that their love has the ability to be as genuine, selfless and committed as heterosexual couples. Viewers responded to his comment with contempt and frustration. Most said that both scenarios are equally as bad; others recited scriptures to him but one viewer thought that his views were imposing and expressed it by saying the following:

supahdupahguy81 (United Kingdom): jheez...........¬_¬ It’s these type of arguments that dont do u any favors, instead of just defending ur right to choose a particular lifestyle, u try 2 polarize the debate by giving an extreme moral comparison 2 try & portray your lifestyle in a good light. This is the point where u move from defending ur lifestyle 2 imposing it on others through passive-agressive statements, THIS is what pisses people off. I couldn’t care less what u do in privacy, just dont force ur lifestyle on others...

This viewer’s comment promotes silence; he/she feels that if a homosexual person talks about his/her life he or she is trying to impose homosexuality upon them. Heterosexuals talk about their lives all the time their lives are the narratives of book, movies, television shows and the list goes on. Yet londondawg did not respond by saying heterosexuals are imposing their lifestyle on people. His message was not full of bad intentions he, like many others, wanted to show that there are worse things in life than the sex of the person you love. Supahdupaguy81’s comment furthers the feelings of LGBT as second class citizens, who are to be seen but never heard, acknowledged but never accepted.

88 “Homosexuality and the Black Church Part III.” YouTube. <http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments&v=a8ChCIZc2a4>
Conclusion

If gays cannot see themselves inside of the church, where does that leave them? Where are they to go for their spiritual enrichment? The black church has been shaped out of the oppression and injustice of people. But is it justice just for a few? Liberation theologies like Womanist Theology use the unique knowledge of Black women to interpret the Bible in ways that empower them and furthers their understanding of God from their marginalized position. Womanist theology allows women to give voice to their own experiences and create community. Using their marginalized position as way to gain strength Womanist theology challenges patriarchy inside and outside of the Black community, looks at issues of sexuality and gender and concerns itself the daily realities of Black people. 89 If one of the main aspects of Black liberation theology is the re-interpretation of existing texts to support the success and equality of people, why are we choosing who gets support from the text and what criteria are we using to provide affirmation, justice and love? Re-interpretation continues to happen as is the case with Womanist theology therefore it can happen again.

YouTube shows the progression of thought that is taking place all over the world when it comes to the Black church and homosexuality. More importantly, it allows voices that may have been silenced within the walls of the church to actively participate in the discourse. The use of YouTube also invites people outside of the

Black community to voice their opinions, which is a significant step when their voices are often seen as threatening, biased and having no authority to speak on issues dealing with the Black community.

One critique of YouTube that I have is that since it is fairly new, there is a clear generational gap present in who post clips on the website. In an attempt to compensate for this generational gap, I thought it would be interesting to see if the progressiveness that I found on YouTube can also be found within the church. I had the opportunity to speak with two people who both hold leadership roles within different churches, Donte Wright and Thelma Jefferson. Despite the generational difference between the two (Wright in his early twenties and Jefferson in her early seventies), there was not much difference in their views toward the church and homosexuality. Both thought that the church does not address the issue of homosexuality to the extent that it is needed; Wright went on to say, “we need to learn how to talk about it.” Jefferson mentioned the hypocrisy within the church when it comes to homosexuality, stating that the church may not teach what the church does, hinting at the presence of gays in leadership positions in some churches. When this same topic of gay leadership was brought up through the comments on YouTube it was quickly dismissed as being a lie. Is it that people are in denial of how prevalent homosexuality is within the church or are the LGBT people within the

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90 As requested, Thelma and Donte are pseudonyms
church silencing their sexuality to better fit into an environment that is not accepting?

In many instances both of the elements can be at play.

When asked how they address homosexuality in their own ministries, Jefferson answered that the only thing she can do is tell them (homosexuals) what the Bible says, then they have to make their own decision. She encourages homosexuals to settle the issue with God: “he [God] understands faults more than I can.” Wright, on the other hand, preferred to address homosexuality on a more personal level: “Homosexuality is much better dealt with on a one-on-one basis.”

Acknowledging that some members of his congregation are gay, he wants everyone to feel welcome. Wright is sure that everyone knows his position on the subject, which is that homosexuality as stated by the Bible is not acceptable.

The most interesting question was whether or not they perceived homosexuality as a threat to the Black community and family structure. Wright said that he did not think that homosexuality posed a threat to the family structure: “It is irresponsible to put the blame on others.” He went on to say that heterosexuals are more than capable of hurting the family structure on their own. Jefferson took a different approach on the threat of homosexuality to the Black community, focusing more on Black men on the down-low. She thought that Black men’s fear of being rejected if accused of being homosexual led them to participate in down-low activities. She later challenged down-low men to stop being “cowards.” Jefferson’s

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91 Down-low is a term used to describe the behavior of men who do not identify as homosexual or bisexual but engage in secretive sexual relations with other men.
concerns surround the high numbers of AIDS/HIV among Black women. She thought that part of the reason for such high numbers is that women trust men not knowing that some of these men are having unprotected sex with other men: “because we cannot be open and honest we’re killing each other.”

The stigma placed on men on the “down-low” is problematic because not all black men participate in a down-low lifestyle neither is this situation extremely new. People have been sneaking around having sex with people of the same sex for centuries. It is safe to say that this has become a media driven phenomenon from segments on Oprah to movies and books.

The down-low man has been stereotyped as irresponsible, greedy and promiscuous. He is used as the scapegoat to portray Black women as helpless victims. It is neither fair nor accurate to blame down-low men solely for the high numbers of HIV/AIDS among Black women. Additionally, it is hard to even address the subject of down-low men because they are not easily traceable. The men who have written books about the subject can no longer be seen as living a down-low lifestyle, because people are now aware of their interactions with other men. Instead of trying to figure out who is participating in a down-low lifestyle and who is not, we should focus on the presence of sexual dishonesty, high risk sexual behaviors, ignorance and homophobia within the Black community as a whole. Demonizing the character of down-low men does not put us any closer to creating a comfortable space for men to admit that they have been living a down-low lifestyle. This demonization coupled
with the church’s heterosexual affirming practices and theology does very little to combat the homophobic climate within the church.

Communication is the only chance we have of tearing down the walls of homophobia in the Black community. While YouTube is a much needed step in expanding and including silenced voices in the conversation it alone will not solve the problem at hand. Conversations on YouTube are stifled by the culture of YouTube, the comments are not indicative of and real awareness of current social events shaping the LGBT community nor is there a complete comprehension of what it feels like to be an outsider in a place that is supposed to be a home for the Black community. Moreover, YouTube speaks to an environment where the process of participation is just as/ if not even more important than what is said and how it is presented. Gaining something from the material on YouTube is not the goal of many viewers. They post comments and reply to people, but very seldom do they ask questions in hopes of learning from another person’s perspective. Instead the goal seems to be to share their opinions as much as possible. If people are listening only to speak are we really gaining anything from the discussions on YouTube? Yes, there is a movement away from tradition teachings of the church but now the concern should be how this movement will sustain itself on forums like YouTube where there is no structure and no incentives to remain engaged.

YouTube is only a baby step in the type of discourse that needs to take place inside and outside of the Black church to eradicate walls of privilege and alienation.
We as a community can no longer just say it doesn’t matter and proclaim to love people just because it is the godly thing to do. Our lies fool no one; they keep us trapped in a box of denial and our own self-hate. The Black community’s ideals about sexuality have been so socially ingrained that we fail to see our similarities through the difference; faces of superiority masks the fears keep Black heterosexuals and homosexuals divided. We must challenge the powers that normalize heterosexuality while putting others at a disadvantage. We need to help parents of homosexual children to understand and accept their children for who they are so our Black families can stand strong. The world is already a lonely place; no one should have to go through it without their family. The Black church should stress the importance of homosexual children being able to be open with their parents out of love. We must help to eradicate this notion that homosexuality comes as a result of bad parenting. It is simply not true and no one should have to bear that cross.

Moreover, the church must create an atmosphere that allows gays and lesbians to embrace and claim all aspects of their identity. Since most of them have been hurt by the church they must be healed by the church. We must start to affirm rather than condemn. Taking on the true spirit of Jesus would empower gays and lesbians to realize that they are who they are supposed to be. Homosexuality is by far the least of our problems. When we acknowledge that gays are people too, they cry, they bleed the same blood as everyone else and their love has the possibility to be as selfless, genuine and other centered as heterosexuals then we will be able to tackle
some of the other problems facing the Black community. For too long the struggle to be seen as normal, worthy and authentic has plagued the LGBT community. Black gay people should be able co-exist peacefully in the church and feel like God loves them equally. In a perfect world they would be able to see themselves in God and love themselves fully because of his presence. The God that shines in them is what they will be judged on instead of the sex of the person they love.
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