

Understanding the Intersection of Race and Sexuality through Shame and Pride: A Qualitative Study with Sexual Minority Adolescents

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BACKGROUND: Shame and pride are the primary emotions experienced due to salient social identities (Tracy, 2016). Previous research suggests shame is associated with negative well-being among sexual minority adolescents (SMAs); while pride is associated with positive well-being (McDermott, 2015; Woodford et al., 2014). However, no research has studied how feelings of shame and pride emerge from the intersection of having a sexual and racial minority identity.

METHODS: Life history interviews were conducted with a racially diverse sample of 36 SMAs to understand experiences of stigma related to their sexual minority identities. Interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to inductively understand how the intersections of race and sexuality contribute to feelings of shame and pride. Five researchers independently open coded the transcripts and then met to collapse codes into themes and subthemes.

RESULTS: Three major themes, each with subthemes, emerged as methods to reduce shame and increase pride: disconnecting, balancing, and connecting. Disconnecting occurred to avoid feelings of shame stemming from racial community rejection and stigmatization. Balancing sexual and racial minority identities were used to reduce shame and increase pride. Connecting helped increase self-esteem and reconnection to their racial community.

CONCLUSION: Sexual minority adolescents of color filter perceptions of their sexual identity through their racial lens, which may contribute to feelings of shame. Participants engaged in strategies to protect against feelings of shame by disconnecting from their racial identity, balancing their racial identity with their sexual minority identity, and cultivating deeper connections to their sexual minority identity.

Understanding the Intersection of Race and Sexuality through Feelings of Shame and Pride: A Qualitative Study with Sexual Minority Adolescents (SMA)

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BACKGROUND²⁶

- Moore (2011) argues gender and sexuality norms are also shaped by the historical oppression and marginalization of racial/ethnic minorities in America by influencing **respectability** among people of color.
- **Respectability**: Individuals who hold an ethnic or racial minority status feel responsible for uplifting their communities by strongly adhering to social norms (Moore, 2011).
- **Borderland Theory** (Anzaldúa, 1987): Racial and ethnic minority individuals have to negotiate conflicting realities; i.e., their actual identity vs. society's perceptions of their identity. Society's perception of minority individuals can be limiting, inaccurate, and stigmatizing.
- Sexual minority people of color negotiate the visibility or invisibility of their sexuality based on the perceived repercussions.

BACKGROUND

- Shame and pride are the primary emotions people feel about their social identities (Tracy, 2016).
- Shame is a profoundly painful emotion that causes the bearer to feel wholly flawed, unwillingly exposed, and unworthy of connection to others (Lewis, 1992; Tangney & Dearing, 2002).
- Pride is a beneficially uplifting emotion that causes the bearer to feel successful, socially valued, and motivated to cultivate further feelings of pride (Tracy, 2016).
- Shame and pride are associated with negative and positive well-being, respectively (Fredrickson, 2013; Lewis, 1992; Tangney & Dearing, 2002).

AIMS/QUESTIONS

Aim: To understand how sexual minority adolescents of color experience shame and pride in relation to their sexuality.

Question: What social and psychological experiences contribute to feelings of shame and pride among sexual minority adolescents of color?

Demographics

Table 1		
<i>Sample Characteristics</i>		
	<i>n or M</i>	<i>% or SD</i>
<u>Age</u>	<u>16.27</u>	<u>1.38</u>
14	4	8.33
15	12	25.00
16	11	22.92
17	13	27.08
18	4	8.33
19	4	8.33
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	19	52.78
Female	17	47.22
<u>Sexual Orientation</u>		
Gay	12	25.00
Lesbian	7	14.58
Bisexual	13	27.08
Pansexual	8	16.67
Asexual	1	2.08
Other	7	14.58
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>		
Latinx	19	39.58
African American	7	14.58
White	12	25.00
Asian	10	20.83
Mixed or other	13	27.08

METHODS

- Life History interviews
 - One location
 - Lasted approximately 90 minutes
 - 36 interviews; 13-19 years old
 - Participants compensated with gift card for their time

- Secondary Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)
 - Open coding
 - Multiple coders; iterative process
 - Theme development and refinement

Connecting

Identity Development

“I just use it [hispanic identity] as a firm ground for myself. That has helped bring me to realize how to accept people no matter who they are... It just helped me realize that all this hatred wouldn't do anything. So I just learned to love everybody. I learned to love myself.”

Resourcing

“And now the connection is straight to me and coming here is very therapeutic and I feel very at home; like, the center is my home away from home.”

Socializing

“I feel like there's going to be a few people in that community [queer POCs] that understand what I'm going through and they're going to be there for me”

Cultural Immersion

“I'm Pima...I've learned that most Native-Americans believe that if someone is...not heterosexual, they are born with two souls, two spirits; a male spirit and a female spirit. And I realized when I found that, I was just like oh my God, we are accepted as someone who is honored in their tribe... [they are] being shunned by some people because of who I am; because I was born with two spirits or something like that”

Negotiating

Balancing

“so you weren't really ashamed about being bisexual. But only when you're around your mom. Umhum (affirmative) ... like a disgrace to her. Like I feel like I'm not making her proud.”

Conforming

“I knew it would be bad if I would be different. I did understand that. I did understand that I would probably be treated very differently than I was how I was living.”

Neutral with Identity

“You're still a human. Everyone's just the same... I feel like even though I'm bisexual, I feel like in the community that I'm in, I still feel normal... I feel like there's nothing different. Nobody has treated me differently.”

Cultural Maintenance

“So, I'm still religious. But, I don't like church... because I know in Mexico people are very religious. If you go something against the book or anything, it's bad.”

Disconnecting

Conceal

“My parents are highly religious, so I didn’t really accept myself at all. I kind of tried to play that role of straight boy.”

Social Isolation

“I really wanted to keep everything into myself. It was really hard to trust these people who I said were my best friends or like friends. I really just shut all of that off and I did a lot on my own.”

Cultural Isolation

“more people are more willing to accept, it seems Caucasian homosexuality than any other race”

DISCUSSION

- Our participants negotiated the visibility or invisibility of their identities within their social environments (e.g., family or school) to reduce experiences of shame and maximize ones of pride.
- Participants of color described their racial/ethnic cultures as presenting additional layers to their social environments that could reduce or increase the threat of shame, as well as additional social environments to navigate (i.e., racial/ethnic community).
- Racial/ethnic cultures and communities were commonly influenced by religion.

LIMITATIONS

- Secondary Data
- Qualitative
 - Limited generalizability

IMPLICATIONS

Implications for Practice

- Validating Experience
- Visible vs Invisible Identities

Implications for Research

- Complex Narratives
- Examination of themes in relation to Shame and Pride

THANK YOU!

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