

By Adryen Proctor

Since being black is an identity that I had already learned to enable, the identity of being gay came second and proved to be a huge challenge. I felt like being gay had to fit into the already defined identity of being black. On numerous occasions I have been asked whether I am a 'gay black man' or a 'black gay man'. The question that I believe they're truly asking is: Which of these characteristics do I hold in higher regard?

The majority of the black community does a great job of shutting out ideas that seem farfetched, such as someone in their community being LGBT. I've come to perceive the role of a black man as strong, able, viral and possibly dangerous. A black man would never exhibit homosexual tendencies. A major problem that I have with the black community today is the fact that they feel entitled to take certain scriptures from the Bible and turn them into messages of hate and damnation for homosexuals. LGBT African-Americans are ostracized and swept under the rug because we are deemed as 'not truly black' or 'going through a phase'- all because our community has a problem with our presence.

When I came to Carolina, I had been out of the closet for about two years. I come from a rural area in northeastern North Carolina called Roanoke Rapids. When it became public knowledge that I was gay, the demographic of a mostly black high school provided me with a sample of how the black community would react. Overall, I was shown that the females in my community took to my identity much better than males. Coming out severed presumed friendships as well as brought on the homophobic jokes, slurs and gestures. It proved to me how cruel people could be when they disagree with my sexuality.

When I reflect on my time here at UNC, I realize that I have not had too many problems of homophobia out of the black community besides the occasional person staring at me and the overused phrase of 'no homo'. That phrase completely baffles me because if one were secure in their own sexuality, there would be no point of that little insertion at the end of "questionably gay" sentences. In my eyes, that phrase is a reflection of how insecure people are about their own sexuality. Many black men view homosexuality as a negative and abnormal concept (along with the majority of the black

community), so they feel the need to add 'no homo' in order to separate themselves from this ostracized group. I remember one conversation where "no homo" was used and I asked the guy (who was black) why he felt the need to say that. I told him that we all knew he was straight. He said that he didn't want people to look at him differently because he didn't say "no homo" and to this day, I still don't understand.

The black community is not the only group at fault. The gay community in dealing with black people has been an equally difficult experience. Growing up in a society where the media rules your perception of the world and the only LGBT figures you see on television are white, it negatively impacts the already present emotions of isolation and abandonment we have to endure from our racial community. There is such a separation of the white gay experience and the black gay experience that many black people don't identify with the usual LGBTIQ labels and consider themselves SGL's or Same Gender Loving people. This label was created by and for African-Americans who prefer to distance themselves from terms that they see as associated with "white-dominated" lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities. This divide between an already ostracized people is unnecessary and only puts up more walls instead of bringing people together in the unison that we need to make a change in the world.

Although UNC is an extremely diverse school, different sects within its student body have their own code of behavior. To answer the original question, "My answer is always that I am both because each identity holds equal importance". I do not believe that I have to shut down a part of who I am in order to become a stereotypical 'gay man' or a stereotypical 'black man'. I am black, I am gay, and I am a man. You can find me at a probate for a black fraternity as well as at a GLBTSA Mixer. Identifying as both black and gay has opened so many doors for me to a culture that I would be oblivious to if I had kept who I am hidden away. Mix and match the words all you want but I do not plan on changing who I am anytime soon in order to fit societal molds or standards that it may have for me. I create my own path and do my own thing: Do you?