

Open Homosexuality: Fighting a Losing Battle

Contributed by Leethaniel Brumfield III -- Black College Wire
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Morehouse issue shows need for tolerance

As a gay man who strives to carry myself as a professional, I was outraged by a recent article about gay men at Morehouse College.

Having a large number of openly gay black male students is neither a dilemma nor death sentence but a common reality that schools across this nation—including Morehouse College—must embrace.

It is no surprise that the gay population at Morehouse is outright noticeable—not any more than the cliques of homosexual students that stake claim at any other urban or rural HBCU or traditional multicultural university across the nation. In fact, it may be more expected at Morehouse because Atlanta reigns in the top five U.S. cities that attract gay black men of all socioeconomic backgrounds. Like other students, gay black males are going to go to college and to be just as robust and defiant as other college students.

Since most of us are not lucky enough to acquire self-made wealth or an overnight celebrity status, the necessity of a college education becomes our means of attaining financial freedom. And it is during this process that many of us acquire the courage to unveil our physical and mental inhibitions. During undergraduate school, gay black men, too, are free to be themselves—some, for the very first time. The will to go against the grain and experience the many facets of diversity is rather tempting to a homosexual who has sacrificed their true identity their whole lives. Therefore, when they arrive at schools like Morehouse and are surrounded other gay black men, they are relieved to be among like company.

The result is an urge to express their sexuality through their identity—something that even straight students do through tattoos, saggy pants, halter tops, do-rags, cleavage and midriff exposure, gold chains, and grills.

Although these cries for social acceptance made by heterosexuals are arguably distasteful to some, they should be respected along the same lines as a gay man's Louis Vuitton purse or his freshly arched eyebrows. What we all see in clubs, other social settings, and on BET and MTV promote our desire to be creative in our individuality—an individuality that usually resembles either a friend's or a pre-packaged celebrity's. We claim to want to be our own individuals; however, we end up looking like and adopting mannerisms similar to what we perceive as desirable because we're too afraid to rock the boat and express who we really are. But some homosexuals, just like some heterosexuals, let loose and venture outside of conformity.

Although in this day in age, everyone can pretty much attest to having an openly gay relative, homosexuality doesn't necessarily have to be celebrated but it should be tolerated with at least minimal respect.

In an academic setting, classroom discussions that shed light on homosexuality should also extend the same mutual reverence. Heterosexual students who are secure in their sexuality shouldn't feel embarrassed or hesitant to critically debate gender-bending topics because we all have our own opinions about everything, and these views may even go against what our closest loved ones believe.

Not to take away from the fact that Morehouse produces a large number of black males who go on to make truly exceptional contributions to society, other institutions across the nation graduate the same quality of black men, and not all of them are straight.

Heterosexual black men at Morehouse and other schools shouldn't feel at liberty to shout out derogatory comments towards gays just as it is unjust for whites to yell racial slurs towards minorities and vice versa.

Dealing with what some may feel is an over-expression of homosexuality, in order to survive and get along in the socially diverse world in which we live, we must offer the same uncompromising respect towards a man proudly carrying a Dooney and Bourke as we would to an overweight female whose body parts are falling out of a blouse four sizes too small.

What happens when we get into the workplace on a six-figure salary job and our flamboyantly gay male boss walks in wearing a pair of hip hugging slacks? Do we jeopardize our employment by displaying egregious body language that confirms our disapproval, or do we let our opinions take a backseat to securing a lucrative position during these tough economic times?

Dealing with a man with a glowing face of MAC makeup and a pair of five-inch Stilettoes is no more challenging than attempting to understand the slurred speech of a classmate who speaks through a blinged-out, gold-encrusted grill.

Homosexuality is a lifestyle that is obviously here to stay, and we must be able to contain our dislikes in order to maintain and make ends meet in the ever so competitive grand scheme of things.

Colleges across this country, and Morehouse alike, should accept homosexual students just as they do all qualified applicants. Some of the most successful black men are gay—whether they've made it known or not. Regulating a screening or interviewing process that solely seeks to control the number of gay students admitted would be like the government enforcing a mandate requiring only Black homeowners to pay property taxes. These actions wouldn't be exemplary of what this great nation stands for.

Gay black men at Morehouse and other schools may have the same sincere desires for unity and brotherhood as their straight counterparts.

They may uphold the "Morehouse Mystique" or whatever their campus slogan with more rigor than heterosexuals, and may even go on to become active alumni that make hefty donations to their alma mater. As long as gays are not forcing their lifestyle upon others, heterosexuals who oppose their behavior are fighting a losing battle and should exert this energy elsewhere. While the subject of choice is highly controversial, only someone foolish would choose to live a life that their families and others condemn.

Who then are we to pass judgment on, approve, or disapprove of someone else's practices?

Although we may feel that a man wearing a weave is going too far, causing an uproar is not going to stop them. A school like Morehouse's reputation is no more damaged by an increasing influx of feminine males students than it is by fraternities and sororities being exposed for hazing incidents that threaten the lives of its student body.

However, it is possible for the coming of age to cause homosexuals students to take a personal inventory of the physical body that they display.

Openly gay men at Morehouse and other institutions of higher learning explore identity and personal growth like other students. During this process they, too, may grow out of old friends and acquaintances as they become more reserved and comfortable in their own skin. Just as heterosexual males discover their place in society and in the workplace, gays may also decide to turn down their physical display of sexuality as they seek careers in perhaps more conservative settings. Like straight students who alter their appearance with maturity and experience, flamboyantly gay black students may also decide to discontinue wearing weave and other feminine adornments considered offensive and outlandish to others. However, if they don't, it should be a decision completely their own because only they will face the consequences.

Most importantly, there are so many other critical campus concerns that deserve a more firm response than open homosexuality.

A more quietly kept secret may perhaps be the number of DL men that choose to live a closeted lifestyle that includes random, unprotected sexual activity with both genders—a choice that is devastating the black community. These DL men exist at Morehouse and elsewhere but their story remains untold. That is until a distraught, married black woman comes forth and exposes that fact she is HIV+ and suspects that she contracted it from the husband that she wrongfully assumed was committed to their monogamous relationship.

So while we ridicule and pass judgment on a group of gay men for being open and honest about who they are, we sweep the issue of the DL stigma further and further under the rug, which goes to show that we [blacks] are, indeed, our own worst enemy.

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