



WHEN THE PLACE YOU LOVE DOESN'T LOVE BACK:

On Being Black and Queer in Texas

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Black-identifying individuals make up roughly 12% of the Texas population, or 3.55 million individuals (Texas, 2020). It is estimated that 12% of the Queer population in Texas identify as Black (Mallory et al., 2017). Queer Black Texans are a minority within a minority. It is this double minority status, in a state that historically hasn't looked favorably on either of these marginalized groups, that can make Texas a difficult place in which to reside. Being a Queer Black individual in Texas often means not having a place where one can be fully oneself (Nash, 2019).

ECONOMICS

Overall, Queer Texans face worse economic outcomes than non-Queer Texans (Mallory et al., 2017). Eight percent of Queer individuals in Texas are unemployed and twenty-six percent of Queer individuals in Texas are food insecure (Mallory et al., 2017). When examining the experiences of Queer Black people in the state, we find they fare much worse. In fact, Choi et al. (2019) found that Queer people of color have higher rates of economic insecurity than Queer White people. Where does one go when unemployment is high, and food is difficult to come by?

What is the role of MFTs in addressing economic disparities for Queer Black individuals? MFTs need to be sensitive to the fact that therapy may not be high on the list of priorities for Queer Black Texans due to other priorities taking precedence. MFTs should meet Queer Black Texans who present to therapy where they are, rather than where they think their client should be. For instance, MFTs should strive to support and keep an up-to-date list of community resources (or borrow such a list from a social worker) such as food banks and solidarity fridges (like these in Fort Worth, Austin, and Dallas), that could be provided to their Queer Black clients if needed. Many of these organizations maintain a social media presence informing followers on important policy issues affecting their community—and thus that of one's client(s).

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“Where does one go when unemployment is high, and food is difficult to come by?”

HEALTHCARE

When it comes to healthcare, the disparities are similar. For instance, 16% of Black individuals residing in Texas are without health insurance (Texas, 2020), while 26% percent of Queer individuals in Texas are without insurance (Mallory et al., 2017). What does this mean for Queer Black individuals? It may mean that Queer Black individuals residing in Texas are at a higher risk of being without health insurance.

It is a well-known fact that lack of access to health insurance leads to greater health disparities. One result of not having access to health insurance means that Black trans individuals are unable to access healthcare such as hormones and gender-affirming surgeries. Even if a Black trans individual can access state-funded Medicaid that doesn't mean they will be able to access gender-affirming care. In fact, Texas Medicaid policy outright excludes gender-affirming health care (Healthcare laws and policies, 2022). Where does one go when affirming healthcare is denied?

What are the possible roles of MFTs in healthcare? MFTs can work to create an environment free of bias, prejudice, and stigma for their Queer Black clients as this is a noted barrier to healthcare (Choi et al., 2021). In addition, MFTs can lobby to be able to accept Medicaid as a form of payment (as TAMFT's legislative committee has been working toward for some time) as it would allow more Queer Black individuals to access mental healthcare as well as physical healthcare (Choi et al., 2021). Lastly, MFTs can also spread awareness about the importance of gender-affirming care for the health and wellbeing of Black trans individuals.

EDUCATION

When it comes to education, Mallory et al. (2021), found slightly more queer individuals (45%) in Texas attained their high school diploma than non-queer individuals (42%). This trend does not continue when examining higher education statistics (Mallory et al., 2017).

As educational level increases, Queer Texans are less and less represented with only 10% acquiring a post-graduate compared to the 12% of non-Queer individuals (Mallory et al., 2017).

These percentages are even more disheartening for Queer Black individuals in Texas. They face discrimination due to both their blackness and their queerness within the public school system.

Queer Black youth have been found to frequently experience biased remarks regarding both their ethnicity and sexuality/gender expression (Truong et al., 2020). They often do not have a supportive school environment that is essential for their achievement (Truong et al., 2020). Where does one go when seeking education is fraught?

What is the possible role of MFTs within the education system? MFTs within the education system can provide professional development for school staff on Queer Black student concerns, which can facilitate better awareness and understanding. In addition, MFTs within the education system can strive to be supporting individuals for Queer Black students. The presence of such a supportive individual can help to create better educational environments for Queer Black youth (Truong et al., 2020) (see "Hope at Every Level" in this issue for additional ways MFTs can affect change in the school system).

CONCLUSION

Where do you go? Where do you go when faced with any of the above questions? If you were to ask Queer Black individuals in Texas, the answer would be, "You stay, and you work for a better tomorrow." MFTs in Texas can work with their Queer Black clients to help shape that better tomorrow. Queer Black Texans and MFTs in Texas can work to address the discriminations and hardships that are levied against the Queer Black community by supporting an advocacy organization. They can work together to raise awareness and bring understanding to the larger population in Texas. In solidarity, Queer Black individuals and MFTs in Texas can work together to create a better Texas for the Queer Black youth to come.

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