



### **A3. The Down-Low: A case of intersecting racism and sexism**

**Type of Exercise:** classroom/workshop discussion

**Level:** Advanced

**Length of time:** 20-30 minutes

**Resources needed:** None

**Instructions:** Share the following "down-low" explanation with students/workshop participants, followed by questions that focus discussion of the intersections of racism and sexism:

A few years ago, television talk shows and news programs seemed obsessed about African American men on the "down low." They referred to Black men who have sex with men without telling their female partners, and often blamed the higher rates of HIV/AIDS among African American women to men on the "down-low."

In reality, the "down-low" is an example of "racialized sexism" (Miller et al., 2007). The fact is that some men (and some women) from all cultural backgrounds engage in bisexual behavior without telling their heterosexual partners. Battle and Crum (2007) proposed that poverty is the major factor in the higher rates of HIV among African Americans, not men on the "down low." Binson and coauthors (1995) found that black men were only slightly more likely to be behaviorally bisexual than white men, however, these numbers are still very small and cannot account for the higher rates of HIV (see also Mays, Cochran, & Zamudio, 2004).

#### **Questions for discussion:**

- Why have Black men been targeted in this media attention?
- How is racism reinforced by stereotypes like the "down-low?" Why is this stereotype used to characterize black men more than other racial groups or women?
- What other examples can you identify of ways in which minority or disadvantaged groups are "sexualized," or stereotyped in ways that are demeaning of their sexual experience?
- How do the stereotypes that involve intersecting racism and sexism affect health care experiences and interactions?



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**Citations:**

Battle, J., & Crum, M. (2007). Black LGB health and wellbeing. In Meyer, I.H. & Northridge, M. (Eds). The health of sexual minorities: Public health perspectives on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender populations. NY: Springer, pp 320-352.

Binson, D., Michaels, S., Stall, R., & Coates, T.J. (1995). Prevalence and social distribution of men who have sex with men: United States and its urban centers. *Journal of Sex Research*, 32, 245-254.

Mays, V.M., Cochran, S.D., & Zamudio, A. (2004). HIV prevention research: Are we meeting the needs of African American men who have sex with men? *Journal of Black Psychology*, 30(1), 78-105.

Miller, M., Andre, A., Ebin, J. & Bessonova, L. (2007). Bisexual health: An introduction and model practices for HIV/STI prevention programming. NY: National Gay & Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute, Fenway Institute, and BiNet USA



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