#HIVBlackLivesMatter Also

December 22, 2014 By Aundaray Guess

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Upon hearing the no indictment verdict from the Eric Garner case, I could do nothing but throw my hands up in the air and feel a wave of hopelessness wash over me. How can any grand jury view the recording of an unarmed black man, shouting his inability to breath, based on the cop's arm pressed against his throat? A choke-hold which contributed to his death and was ruled a homicide by the medical examiner. Eleven times he called out in distress to no avail. Despite the clearness of the videoed interaction, the jury still felt this was not a case worth pursuing? Again it felt as if the taking of a black life had no importance. That the justice system issues a 'not guilty' pass to those who take black lives. A 'get out of jail free' pass which communicates that everyone has rights, except if you're black; a throwback to a time when blacks had no value and were sold to the highest bidder on the auction block. So in the context of recent killings of black men by law officials and a forgiveness given to the officers, a question is asked. How does a young gay black man experiencing this inequality, feel their life matters? On a deeper level, how can we expect a young black man with HIV to look out the window of this country and find their own worth based on today's war on black bodies? Or is there a connection at all? Does the perception that black life doesn't matter as it relates to HIV, contribute to one's self care?

Attempting to navigate the reasoning for recent injustices makes it impossible to understand, especially on the heels of another 'not guilty' verdict of Mike Brown in Ferguson. Around the country people of all races are holding signs and exclaiming, **#BlackLivesMatter**. A powerful declaration to encompass all dark skins but especially targeted to young black males. On the macro level the urgency of the message is clear. When will the issues of the systematic destruction of black men, whether by self or others, become addressed? On a micro level and with the attachment to young gay black men, the prescribed slogan no longer becomes a statement but morphs into a question. If **#BlackLivesMatter**, why are HIV rates rising among young gay men of color? Why do young gay and black men feel hopeless when it comes to their health and feel HIV is their fate? Why is there no acknowledgement that they're constantly targeted by the Darren Wilsons hidden in their community? Communities filled with those who shoot their own bullets of hate and ignorance to those who happen to be gay and worse, HIV positive. What does it communicate when people cry out for the justice of a stranger but provide little empathy for their brothers who live with the virus. Does **#BlackLivesMatter** only if you're hetero? A man? HIV negative?

What's the takeaway hearing **#BlackLivesMatter** when it's also expressed that contracting the

virus is the punishment from God for being gay. Coupled with people passing theoretic judgments on why black men seemed to be favored by HIV, not understanding the failed approached of attempting to treat this disease with structures designed for the majority and not the minority. When HIV prevention generalizes a young gay black man's life and his experiences and disqualifies the societal ills he endures, instead issuing a tone-deaf mandate to simply put a condom on with little regard of the systematic tool of racism makes this one act difficult. Even with the perfect means to prevent exposure of HIV what conversations are taking place which connects race to HIV and the relation to medical adherence to those who see their existence as meaningless based on today's headlines?

People never fully understanding why young gay black men have their **#HANDSUP,** a display of defeat as they are consistently forced to temporarily pocket their sexuality simply to stand shoulder to shoulder with their brothers. A devalued experience of trapped between two identified communities that never offers a full embrace. One community represents place of origin and the other is a quasi-form of support from the majority gay community which offers a temporary membership, sometimes based on the fetishism or eroticism of young men and their ebony shade. The same community which expresses, "Gay Is the New Black," a mantra co-opted without the benefit of participating in the actual struggle of those who are black.

#ICANTBREATHE is a sentiment shared by those who are young, gay and black as they are no longer people but quantified as HIV statistics. How can anyone breathe when people with good intentions remind them of their deficit? Over and over, when it comes to HIV, as a young gay black man it's not a matter of if you get the virus but when? This recycled missive plugged into their heads with the messengers not realizing the long-term implications. Not taking into account how the subliminal message provides a map to predestined exposure.

If **#BlackLivesMatter** to certain black communities they would know that they're killing their young gay black men with the weapon of HIV stigma. That gifting tools of rejection and condemnation leads to unfulfilled access to life saving medication. Pills sometimes thrown aside as young men ask themselves, 'What's the point?" A sometimes preferred slow suicide death as the motivation for living is weighed against the decision of living on the peripheral of communities.

If **#BlackLivesMatter** to black families, their love and support would exist despite their son's HIV status. There would be no second guessing of whether their exposure to a disease is a condition of affection. Unconditional love would be a right and not a gift to take away when one pleases.

If **#BlackLivesMatter** we will all stand together to protest the death of any black life from HIV, recognizing any death is one too many. As we march we send the message that all black life matters. And in the context of the statement, transform the word from a slogan into one of action.

And finally to the young gay men living with HIV navigating this alleged post racial environment, despite the headlines and statistics, **your black life does matter**. No one may tell you or give you the impression that it does, but you must cultivate and hold dear to the fact that you have value. Your life is valued. Your life story has a purpose. Know there are those who do march for

you. Who hold up signs of awareness and take steps in your name. Recognize there are communities that don’t hijack your movement and modify it into a hashtag. Instead they walk the streets in protest for your name.

They do this because they care and you should know your #HIVBlackLivesMatter.

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