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Lift EVERY Voice and Sing: An Intersectional Qualitative Study Examining the Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Faculty and Administrators at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Jonathan Wesley

ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING: AN INTERSECTIONAL QUALITATIVE STUDY EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND QUEER FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATORS AT HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES, by JONATHAN WESLEY, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education & Human Development, Georgia State University.

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Lift Every Voice and Sing: An Intersectional Qualitative Study Examining the Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Faculty and Administrators at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

by

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Under the Direction of Dr. Jennifer Esposito-Norris

ABSTRACT

While there is minimal literature that address the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans* identified students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), the experiences of Black, queer faculty and administrators at HBCUs has not been studied. This intersectional qualitative research study focused on the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer identified faculty and administrators who work at HBCUs. By investigating the intersections of religion, race, gender, and sexuality within a predominantly Black institution, this study aims to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts at HBCUs by sharing the experiences of the LGBQ faculty and administrators that previously or currently work at an HBCU as a full-time employee. The research questions that guided this study were 1) How have LGBQ faculty and staff negotiated/navigated their careers at HBCUs? and 2) How do LGBQ faculty and staff at HBCUs influence cultural (relating to LGBQ inclusion) change at the organizational level? The main theoretical framework used was intersectionality and it shaped the chosen methodology and methods. The Politics of Respectability was the second theoretical framework used to describe the intra-racial tensions within the Black/African American community. The study included 60-120 minute interviews with 12 participants. Using

intersectionality as a guide, the data were coded and utilized for thematic analysis. Then, an ethnodramatic performance engages readers. The goals of this study were to encourage policy changes, promote inclusivity for LGBQ employees at HBCUs, and provide an expansion to the body of literature in the field pertaining to the experiences of LGBQ faculty and administrators in higher education.

Key Words: hbcu's, lgbtq, equity, inclusion, education

Lift Every Voice and Sing: An Intersectional Qualitative Study Examining the Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Faculty and Administrators at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the future of higher education, more specifically to the Black community at HBCUs. This work is transformational in nature and I must acknowledge that I relied on the strength of the ancestors that encouraged me through the process to finish this work. When my mother died two days before my 25th birthday, I was not committed to pursuing school again, however, I PHinisheD. Therefore I dedicate this to my mother, Theresa M. Black who was my best friend and biggest supporter. While she will not be able to read this work in this lifetime, I dedicate this work primarliy to her. I would also like to dedicate this work to all of my decesaed loved ones whose presence remains with me daily as I attempt to live my best life while I have the gift of life.

To those who are living, I dedicate this to my biological and chosen family. My sisters (Latoya and Tera Black) along with my nephews whom I have raised as my own sons (Daishaun, Khari, and Elijah) have been important in my life and I dedicate this to them as well. I am the only Dr. in the family and a first-generation college student on both sides of my family. I dedicate this to Irvington/Newark, NJ where I was born and raised. It is possible to move beyond the inner-city and obtain what you desire. I am a living testament of that.

Lastly, I dedicate this work to every member and ally of the LGBTQIA+ community. Our lives matter. This work is a testament that we will not be silenced and that we deserve equitable and inclusive treament in all areas. To my queer ancestors whose voices were never lifted or deliberately erased because of your intersecting identities, I honor you through this work and my future works. I will continue to invoke your presence to guide and protect me while engaging in this transformational soul work which will hopefully provoke continued critical thought and dialogue about the experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

"Our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law…for if we are truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to one another must be equal as well." – Former President Barack H. Obama (2013 Inaugural Address)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of faculty and administrators who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer (LGBQ) and work/have worked at a historically Black college/university (HBCU). This subject has not been previously studied as there are no stories about the experiences of LGBQ faculty and administrators at HBCUs. Without hearing the perspectives of LGBQ faculty and administrators, HBCUs are overlooking the nuances of the intersectional lived experiences of one of the most important functional units within the institution. Thus, there is a need for this study as it will add to the body of literature pertaining to sexuality, intersectionality, higher education, HBCUs, and religion which are aspects of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Openly discussing sexuality and publicly identifying queerness in religious African-American communities is not widely accepted because of controversial views that are rooted in religious doctrine (Broadhurst et al., 2018; Chaney & Patrick, 2011; Harper & Gasman, 2008; Griffin, 2000; Irizarry & Perry, 2018; Ledet, 2017; Lightsey, 2012; Literte & Hodge, 2012; Pingel & Bauermeister, 2018; Quinn et al., 2016; Ward, 2005). Therefore, it is my desire and hope that this research will influence policy changes at HBCUs to enhance their diversity, equity, and inclusion of the intersecting identities of marginalized populations. By implementing said policies not just for students, but for all LGBQ individuals, HBCUs can become leading institutions in resolving the intra-racial tensions that exist among race, sexuality, gender, and religion. It is my hope that, through this research, leaders of HBCUs would acknowledge and

implement best practices that would prompt the institutions' climate to truly become responsive to the needs and desires of the LGBQ faculty and administrators.

Definitions

Below are terms that are used in this study. For consistency and understanding, it is important to understand these definitions at the beginning of the study.

- Administrators – higher education employees that are at the Assistant, Associate, Senior or full Chair, Director, Dean, Provost, Chief, Chancellor, and President role
- Bisexual - a person that has a sexual or romantic attraction to people of one's own gender identity and of other gender identities
- Cisgender - a person, whose gender identity corresponds with the sex the person identified as at birth
- Faculty – are defined as full-time members in the ranks of tenured (assistant, associate, or full professor) and non-tenured (lecturer, instructor, or clinical)
- Gay- a person who has a sexual or romantic attraction to people of one's same sex
- Heteronormative - a perspective that heterosexuality is the only normal and natural expression of sexuality
- Heterosexism – a belief and practice of power that privileges and dominates societies in the perpetuation that heterosexuality is the only moral way of living which diminishes or eliminates their ability to advocate for justice for the LGBTQ+ community
- Homophobia - irrational fear, aversion, and/or discrimination against non-heterosexual people
- Intra-racial - within race (group of people); of or by members of the same race

- Lesbian- a term used to describe some gay women
- Marginalize - to deliberately decenter people or underrepresented groups to powerless positions within a society or group in efforts to retain power
- Microaggression - comments and actions that subtly and sometimes unconsciously, or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced belief toward a member of a marginalized group
- Oppression - unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power
- Pracdivist – a person who is a practitioner, academic, artist, and activist that is an agent of change through the use of the intersecting abilities that are practical, academic, artistic, and activist oriented
- Pracdivism – the act of engagement through a diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice lens that encapsulates the works of practitioners, academics, artists, and activists to provoke and engage in systemic and structural change. This dissertation is a work of pracdivism.
- Queer – an umbrella term that can define sexual orientation and gender identity that typically is opposite of heterosexual and cisgender identities
- Race – for the purpose of this study, race is considered to be a social construct that has material consequences and that has been used to oppress non-white minority and underrepresented communities. Omi and Winant's (2014) concepts of racial formation are used in this work, alongside intersectionality, due to interactions between differing groups. Also, race and racial meanings are neither stable, nor consistent, and, often, reflect a visual identity that cannot be hidden.

- Trans(*)gender - a person whose gender identity differs from the sex the person was identified as having at birth (while I do mention trans* identities, this study did not solicit participation of trans* individuals for protection and privacy reasons).
- Transphobia - irrational fear, aversion, and/or discrimination against gender identities that are not cisgender

Research Questions

Research studies are guided by research questions that provide an in-depth exploration of the research topic. The overarching research questions for this study are:

- How have LGBQ faculty and staff negotiated/navigated their careers at HBCUs?
- How do LGBQ faculty and staff at HBCUs influence cultural (relating to LGBQ inclusion) change at the organizational level?

Statement of the Problem

The public discussion about sexuality at HBCUs remains minimal (Lee, 2015; Williams, 2013). Due to the strong connection to religion in the Black community, some of the Black community struggles with engaging in productive conversations about sexuality or, more specifically, sexuality that encompasses LGBQ identities (Barnes, 2013; Cane, 2015; Gates, 2021; Guy-Sheftall & Alexander, 2006; Marston, 2018). Douglas (1999) avowed:

> Homosexuality is seen as threatening Black well-being. The passion that often surrounds homophobic attitudes is perhaps best understood in the light of Black people's mistaken

> efforts to protect “authentic blackness” rather than as a sign of a community more intensely homophobic than other communities. (Location 1967 -E-book)

When Douglass references “authentic blackness”, she troubles the notion that Blackness was centered around heteronormativity, religion, and being cisgender. Anything outside of those constructs were not viewed by some Black people to be authentically Black. HBCUs were established by Christian missionaries and philanthropists and some remain connected to major Christian religious denominations (Butner, 2005; Hutchinson, 2020). HBCUs strive to empower Black people to be agents of change in the world (Davis et al., 2018; Guy-Sheftall & Alexander, 2006). There are currently 107 active HBCUs in the United States with the majority of campuses located in the southeast (HBCUFirst, n.d.). The empowerment of African Americans can be seen by the elections of the Vice President of the United States, Kamala Harris (Howard University Alumnus), and Senator Reverend Raphael Warnock (Morehouse College Alumnus) where HBCUs have been highlighted due to their alumni’s election to high-ranking governmental offices. The major religious affiliations of HBCUs include but are not limited to African-Methodist-Episcopal (AME), United Methodist and Baptist denominations. According to Mobley and Johnson (2015):

> The historical and contemporary religious affiliations that are inherent within HBCU communities present a tension of how and whether these institutions can and will take a reaffirming and nonjudgmental stance regarding the presence of Black LGBT communities on these campuses. (p. 81)

Since most HBCUs struggle financially, publicly affirming their internal queer constituents could cost them (more specifically private HBCUs) significantly as the denominations that support the insitutions could withdraw all or part of its funding if supported

by the church (Cohen, 2006; Holloman et al., 2003; Leak & Reid, 2010; Lomax, 2010). Because some of the Black community struggles with nuances of religion, sexuality, and race, indviduals who identify as LGBQ are encouraged to reamain silent about their sexual orientation (Valera & Taylor, 2011; Ward, 2005). Those fears are manifested when the culture of the institution is non-inclusive due to beliefs and ideologies that support the discrimination of non-heterosexuals. According to Mobley and Johnson (2015):

> In order to have substantial change with regard to transforming any particular HBCU into a more inclusive campus environment not only for the LGBT students, but for students and staff seeking to express themselves on campus without fear of retribution, HBCU campus administrations must examine the roles they play in reinforcing and perpetuating heteronormative practices that privilege some while marginalizing others. (p. 82)

As mentioned under defined terms, heteronormative pratices are rooted in the belief that identities outside of heterosexuality are not natural, thus privileging those who are heterosexual while marginilazing all other sexual and gender identities. Because heteronormativity is the expectation due to religious ideologies and heteropatriarchy, queer people within Black spaces are not often accepted due to the belief that race is more important than sexuality. The tension here is being able to acknowledge the intersectionality of a person's identity in direct confrontation of the privileged identites that marginalize and oppress other identities. This project seeks to examine the ways this tension plays out on HBCU campuses. The successes and struggles of HBCUs should be acknowledged; however, in that acknowledgement, the lack of inclusivity of the LGBTQ community is worth further investigation in an effort to continue to lift and shift the institutions to become more progressive.

The experiences of LGBTQ students at HBCUs continue to be explored in academic research. According to Lenning (2017), "LGBTQ students at HBCUs are often rendered invisible and pushed to the margins of the campus community and consequently may take some time to feel comfortable in spaces where their identity is on display" (p. 290). LGBTQ students face hardships at HBCUs due to the cultural teachings of heteronormativity often undergirded by religion. The same may be true for faculty and administrators as they face the same challenges as their students with the additional caveot of potentially losing their job or not being promoted because of institutional and systemic homo/transphobia. Thus, the problem is that there is no research on the experiences of LGBQ faculty and administrators at HBCUs which shows that there is a gap in this area that needs to be addressed. It is my hope that this work will answer my research questions and provoke others to continue to research this population to add to the body of literature pertaining to queerness and HBCUs.

Background of the Problem

As a result of trying to navigate sexuality in a conservative institution of higher education, Cyril B. Wilcox was a student who struggled academically at Harvard due to his sexuality. He did not complete his education at Harvard due to his untimely death by suicide. He was found by his mother, Mary Wilcox on May 13,1920 in their home (Paley, 2002) and it is believed that his suicide was due to a secret court at Harvard that investigated the same-sex relationships of males on campus. This court consisted of five white[1] men who were administrators at Harvard College who asked other males who were involved with Cyril intrusive questions about

[1] While APA guidelines suggest capitalizing the racial identities, due to the systemic nature of white supremacy and the fact that whiteness has been continually privileged in this society, I will not capitalize the term in this study. This study centers and lifts Black voices, therefore, Blackness is centered in this manuscript.

masturbation and engaging in same-sex relations. The court was a secret because their board of directors did not know that they were leading a charge to remove all students from Harvard whom they suspected, through their interrogations, of engaging in same-sex relationships. The only way that a person could stay at Harvard was if they confessed that they acknowledged that same sex relations were immoral and that they were deliberately working to change to become heterosexual. A faculty member who was also pursuing his Ph.D. as a third-year student at Harvard was dismissed during the time of this secret court for being gay, removed from all university correspondence, and, therefore, the opportunity for him to receive a Ph.D. was revoked (Paley, 2002). Thus, the long-standing problem is that the intersection of heterosexism and religious doctrine makes organizations unsafe for LGBQ people. Heterosexism informs the cultural and religious beliefs of most countries. According to Mayo (2014):

> Heterosexism and heteronormativity – the first, the assumption that heterosexuality is superior, and the second, the pervasive assumption that sexual and gender differences is just not there – are both social processes that make the assertion of sexual or gender difference is difficult for all people, including those heterosexuals who are allies or do not themselves conform to social norms. (p. 20)

Identities outside of a heteronormative context are viewed as taboo or sinful in the eyes of religious deities and practitioners within certain faith traditions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which are known as Abrahamic religions. This deficit framing is based on a scriptural interpretation that has led to discrimination towards the LGBQ community (Amoor, 2019). According to Douglas (1999), within Christian religion:

> The irony is, however, that the Bible does not present as clear a position on homosexuality as is often self-righteously asserted. The meaning of the biblical stories customarily

> referred to as proof against homosexual practices has generally been misconstrued or distorted. Biblical scholars have painstakingly shown that the Leviticus Holiness Codes (Lev. 18:22; 20:13), the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:1-9), and Paul's Epistle to the Romans (1:26-27) do not present a compelling case against homoeroticism. (Location 1668 – eBook)

Due to these conflicting views, it is often difficult for the African American LGBTQ community to engage in reconciliatory conversations about intersecting identities such as sexuality, race, and spirituality.

According to Subhi and Geelan (2012), "Since the beginning of Christianity, most Christians have regarded homosexuality as morally wrong, which led to the position upheld today by most mainstream denominations such as Catholic, Orthodox, and also most Evangelical Protestants" (p.1383). In this study, researchers conducted a qualitative study of 20 gay Christian participants (10 male & 10 female) using semi-structured interviews to explore the conflicts experienced because of being both Christian and homosexual. This study's research questions focused on participants' experiences in an effort to understand the conflict between their religious/spiritual understandings along with their sexual orientation (Subhi & Geelan, 2012). Four respondents (all females) were not impacted negatively by their religious identity and sexual orientation while the other sixteen were negatively impacted by the views and treatment they received.

Negative perceptions of sexuality can cause internalized homo/transphobia for those who are LGBTQ (HRC, 2009), especially when components of race/ethnicity are added. According to Meladze and Brown (2015), "Gay men may experience shame when comparing their same-sex attractions or behaviors to those set by the heterosexist society" (p. 1951). In this research, mixed

methods were used to determine how religious beliefs and internalized shame predicted homonegativity amongst 133 Asian and Caucasian gay men. In the quantitative analysis, there was predicted homonegativity amongst the main Abrahamic faiths (Christianity, Islam, Judaism, etc.) as well as internalized shame. While Christian groups feel homonegativity and internalized shame, some other faith traditions have much harsher punishments for those who are queer. This study focused on men of different ethnicities with the centralized point connecting to the impact of religion on one's identity. Misinterpreted religious rhetoric provides a strong foundation for queer people to remain silent about their intersecting identities. According to Tamilchelvan and Rashid (2017), "In Islam, being gay is viewed as deviant, corrupt, and rebelling against God, which takes off no plausibility for recognizing gay as Muslim" (p. 274). Researchers conducted a systematic review on the literature about Muslim gay men. Many Muslim gay men remain closeted to protect their image and religious identity because Islam is not accepting of the LGBTQ community since they are perceived as being immoral against the nature of God and should not flaunt their sexuality in public. According to Tamilchelvan and Rashid (2017),

> The majority of the gay men in the studies revealed that they cannot share their sexual orientation to anyone because it is illegal in Islam. They felt that they did not have a place in the religion since they were sinful. At first, many of them felt sad and underappreciated, but over the years they decided to make a firm decision not to read the Qur'an anymore. (p.279)

Based on the negative views of gay relationships due to religious indoctrination, much of the LGBTQ community who engage in faith practices suffer in their attempts to reconcile their sexuality and spirituality within a community that they desire to journey with and grow in.

Homonegativity causes some within the LGBTQ community to strive for heteronormativity because of non-acceptance. Fjelstrom (2013) found, "When the environment is homonegative, same-sex attracted individuals often have to hide their feelings, creating significant barriers to the possibility of living life authentically as a non-heterosexual person" (p. 801). In this research, 15 participants that identified as lesbian and gay engaged in sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) in attempts to change their sexual orientation to heterosexual based on the negativity they experienced. According to Fjelstrom (2013), "The participants' motivations for entering SOCE primarily was the internalized belief that homosexuality was sinful behavior that would not be accepted by peers, community, family, or church" (p. 805). Because the narrative that some deities do not accept queer people remains dominant, the pressure to live in a heterosexist world further troubles the ability to share openly about one's sexuality. How, then, do we engage in a discourse that provides us the opportunity to inform those seeking conversion treatment that the God they believe in still loves them and that there is a community of LGBTQ people to which they already belong?

Thus, being anything outside of heterosexual has been viewed as deviant, immoral, unnatural, sinful, and abominable in the eyes of those who take religious text literally so much so that they discriminate against those who do not follow their beliefs which results in inequitable treatment of LGBTQ individuals. For example, in 2020, George Floyd and Breonna Taylor were murdered by racist police. Floyd, Taylor, and others, all African American, received swift support from the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM) through which there were campaigns and protests to end discrimination justified by racism towards Black people by police. In 2019, a Black teenager by the name of Nigel Shelby committed suicide because he was bullied for being gay (Merrett, 2019). In June

2020, a woman of trans experience named Iyanna Dior was brutally beaten, almost unto death, and this murder was broadcast on social media (*Iyanna Dior, Black Trans Woman, Beat In Viral, Brutal Video*, 2020). In June 2021 in Atlanta, a young boy by the name of Tyler went viral because his family etched "gay" into haircut because he was being himself. They publicly humiliated him on social media and then required him to make a video suggesting that he was not being assaulted (Keith, 2021). While Tyler was removed from the home due to the viral nature of video, had that moment not been captured, we can only image what could have happened to Tyler. There were not hashtags for Iyanna, Tyler, or Nigel. There was no justice for them. What makes them different from Breonna and George besides their gender and sexual identity? Why was there no hashtag campaign for justice for Iyanna or the other Black women of trans* experience who are murdered without a trace? The intra-racial tensions of sexuality, race, religion, and education among African Americans needs to be continually investigated so that equity is based on intersectionality and not just one identity.

According to Mobley and Johnson (2015), the very first HBCU to have a dedicated LGBTQ+ center was Bowie State University in Maryland in 2012. Since 2012, there have been five additional HBCUs that have created spaces for LGBTQ students (for a total of 6). The growth of LGBTQ centers at HBCUs is telling because LGBTQ+ centers have only been created at 6 of the 107 active HBCUs. It is great that HBCUs such as Bowie, Morehouse, and Spelman have been the trailblazers for intentionally creating spaces for LGBTQ+ students. Despite the establishment of those spaces for LGBTQ students, it is also important to acknowledge that some faculty and administrators at HBCUs still wrestle with sharing their sexuality publicly (for those who decide to share this information). While acknowledging that many in the Black community

struggle to hold open conversations about sexuality, queerness, and religion as intersections, there is a need to further the dialogue. Given that HBCUs are, in a sense, a reflection of the Black community, faculty and administrators might be expected to keep their sexuality to themselves by being extremely private or having to lie, which could potentially be a problem for those who want share publicly.

Research Paradigm

Making meaning of our lived experiences is important to engage in a greater sense of community with humankind. For example, I am an African American who identifies as queer in every way. I am also a millennial, differently abled, and a member of clergy. It has taken my life's experience as well as research to determine how I engage with the world given the intersections of my identity. In some spaces, I am not accepted because of my race. In other spaces, I am not accepted because of my queerness and how it is expressed publicly. In other spaces, I am not accepted because I am vocal about injustice that manifests in the workplace and how I am discriminated against because I am younger. My research paradigm relates to the challenges of the reconciliation of sexuality and spirituality within the African American community as approached from a constructionist lens. According to Crotty (1998), "There is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world" (p.8). Constructing meaning takes time. As we move within our realities, we learn to make meaning of them if we take the time to carefully analyze those realities. For example, when I came out as bisexual at age 15, I did so because I was still making meaning of my sexuality and that was my identity at that time. Currently, as I have learned more about the world, the people within, and myself, my identity has changed based on how I have

been able to make meaning of the fluidity of gender, sexuality, religious beliefs, race, and institutions.

Meaning is constructed by the person(s) who have interacted with the object (symbol) to attempt to make sense of the world (Crotty, 1998). According to Crotty (1998), "According to constructionism, we do not create meaning. We construct meaning. We have something to work with. What we have to work with is the world and objects in the world" (p.43). Constructionism is based on one's respective interpretation of events which informs construction versus creating meaning. When creating an object, the way it is created remains the same even if repeated. For example, when a car is created, there is a set process on how to create a car based on the standards that are required for it to be operable. In contrast, when a person purchases a car, the meaning made with the car will be contingent on the experiences they have with the car. This is how meaning is constructed. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stated, "Individuals interpret with the help of other people from their past, writers, family, television personalities, and persons they meet in settings in which they work, and play-but others do not do it for them" (p. 27). Engaging in the analysis to construct meaning, a person must spend time with themselves and how they have been socialized. The Abrahamic religions do not empower believers to make meaning outside of what is written as these texts are deemed to be the law of God (The Torah, Holy Bible, and Qur'an). The challenge here is when individuals cannot make meaning for themselves yet are encouraged to interpret scripture without further analysis. Without making meaning of the experiences of LGBQ individuals, the heterosexist micro and macroaggressions may prevail within the African American community. As indoctrination occurs within faith spaces, those same biases have the potential to influence HBCUs in a negative way when it comes to LGBQ faculty and administrators.

This epistemology undergirds my belief that religion, while contributing to the success of Black communities, has also harmed the community in some ways by not engaging as intentionally with intersections of race, religion, and sexuality which are in need of further interrogation (Gates, 2021). The meanings that have been constructed based on narratives shared by the dominant, heterosexist culture has created a strong intra-racial tension with the African American community about sexuality and spirituality (Allen et al., 2007; Barnes, 2013; Barton, 2015; Broadhurst et al., 2018; Chaney & Patrick, 2011; Crawley, 2008). As a result of this foundation, it is possible that some HBCUs may struggle with equitably and publicly recognizing and valuing the voices of LGBQ faculty and administrators which may, as a result, unintentionally create inhospitable cultures.

Theoretical Frameworks

Having an experience is meaningful. Having an experience governed by an informed perspective provides a more substantive understanding of the experience. As a result, the two theoretical frameworks that I have identified for my study are intersectionality and the politics of respectability. In this section, I begin by defining the epistemological and historical underpinnings of intersectionality. Afterwards, I define the epistemological and historical underpinnings of the politics of respectability (TPOR). Intersectionality is both a theoretical and methodological framework that is used across multiple disciplines to frame and engage in research studies. Intersectionality and TPOR frameworks seek to provide liberation for marginalized communities in their own unique ways. Lastly, I situate and describe how I used TPOR and intersectionality as

guiding theoretical frameworks that explore the intersections of race, religion, sexuality, and gender experiences within HBCUs.

Epistemological and Historical Underpinnings of Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality emerged as researchers explored the ways that being a part of two or more undervalued or oppressed groups creates a unique perspective with idiosyncratic benefits and challenges. When an LGBTQIA+ person's racial identity is tied to cultural norms that reject their sexual or gender orientation in a strong way for whatever reason, the consequences on that person's psyche can be profound, especially given the potential effects of cognitive dissonance for generating negative responses (Colosio et al., 2017). Intersectionality is useful for studying how multiple minority statuses can affect a person's life (Collins, 2019; Younge et al., 2007), which makes it a critical concept for this research. This study explored the experiences and perceptions of LGBQ faculty and staff at HBCUs to understand the intersections of Blackness and sexual orientation as neither constructs are monolithic.

Understanding the formation of racial identity and how race is socially constructed unstably in varying ways is critical to the roots of this work. Intersectionality is a critical social theory that explores how belonging to multiple marginalized groups can have a major impact on a person (Collins, 2019). Omi and Winant (2014) explore about how racial identity is formed in America, and it is tied to ideas of otherness and exclusion. Race is not something that can be hidden, unlike sexuality. However, race goes beyond the combination of DNA and RNA that produces heritable traits. Participation in a racial community and interacting with other racial communities depends a great deal on the social and cultural context to determine the nature of those

exchanges (Omi & Winant, 2014). The racial formation theory examines the ways structure and culture are part of racial formation. Specifically, how do history, economics, and politics play a role in how race is defined and how meanings change over time? Understanding race as a social construction means that we also have to examine the material consequences of how racial formations are created and maintained. Intersectionality is a tool that can be used to examine ways people navigate not only their racial identities and the material consequences of it but also other social identities like sexual orientation (Crenshaw, 1989 & 1991; Younge et al., 2007). Human beings should not be confined to one social category. For example, I identify as an African American who is differently abled and queer in every possible way. While my dominant presenting gender is male; because I also embody femininity, my gender presentation changes as I do not live in the single social construct of masculinity/maleness. Thus, I do not solely identify as a Black male as I am more than the binary intersections of race and gender. This is important to note because intersectionality as a social theory speaks to identity and structural/systems of oppression as they are interlocking (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Dill et al., 2007; Jones & Abes, 2016; May, 2015). According to Dill and Zambrana (2009),

> An innovative and emerging field of study that provides a critical analytic lens to interrogate racial, ethnic, class, ability, age, sexuality, and gender disparities and to contest existing ways of looking at these structures of any quality, transforming knowledges as well as the social institution in which they have found themselves. (p.1)

Situating intersectionality as simple identity politics does not provide the depth nor correct meaning of using intersectionality as a concept, heuristic, paradigm, theoretical framework, or method of analysis. In the words of Collins (2019), “In this sense, intersectionality is not just

ideas, but has an important role to play in the social world" (p. 290). Intersectionality is evident in the way that it has been used within and outside of the academy to provide deeper understanding of social problems to frame power and privilege.

Kimberlé Crenshaw was the first person to technically coin intersectionality as a social theory in her seminal works (Crenshaw 1989, 1991); however, research speaking about intersecting identities and dominating structures occurred before she wrote about it. Edwards and Esposito (2020) asserted:

> Intersectional theory has a multiple origin story, so its history cannot be neatly mapped along a linear trajectory of thought. Thus, it certainly did not emerge after, because of, or in response to white women's political organizing. For nearly two centuries, women of color have advocated for their specific socio - political and economic needs in the face of simultaneous projects of racism, classism, heterosexism, slavery, and colonialism. (p.4)

Thus, while the term intersectionality was not used, scholarship, conversations and activism were present pertaining to identity and intersecting domains of dominance that could not be escaped. Other women who wrote about this topic include, but are not limited to, seminal theorists Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells, Combahee River Collection (Black feminist lesbian organization), Patricia Hill-Collins and Kimberlé Crenshaw (Esposito, 2019). Crenshaw is a scholar of Black feminist legal theory, critical race theory (CRT), and law. She constructed intersectionality because there were limitations to CRT.

Intersectionality was designed to give voice to the experiences of Black women due to the interconnectedness of gender, class, and race which always furthered oppression and

marginalization that rendered them invisible in circumstances that cannot be quantified. Crenshaw was empowered to construct this theory because anti-discrimination cases/law did not account for the lived experiences of women of color (Anders & DeVita, 2019). The roots of intersectionality from Crenshaw can be connected to neo-Marxist scholarship on law and hegemony as well as neoconservatism with a designation to further institutional change and social justice (Wijevesingbe & Jones, 2019). To further describe the nuances of intersectionality and its direct correlation to domination, Crenshaw (1995) tells us

> The struggle for blacks, like that of all subordinated groups, is a struggle for inclusion, an attempt to manipulate the elements of the dominant ideology in order to transform the experience of domination. It is a struggle to create a new status quo through the ideological and political tools that are available. (p.119)

Though this quote speaks to Black people, Crenshaw is being inclusive of all Black people as the dominant system of racism has and continues to make life difficult. This notion is further nuanced based on Crenshaw's experience on the legal team of Anita Hill. In 1991, Crenshaw acknowledged what it was like for a Black woman (Anita Hill) to testify against a Black man (Clarence Thomas) as he lambasted Hill's testimony of sexual harassment as being a form of lynching. This insight allowed Crenshaw to face the sad reality that being both Black and female in a racist and patriarchal society is a prime example of intersectionality. Hill could not be legally recognized as both Black and as a woman. The law did not allow for the nuances that her identity as a Black woman called for. In the 70s, 80s, 90s, Blacks were still discriminated against (there is a history in the country of Black men being falsely accused of the rape of white women, i.e., Emmett Till, Birth of a Nation, etc.,) and women (of all races) were not always taken

seriously when they accused men of sexual harassment. The same is still true today. Hill, as a Black woman, was viewed as a "jezebel" and admonished for raising concerns about Black men considering the state of America (Crenshaw, 2018). By not engaging in the struggle for inclusion based on the intersecting of identities, there will continue to be injustices committed by those who are privileged in being part of the dominant group.

Patricia Hill Collins is a sociologist who furthered the idea of intersectionality by providing a matrix in which identity overlaps within a system of oppression. According to Collins (2000):

> Race, class, and gender constitute axes of oppression that characterize Black women's experiences within a more generalized matrix of domination. Other groups may encounter different dimensions of the matrix, such as sexual orientation, religion, and age, but the overarching relationship is one of domination and the types of activism it generates. (p. 544)

Thus, social identities are connected to systems of control, which necessarily result in activism. As mentioned earlier about my social identities, my oppressions are toxic masculinity, ableism, religion, and ageism. These are systems of oppression that are perpetuated because they are embodied and practiced by people. When serving in various roles, per intersectionality, there is not one single dominating force and oppression manifests in varying forms such as people, policies, and procedures that must be connected in depth to historical, social, economic and political contexts (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Edwards & Esposito, 2020).

When using intersectionality as a theoretical framework, as other theories, there are guiding principles that provide grounding to make meaning of the matrix of identity and oppression. Harris and Patton (2019) described in their work that there are ways to do and undo intersectionality by making the theory more academic (disciplined and prescriptive) rather than allowing the radical social justice orientation of the theory. Thus, when intersectionality is made more prescriptive, it whitens and depoliticizes the theory, which in turn causes the theory to become undone. Thus, in my study, I made sure to be careful not to undo intersectionality by ensuring that radical social justice remains at the center of this study to provoke structural/systemic change within HBCUs. The provocative nature of intersectionality in my study challenges the sociohistorical nature of race, sexuality, and religion within HBCUs. This work is political as it is transformative to the structures that support oppression of sexual minorities within these institutions. In the next section, I share the principles of intersectionality and share how it has been used as a theoretical framework both directly and indirectly.

Principles and Use of Intersectionality

Intersectionality has several key principles. They are 1) acknowledging the lived experiences of people of color, 2) knowledge must be utilized for social justice goals, 3) knowledge must make space for multiple voices, and 4) knowledge must help advance fair and inclusive policies (Dill & Zambrana, 2009). Similar to Critical Race Theory, intersectionality places a strong emphasis on counter-storytelling (narrative) to provide depth to the lived experiences of people of color. Once the variety of narratives has been shared, it aims to provide social justice in the form of policy, processes, and practice. Thus, if the goal of the research is not rooted in social justice, actionable aims, it should not be considered intersectional work. Collins (2019)

further asserts these concepts as categories which are 1) relationality, 2) power, 3) social inequity, 4) social context, 5) complexity, and 6) social justice.

To see intersectionality at work, relational connections are required. These relations occur between people, structural arrangements, and systems. The nuances of these interconnected identities in structures have also provided meaningful research to higher education. Harper and Gasman (2008) conducted a study on the intersections of Black male undergraduates and politics within HBCUs. In their study, participants shared three main themes, which were: 1) sexuality and sexual orientation, 2) self-presentation and expression, and 3) positional subordination. They uncovered in their main themes that sexual orientation and sexuality were dismissed by the faculty, staff, and student body in a push towards heteronormativity and religious ideology where anything other than heterosexuality was sinful. In addition to this theme, the study also showed how these male students were always expected to dress their best to be viewed as respectable and that when a faculty, staff or administrator provided a directive, it should be followed without question. While Harper and Gasman did not specifically use intersectionality as a theoretical framework in this study, it can clearly be noted that the intersections of identity (i.e., gender, race, sexual orientation) were situated in structures of domination (i.e., HBCU, religion, ageism) to provide a solution towards the social justice aim of being more inclusive which is a struggle for HBCUs. Also noted by the authors, none of the participants in the study openly identified as queer. Due to the lack of disclosure of sexual identity, the silence furthers the notion that sexuality cannot be shared safely due to potential discrimination and retaliation.

Black Sexual Politics was written by Patricia Hill Collins using the theoretical framework of intersectionality to address the gender politics of the African American community that the white majority has instituted. According to Collins (2005)

> Black sexual politics consists of a set of ideas and social practices shaped by gender, race, and sexuality that frame Black men and women's treatment of one another, as well as how African Americans are perceived and treated by others. (p. 7)

As noted in her text, Collins provided the historical and social contexts on a variety of intersecting topics that cause Black people to be overly sexualized and fetishized based on the dominant perceptions of whites and each other. She provided historical definitions of "buck", "bitch" and "respectability politics" to name a few. Thus, her intersectional understanding of popular culture provides readers with knowledge regarding how sexual fetishes are rooted in systemic racism and oppression.

Foucault (1978) also discusses the intersections of sex, religion, and clergy in a very nuanced way. Foucault talks about the history of sexuality by framing how sex was discussed and became silenced by the bourgeois and Christianity through repression. Foucault also shared the connection of discussing sexuality based on power and knowledge based on political influence. According to Foucault, "If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression" (Location 88). Sex, per Foucault, was not discussed unless there was a particular group who had permission, privilege, and power to discuss it.

The deliberate secrecy and shaming of sex causes repression. One of the most significant findings contributing to the work of intersectionality was Foucault's description of the confessional in Catholic church as a power structure that enhanced eroticism. To think that the "sacred" church would also be the place where the most sexual corruption has taken place is amazing. Here, we can see the intersections of identity and power dynamics. Foucault's desire in writing the text was to liberate others to speak more freely about sex and sexuality without the fear of other people and religious institutions. While Foucault is not a person of color, the intersections of what he described can and have been studied by people of color.

In 2008, E. Patrick Johnson wrote the iconic *Sweet Tea*. Johnson conducted a qualitative study over two years with seventy-two participants who identified as gay and/or trans women of color. With stories told from an intersectional perspective, he shared lingo used within the Black queer community and situated the text around the intersections of the region (geographic location), sexuality, gender identity, race, and age with the underlying notion that Black, gay southerners have always co-existed in the community throughout the southern region of the United States. He argues, though, that the South has its challenges as it relates to acceptance, even as Black, gay men have been able to navigate life in a productive and fulfilling way. He shared the stories of his participants, which are woven through their life histories to combat the thought that the South is backward and repressive. As noted earlier in this section, intersectionality is rooted in the historical, social context and is aligned with social identities and structural domination. In this case, the structural domination was the American South, also known as "The Bible Belt" trying to "Make America Great Again". Participants in this study, while co-existing, did speak to the fact that they experienced homophobia and racism at extremely high levels.

The last study that I share in this section to illustrate how intersectionality can be used as a framework to continue to liberate the discussion of sex and sexuality in Black spaces is Lemons (2012), who investigated the intersections of religion, sexuality, and the deliberate silencing of gay and lesbian Black people. Lemons is a heterosexual scholar and clergy member who submitted an essay to the Arcus Foundation to support Phase II of the epic Audre Lorde Project. He makes a compelling statement in his essay that states:

> Exposing the spiritual hypocrisy and contradictions of mainline black church dogma signified in the statement: "Hate the sin love the sinner," I maintain that such rhetoric is rooted in self-righteous doctrinal legalism, mean-spirited heterosexist anxiety and fear – comingled with callous and venomous homophobia. (p. 81)

As Lemons notes in his statement, the intersections of intra-racial issues are lifted and addressed very directly with aims for social justice in dismantling homophobia, legalistic Christian doctrine, and practicing hate when the God of Christianity emphasized the importance of love.

The studies that I have shared were examples of how intersectionality as a theoretical framework has been used across a variety of academic disciplines in efforts to show the main principles that guide the framework. They are: 1) the lived experiences of people of color, 2) knowledge must be utilized for social justice goals, 3) knowledge must make space for multiple voices, and 4) knowledge must help advance fair and inclusive policies (Dill & Zambrana, 2009). For change to occur, using direct language to address the systems of oppression and the people who sustain them is vital. In addition to addressing the oppression verbally through intersectionality's use of narrative, the hope and expectation is that policies, procedures, and practices will change to become culturally responsive with deep roots to social justice. Thus, in this

section I have shared the historical and epistemological underpinnings of the theoretical framework known as intersectionality, its principles, and how it has been used across a various scholarship in practice in efforts to bring social justice to fruition. With roots in CLS and CRT, intersectionality provides a deeper understanding of the experiences of people of color, their intersecting identities, and structure/systems of oppression that seek to maintain domination of marginalized groups. In the next section, I place intersectionality and TPOR together in conversation and propose how I used them in my research.

Epistemological and Historical Underpinnings of The Politics of Respectability

It is important to name that there is a correlation between the Politics of Respectability and CRT. Thus, I name in this section some aspects of CRT and addressed how they connect with TPOR as a counter-story. Counter storytelling is a primary tenet of CRT that was used to counter the dominant narratives of white people who depicted Black people in a negative light. A great example of a counter-story in narrative form is the film "*The United States vs. Billie Holiday.*" Holiday was considered a threat because of her iconic song "Strange Fruit", which depicted the lynching of Black people. Some of the white community described her based on her heroin use; however, the counter-story is that drugs were used to silence her from singing "Strange Fruit". According to DeCuir and Dixson (2004), "The use of counter stories allows for the challenging of privileged discourses, the discourses of the majority, therefore, serving as a means for giving voice to marginalized groups" (p. 27). When the community is permitted to speak for themselves or take the chance to speak out in environments that attempt to control their narratives, it provides a perspective that often is silenced because of the fear associated with revealing the truth.

DeCuir and Dixson (2004) also stated, “Furthermore, by telling their stories in their own words, their counter-narratives allow them to contradict the Othering process, and, thus, challenge the privileged discourses that are often found at elite, predominately white, independent schools” (p. 27). As we can see, this statement supports that the counter-narrative is vital to CRT as it seeks to destroy the lens and rhetoric of white people who have historically done everything within their power to tell the “story” of Black people for their own gain, denial of harsh realities imposed on Black by whites and to maintain their comfort. Counter-storytelling also ensures that white privilege is not invisible by exposing unjust treatment due to practiced color blindness (Schofield, 1986). Without counter-stories, the preeminence of white privilege and racism would continue to be rendered invisible by colorblindness. Sharing stories based on a person’s epistemological formation provides other interpretations which provide greater insight into respective phenomena such as economic, political, and social structures (Banks, 1993).

From a CRT lens, the inter-connectedness of politics and policy is related to interest, power, and assimilation. Buras (2013) stated, “Politics cannot be separated from policy - education policy is the product of disparate and competing interests between differently and often unequally situated groups” (p. 218). Black and white people have been situated unequally due to the social construction of race and the implementation of systemic racism to maintain white supremacy. Due to racism, Blacks were committed to counter the stories that whites shared about them which often demonized the Black experience. By becoming “respectable” people, the deficit perspectives of whites were challenged by how Blacks presented themselves.

This method of being respectable to whites by Blacks to combat racist stereotypes is known as the politics of respectability (Brown, 2008; Harris, n.d.). Higginbotham (1993), who coined this theory, states:

> The politics of respectability emphasized a form of individual behavior and attitudes both as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform of the entire structural system of American race relations. With regard to the black Baptist women's movement, such a politics did not reduce to an accommodationist stance toward racism, or a compensatory ideology in the face of powerlessness. (p. 218)

The "form" addressed above consisted of proper dress attire, speech, temperance, cleanliness in all facets, sexual purity, polite manners, and mentalities. Because Black women of the Black Baptist convention created this code of honor, the politics of respectability afforded men and women the space to openly discuss systemic oppression and form a resistance to unjust laws. The teaching and practices of the politics of respectability were grounded in Black Christian Church ideology and distinguished who was respectable or not in the late 19th and early 20th century. The politics of respectability attempted to help the Black community to combat the negative perspectives that whites held of Blacks that were predicated on appearance and speech. However, this distinction did not come without a price.

As deemed by the Black church (Christians), the politics of respectability created another system of oppression from a class, gender, and sexuality perspective. Respectability politics steers the "unrespectables" into a margin that will remain in the lower class if they are not economically able to change based on the initial definition, thus rendering them unable to adhere to the politics of respectability (Harris, 2014). Since the Christian church follows the laws of the Bible, this historical text condemns women in leadership and homosexuality, to name a few.

However, it also supports slavery, patriarchy, and oppression (Valera & Taylor, 2011). Because of these systems of oppression that have been implemented by "God's Word", this practice of respectability politics has caused conservatism to operate as a form of oppression. Conservative views are taught consistently by the Abrahamic religions. Conservatism means whatever the religious texts say is sinful is just that with no questions asked. That poses a problem. If conservative views cannot be questioned and justified because they are laws of "God", then this oppression heavily resembles slavery by the enforced subjugation of queer people and women. White (2001) states:

> For example, the homophobic tendency to exclude gay and lesbian African Americans from the black community naturally weakens the entire community. Homophobia causes gay and bisexual men to feel compelled to keep their sexual practices secret, which allows Aids to circulate uncontrollably. Also, of great concern is the growing number of homeless gay, lesbian, and transgender youth who end up on the streets because they have been thrown out of their homes or harassed out of their neighborhoods. (Location 164)

The deliberate abandonment, marginalization and ostracization of queer people has been supported and practiced by Black and white people. While White (2001) addresses the spread of AIDS, I argue that further interrogation of why homophobia is very prominent in the African American community is needed. Since sex was such a taboo topic to discuss and deemed immoral, what safe space did people with HIV/AIDS have to share their truth? The lack of safe space is still problematic today as the myth that HIV/AIDS is perceived as an LGBTQ disease only. While HIV/AIDS does disproportionately impact Black, gay men, this negative projection

on the LGBTQ community continues to sustain conservatism by regressing the conversations about sex and sexuality (Human Rights Campaign [HRC], 2020).

Black queer people have always existed whether they were acknowledged or not. For example, the first drag queen was a former slave named William Dorsey Swann born in the 1800s (Joseph, 2020). Swann was deemed to be a "strange" person and was arrested for holding house balls which the police and others believed to be a brothel, supporting the perception held by whites and other conservatives that queer people are sexually immoral based on religious beliefs around sexuality. Because of queer exploitation by whites and Blacks who deemed them ungodly, it was difficult to protect Swann and others like him from harm (Joseph, 2020). TPOR has led to conservatism within the Black community by making respectability counter whiteness while erasing identities that are not deemed respectable to the majority members of the Black race.

Working Together: Framing Intersectionality and TPOR for an LGBQ Study of HBCU Faculty and Staff

When constructing a study, theoretical frameworks inform the research questions, methodology, and method of analysis. Thus, the empirical research that I have conducted was framed by TPOR and intersectionality. This research is based on the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer faculty and administrators at HBCUs. This study is important to note because there has not been a study that focuses primarily on these two powerful groups at HBCUs. While some literature speaks to the lived experiences of queer students at HBCUs (Bonner, 2001; Brckalorenz et al., 2020; Carter, 2013; College, n.d.; Garvey et al., 2019; Grundy, 2012; Guy-Sheftall

& Alexander, 2006; Harper & Gasman, 2008; Harris, 2014; Lenning, 2017; Lewis & Ericksen, 2016; McCrary, 2014; McCready, 2004; Means & Jaeger, 2013; Mobley et al., 2019; Mobley & Hall, 2020; Mobley, 2017; Mobley & Johnson, 2015, 2019; Patton, 2011, 2014; Washington et al., 2009; Younge et al., 2007), the experiences of Black, queer faculty and administrators are lacking. Therefore, I am interested in learning more about their lived experiences within the structural context and confines of HBCUs, which are rooted in Blackness and religious ideology.

To execute this from the lens of TPOR and intersectionality, I would like to place them in conversation with each other to justify my use of both frameworks for my study. According to Woodson (2000)

> In history, of course, the Negro had no place in this curriculum. He was pictured as a human being of lower order, unable to subject passion to reason, and therefore useful only when made a hewer of wood and the drawer of water for others. (p. 21)

As Woodson speaks about Blacks not having a place in the curriculum due to the deficit perceptions maintained by whites, this same deficit of perspectives about queer Black people causes the community to be perceived as and treated with lesser value by other Black people.

Lawrence (1995) asserts

> If the Word is to validate and legitimate the experience of those it seeks to serve, its form as well as its content must say to our brothers and sisters that what you see, think, and feel, the way you experience life and your creative articulation of that experience is "scholarship/art" – is valid and of value. (p. 343)

As Lawrence notes, using words and stories assist in providing value to narratives that are often devalued based on how they intersect within oppressive structures. The words that humans use are powerful. Proverbs 18:21 reads, “Words kill, words give life; they are either poison or fruit - you choose” (BibleGateway, n.d.-b). Therefore, it is imperative to be mindful of the words spoken about people, especially queer Black people, in this context. Using the Black national anthem as a grounding point, to actively lift every voice and sing means every voice should be heard. Just as intersecting musical components create meaningful songs, so are the additions of queer, Black voices in harmony with the heterosexual voices to sing the same song of liberation. When we listen to music, many moving parts make music more enjoyable because of the intricate nuances or lyrics, harmonies, performance, and, instrumentation. Vocal performance, lyrics, instrumentation, and emoting bring the music to life. As such, queer Black voices add to the music of the Black community. The nuance occurs when Black queer voices are not provided with the agency or empowerment to add to the song to provide more meaning simply because they are queer.

Kimberlé Crenshaw articulated the connection between TPOR and intersectionality. As a Black, educated woman in the patriarchal field of CLS, the intersections of gender, race, class, and the legal system were not interrogated as they should have been per Crenshaw's observation. One of the main objectives of intersectionality is social justice. Social justice within intersectionality provides the nuanced relationships of intersecting identities and their connection to dominant groups of systemic and structural oppression. In my study, the intersections explored are race, religion, gender, and sexuality within the HBCU environment.

Ladson-Billings (2009) states, “Because our society is organized along binaries, intersectionality is difficult to research. We perform our identities in myriad ways and can never be certain to which of those identities others react” (p. 349). While this statement has an essence of truth, within HBCUs, it is known that openly queer people are not accepted nor invited into spaces publicly due to the discriminatory practices grounded in the politics of respectability, conservatism, and religiosity. It is the binary that causes discrimination as people sometimes struggle to understand that life can be “both/and” and not always “either/or”. Black people are various intersecting identities; however, queer identity poses problems in most Black, conservative spaces.

This study is not simply to hear and learn about the experiences of queer faculty and administrators. It was designed to produce social justice scholarship about the equity and inclusion of queer people at HBCUs. While being openly queer and Black has historically and currently been demonized within HBCUs, the deliberate lifting of every voice provides additional insight as to how these institutions can be safe, bold, protected, and thriving spaces for all. By using multiple voices and connecting different themes, my dissertation will provide faculty and administrators, who are deemed the key agents of change in higher education, to be visible and continue to serve as possible models for their students. Teaching and leading in the shadows is not beneficial in our current climate. In a time where the significance of Black lives must be articulated to whites the significance of Black queer lives must be articulated to other Black people who continue to render the LGBTQ community invisible per their connection and practice of the Abrahamic religions. Therefore, intersectionality and TPOR served as the main frameworks for my dissertation as it engages intersecting identities beyond race within intra-racial discourse. My argument here is that the conservative nature of TPOR supports the silencing of LGBQ identities

as it is directly connected to religious ideology that is practiced by most of the Black community, which impacts HBCUs.

Positionality

As I situate myself within my research context, I do identify as a queer, African American clergyman who is a member of a Black Greek Letter Organization (BGLO) and a product of an HBCU (Claflin University). I have also worked at several HBCUs during my tenure in higher education. While attending Claflin University, I was open about my sexual identity because I came out at the age of 15 when I lived in the inner city of Irvington, NJ. I was not willing to return to a place of secrecy, deception, and shame for the sake of attending college at a religious institution. I was not concerned with acceptance as a student because of my stance against discrimination. I understood my positionality and power. Therefore, as a student, when I felt that something was unjust, I spoke with the university president when other administrators did not follow through or respond. The university president and I developed a mentor-mentee relationship as I desired to become an HBCU president.

Our relationship was established because the president emeritus held office hours for students every week unless there was a conflict in his schedule. I began visiting the president during my freshman year and continued throughout my matriculation as I admired his leadership. He was a man of integrity and was very personable. The university made great strides, and when I shared with him a concern after following the initial chain of command, the issues were resolved. I found that addressing university issues with the president for resolutions was unfortunate. A student should not have to engage with the university President to resolve issues that other administrators are responsible. Had I not gone to the President, to build a relationship and share the

concerns of our residents in the dorm, nothing would have been done. Nevertheless, I learned a lot from his guidance which enhanced the leadership skills that I still embody today.

As I reflect on the general experiences of undergraduate students, I must admit that I was concerned about the university providing safe spaces for students like myself who openly identified as LGBTQ. My concern arose from finding my own community of queer people who became my support system as an undergraduate student. People often told me that I should keep my sexuality to myself, which further supported the notions of TPOR. Those who were queer did not openly share their authentic selves out of fear of retaliation from other faculty, staff, and campus administrators. Once I transitioned from student to employee of three HBCUs, I noted no positive conversations pertaining to the LGBTQ community throughout the campuses. Sexuality within the student, faculty, and administration was often a conversation that was avoided, which caused me to become more vocal about the blatantly discriminatory practices of the institution as it related to providing a truly inclusive, diverse, and safe environment for the entire LGBTQ community. Because I challenged the discriminatory practices, I was targeted by some of my heterosexual and homophobic counterparts, whose behaviors helped create a toxic work environment and sustain social injustice. While I did leave the HBCUs voluntarily, my soul is committed to lifting and shifting HBCUs, which is why I am passionate about this research. To those faculty and staff who do not feel as though their experiences are valid, this research will provide them the opportunity to share in hopes to impact positive change at HBCUs pertaining to LGBTQ identities. I also must share that my research is a passion for me because I strongly believe in the power of HBCUs. Hopefully, this research will continue to lift and shift HBCUs to become more culturally responsive to the needs and desires of LGBQ faculty and administrators.

Limitations

The limitations of this study were:

- Most HBCUs do not engage in diversity, equity, and inclusion training or policy creation relating to LGBTQIA+ faculty and staff.
- This study only included lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer sexual identities. Those who identify as trans* or non-binary are not included in this research as gender identity is out of scope. Thus, it is an implication for further research.
- Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted via a virtual platform that prohibited face-to-face interviews in localized areas with several HBCUs.
- Intersectionality as a methodology is relatively new.

Study Overview/Conclusion

This is an intersectional, qualitative research study that explores the lived experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer-identified faculty and administrators at HBCUs. Participants in this study met specific criteria to be certified as eligible. I have conducted twelve semi-structured interviews to explore the research questions mentioned earlier in this chapter. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the participant's personal and institutional identity. Intersectional qualitative research methodology was used as it supports the posed research questions and theoretical frameworks. There were no risks associated with participating in this study, and participants did not receive any compensation for their participation. The transcription of interviews was conducted, followed by member-checked, and verified before data analysis by participants. Once

participants approved their transcripts, I analyzed the data using a qualitative software, provide an ethno-dramatic sketch of their experiences, and provide implications for further research.

In conclusion, I have shared the problem statement, background of the problem, research questions, theoretical frameworks, subjectivities, study overview, and assumptions/limitations of this research study. As an intersectional qualitative research study, it is essential to state the nuances of intra-racial tensions among LGBTQ African Americans and the Abrahamic religious traditions covered in this chapter. In Chapter 2, the literature review will address additional nuances of HBCUs as it pertains to queerness and religion. Chapter 3 will focus specifically on the methodology and methods of the study. Chapter 4 is the ethnodrama which depicts the lived experiences of my participants in the form of a play along with a traditional analysis to further make meaning of their stories. Chapter 5 is the culmination of the work which includes lessons learned, implications for further research, and a call to action.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

When pursuing educational freedom-really, all freedoms- survival cannot be the goal, and finding a place somewhere on the spectrum cannot be, either. The goal must be pursuing freedom at all costs as a collective group of abolitionist-minded people who welcome struggle. – Dr. Bettina Love

Lift Every Voice and Sing is known as the "Black National Anthem" and was written as a poem by former NAACP leader James Weldon Johnson, an 1899 graduate of Atlanta University (which is now known as Clark Atlanta University). This song was written and performed in collaboration with his brother, John Rosamond Johnson, on February 12th, 1900. (*NAACP History: Lift Every Voice and Sing*, n.d.) While this song speaks to the cultural uplift and hope of the Black community to know that with faith, life would be better for them due to the oppressive nature and cruel treatment enforced by white people in the United States of America. However, what does it mean when only certain voices can be lifted to sing their songs of hope and encouragement? How does the song sound when there are African American voices who struggled not just because of race, but also because of their other intersecting identities within systemic/structural oppressive environments?

As the song has been sang over the years, one should think about the stories of the voices that were not lifted because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity because intra-racial nuances were deemed more important than the intersections of one's identity (Guy-Sheftall & Alexander, 2006). This is an important point to share as this research seeks to explore the lives of LGBQ faculty and administrators through the HBCU experience that is rooted in the Black Church's ideology. In both the Black Church and HBCUs, queer people's voices have often been silenced, suggesting that every voice has not truly been lifted to sing the same song of liberation (Editors, 2020).

Queerness in the original definition meant being odd or strange. Queer was also used as a derogatory term (like faggot, dyke, etc.,) that further marginalized, oppressed, discriminated against and in some cases murdered non-heterosexual and non-cisgender people. Today, the term queer is political as it signifies power of non-heterosexual communities' reclamation of justice. HBCUs have been queer because they were established through the odd/strange circumstances of racism with a desire to provide a safe place to educate Black people (Mobley & Hall, 2020). HBCUs were odd/strange because they were established to provide an educational experience for Black Americans. Due to slavery and racism in the USA prior 1865, education for Blacks was not permitted. Thus, HBCUs were different, strange/odd because they differed from the already existing schools.

Furthermore, Black queer people have always worked, studied, lived, and taught at HBCUs (Harris, 2014). While the nuances of sexuality and race within the African American community are intra-racial tensions, the Black church and HBCUs have historically wrestled with these nuances based on similar religious ideologies and practices. In the next section, I share how I engaged in finding studies that speak to the nuances of intra-racial tensions with HBCUs, the Black church, and the queer community. Second, I share a brief history of HBCUs and some of their queer stakeholders who have taught, led, and paved the way by being trailblazers within HBCUs. Next, I further interrogate why HBCUs have and continue to struggle with embracing queerness related to sexuality and the institution's connection to the Black Church. Finally, I then provide a conclusion that aims to connect the overarching themes highlighted in this chapter to provide additional reasons to support the significance of this dissertation.

Literature Review Process

When searching for academic research on queer faculty and administrators at HBCUs, no data populated. This reality is a strong indication that there is a need to research this topic because it has not been studied before. I performed this search using the Georgia State University library research database and used various word combinations and phrases across several databases, and the result was the same. The databases searched were ERIC, Academic Search Complete, Chronicle of Higher Education, Education Source, JSTOR, ProQuest, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, LGBTQ+ Source, Religion and Philosophy Database, Sociological Collection, APA PsycArticles, APA PsycInfo, and Women's Studies International. I obtained the most search results from the LGBTQ+ Source database than the others. The following combination of search terms was used; (homosexual or queer or lgb* or gay or lgbt or homosexual or sexual minority or gender minority), (college or university or higher education or postsecondary), (faculty or instructor or professor or college teacher or staff or personnel or administrator), (microaggression or bias or discrimination or stigma), and (HBCUs or historically black colleges and universities). In the search fields, I made sure not to include students as there is literature about the lived experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, or asexual (LGBTQIA+) students at HBCUs (Brckalorenz et al., 2020; Carter, 2013; Gates et al., 2017; Hudson, 2017; Lewis & Ericksen, 2016; McCrary, 2014; Means and Jaeger, 2013; Mobley & Johnson, 2015, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2018; Patton, 2011, 2014; Pennamon, 2018; Wood, 2018) and the student demographic is not part of my research study. When using the search terms, some studies spoke directly to the student experience that are not within the scope of my research topic. Thus, these studies are not included in my literature review.

The specific topic of the lived experiences of queer faculty and administrators has not been studied. The search terms were used in various ways to discover the most meaningful

research connected to this topic in collaboration with the College of Education and Human Development's (CEHD) research librarian. As research must be academically viable, I did not search on engines such as Google or Bing as generic search engines do not primarily gather resources from academic databases. I became more specific by using field limiters such as publication year, peer-reviewed, education level (high school, undergraduate, graduate degree earned), higher education, two-year colleges, and English. In addition to using the library database, I also gathered reading lists from mentors and colleagues who are subject matter experts in education, religion, sexuality, psychology, and sociology. While engaging in academic coursework, I focused my assignments where possible based on the scope of the course on the intersections of HBCUs, sexuality, religion, and race. I was able to find eleven studies about the general experiences of queer faculty and staff in the broader field of education across secondary and post-secondary education (Dozier, 2015; Dykes & Delport (2017); Gates et al., 2017; Gess & Horn, 2018; LaSala et al., 2018; Lineback et al., 2016; McKenna-Buchanan et al., 2015; Misawa, 2015a, 2015b; Mobley et al., 2019; Nicolazzo & Jourian, 2020; Reinert and Yakaboski, 2017). After reading each study, I was able to make meaning of additional gaps within the literature and methodological approaches to this topic which assisted in forming my research study by ensuring that the LGBQ community served as the primary focus. The main gaps that I noticed were the limited use of intersectionality throughout the studies and the added nuance of HBCUs. Out of the eleven studies, there was only one that addressed perceptions of LGBTQ preparation at HBCUs in a social work program. The program directors were heterosexual Black women who expressed that their programs do not prepare social workers to provide efficient care to LGBTQ+ clients (Gates et al., 2017). Also, within the eleven studies, there were several that explored the lived experiences of LGBTQ faculty of color at PWIs. After reading each of the studies, it was

evident that the experiences of Black queer faculty and administrators within higher education were limited. Furthermore, there has not been enough discussion to further interrogate the nuances between race, sexuality, gender, and religion. A common thread throughout the studies were the correlation to some extent with religion as a cause of internal and external homo/transphobia.

Brief History of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

The establishment of higher education institutions in the United States was only for white men, dedicated to Christian ministry. According to Holmes (1987), "The Christian college, moreover, is largely a community of Christians whose intellectual and social and cultural life is influenced by Christian values, so that the learning situation is life as a whole approached from a Christian point of view" (p.77). White people believed by that people of color did not have the mental capacity for higher learning because they were perceived as behaving child-like; however, the white abolitionists from the north and HBCUs proved that theory to be inadequate (Decker, 2014; Hutchinson, 2020). According to Delbanco (2012):

> In short, the American college was conceived from the start as more than narrowly ecclesiastical, with the larger aim, as the historian Samuel Eliot Morison put it, to "develop the whole man- his body, and souls as well as his intellect" toward the formation of a person inclined to "unity, gentility and public service." (p. 39)

The "man" referenced in the quote above were white men. Higher education was not inclusive of white women nor was it inclusive of African Americans as they were deemed less than human. white Baptist missionaries from the American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS) believed that Blacks needed the wisdom and guidance of white Christians to teach them how to

function in society as less than equal to whites. This was because most white people had a very narrow view of the world from their racist beliefs supported by Christian rhetoric. To further trouble the perceptions of Black people, in 1735, Carolus Linnaeus, who was a Swedish man that created the taxonomy (the classification system of organisms), divided people into categories of white, Black, Red, and Yellow. In doing so, whites believed themselves to be innovative while Blacks were characterized as careless and lazy (Watkins, 2001). Furthermore, Canaanites born of Ham were deemed to love evil things such as fornication, theft, lying, and were sinful, born ugly and Black (Decker, 2014). These beliefs were primarily held by southern whites because of the strong inundation of religiosity in the southern states.

According to Brazell (1992), "Long before the abolition of slavery, Blacks recognized the importance and power of education. At the same time, slave owners understood the need to control the slaves' access to literacy and therefore made learning to read a criminal offense" (p.26). If knowledge is power (Bacon, 1597), then it would make sense for whites to create institutions of education that closed their doors to Blacks. Slave owners did not desire their slaves to be taught as they were in fear that once the slave became educated, freedom and reparations would be expected, or that Blacks would harm whites the same way that whites harmed them. Roucek (1964) states, "Laws prohibited whites from instructing Negroes in reading and writing for fear that education could lead to Negro unrest and make white control more difficult" (p.164). As a result, Black educational institutions emerged due racism, which made educating Blacks illegal, authorized enslavement of Blacks in America, and steered education after making it legal for Blacks to a segregated environment (Brown et al., 2001).

Blacks deserved an education. Reading and writing were two major competencies that, if acquired, could provide Blacks with the hope to educate others as a means of liberation. When

Black people learned how to read and write as the slave owners knew, the liberation prompted by education was to be treated equally due to having the same knowledge. Thus, receiving an HBCU education for Blacks was a cultural marker for upward mobility, training future leaders, and furthering the social conditions for the entire race after the Civil War (Allen & Jewell, 2002; Anderson, 1988; DuBois, 1903; Frazier, 1954; Gaines, 1996, Green, 1977; Higginbotham, 1993; Lemelle, 2002). While learning to read and write could potentially cause civil unrest, the underlying fear was Black people would become more knowledgeable than the slaveowners and overthrow them. Why would white people fear that Blacks would potentially harm or carry out the same harm done to them if they believed and preached that "God" ordained slavery? When a person has faith in what they are preaching, there would be no need to hinder others from learning and receiving their own revelations of liberation. To minimize the potential for Blacks to inflict harm on whites, whites trained Blacks on the values of whiteness and Christian morality, which created a standard of respectability in the Black community (Anderson, 1988, Nguyen et al., 2018).

As white philanthropists began to take over religious philanthropy, they became the primary donors of industrial and agricultural Black education to provide economic security in the south, not to foster equality as many HBCUs were double taxed. Double taxing occurred because they believed Blacks were morally debased due to slavery which created their immorality (Decker, 2014; Gasman, 2008). Puritans used the New Testament in the Bible, which caused them to believe that all were equal in the eyes of God, and Black people only needed saving from slavery which would happen through emancipation. The Puritans were Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists, and Quakers who founded HBCUs such as Lincoln and Cheney Universities. It is important to know that prior to the Civil War, Black people were showing agency prior to

emancipation. Agency in this context meant that there was an interest in developing education and schools. For example, Cheney, Lincoln, and Wilberforce Universities have significance as being the "first" in their own right. Lincoln University (formerly known as the Ashmun Institute and named after President Abraham Lincoln) was the first degree granting HBCU (Lincoln University, n.d.). Cheyney University (formerly known as the African Institute, Institute for Colored Youth, and Cheyney State College) was founded on February 25, 1837, designating them as the first HBCU by the endowment of a Quaker philanthropist named Richard Humphreys (Cheyney University, n.d.). Wilberforce University (named after the eighteenth-century abolitionist William Wilberforce) is the oldest private HBCU in the nation that was founded, owned, and operated by Blacks with roots that trace back to 1856 (Wilberforce University, n.d.). Due to the Civil War and Morrill Land Grants of 1862 and 1890, colleges for African Americans were established primarily by white Americans. As a result of this white paternalism, the teachings at HBCUs were heavily influenced by private and public institutions to focus on technical and agricultural training (Williams et al., 2019). These higher education institutions have been noted for their ability to enhance student experiences and development by fostering supportive social environments (Patton, 2014). There were 51 HBCUs with the remaining being private.

White donors to HBCUs wanted to ensure that education at these institutions was workforce-related for manual labor and that they would continue to control the experiences of Black Americans to maintain societal dominance (Delbanco, 2012; Hutchinson, 2020). As a result, HBCUs have struggled historically with maintaining financial support and additional resources for faculty, staff, and students because they have not been considered with the same level of importance as other white institutions (Burnett, 2020; Delbanco, 2012; Hutchinson, 2020). This is still a major struggle for HBCUs. According to Hutchison (2020)

> In any regard, it is not wise, however, to under-estimate the efforts of African Americans and the minority of whites who were supportive of equality, and the growth of Black colleges across the South, both private and public, speaks clearly to the intent and will of African American to secure what could never be taken away, an education. (p.103)

While Hutcheson makes this argument, his statement is not completely accurate. Education was and is still, taken away from African Americans. For example, African American History is reduced to slavery, civil rights, and often integrated in U.S. history in primary, secondary, and post-secondary education (King, 2005). As U.S. history is taught in-depth, so should African American history. Doing so could eliminate the minimization of the experiences and contributions of Black people.

Amidst the racial attempts to lessen the education of African Americans by steering to learn trade skills instead of seeking higher education opportunities/entrepreneurship (Washington et al., 2003), providing barriers to receive degrees, limiting state funding, paying faculty and staff less, closing schools in the south due to SACS discrimination among other challenges, HBCUs continue to thrive. They are more ethnically, racially, and geographically diverse than predominately white institutions (PWIs) (Bonner, 2001). African Americans and white philanthropists did this by creating medical schools, committing to liberal arts education, and acquiring funding to keep their schools moving forward. Hence, the foundational purpose of HBCUs is for the upward mobility of Blacks that were excluded from formal education by the white majority. While HBCUs provide cultural uplift, HBCUs have historically been limited by their race, gender, and religious beliefs, leading to the exclusion of varying gender and sexual identities that made the institutions what they were and currently are. As the family of Blacks is important, so is the Black Christian church and HBCUs (Hawkins, 2012).

According to Holmes (1987), “It is not sufficient for a Christian college to identify itself simply as a liberal arts institution; it is also an extended arm of the church” (p.45). The Black church and family extend into HBCUs as the commonplace for Black dignity and equality (Allen et al. 2007; Douglas 2012). As previously mentioned, due to the training and teaching of white abolitionists, missionaries, teachers, philanthropy, and the indoctrination of Christian values practiced by Blacks, to be queer in the Black community was considered one of the most disgraceful and disrespectful identities (Douglas, 2012). Due to the indoctrination of queerness being sexually immoral, the queer sexual and gender identities of those who have attended and led HBCUs have been sanitized from most of Black history. In this section, I have shared a brief history of HBCUs. The next section of literature supports the notion that queer stakeholders have supported, led, and established a foundation of inclusion for the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality at HBCUs.

Black Queer Lives Matter at HBCUs

While HBCUs have made great strides to advance beyond the struggles of inclusion from a racial perspective, they have struggled and continue to struggle with providing a breadth of academic and extra-curricular activities for the diverse populations who attend and work at these institutions. According to Killough et al. (2019), “Since the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which afforded more African American students the opportunity to attend predominately white colleges and universities, enrollment in HBCUs have steadily declined” (p. 45). HBCUs have historically faced diversity, equity, and inclusion issues because the majority were created with racial and white Christian worldviews (Davis et al., 2018). Racial uplift was and is more important for

some HBCUs than addressing other facets of diversity considering their historical, conservative beliefs and practices.

Because of the religious undercurrent of the Black community, some HBCUs tend to support and practice the traditions of the Black church (Douglas, 1999; Gates Jr., 2021; Harper & Gasman, 2008). Thus, there have been challenges with HBCUs openly acknowledging and accepting queer students, faculty, and staff because the African American community typically is not inclusive of this demographic (Mobley & Johnson, 2015; Mobley & Johnson, 2019). According to Walker and Goings (2018), “At times, conservative religious tenets have undermined efforts to acknowledge the contributions of LGBTQ leaders from Bayard Rustin to the creators of #BlackLivesMatter” (p.148). Queer people have historically and currently assisted in making HBCUs the rich institutions they are. Excluding a group from public acknowledgement does not mean that they do not exist within the institution on various levels.

HBCUs have always been queer as there is no separation of sexual identity from the makeup of a person (Johnson, 2008). Mobley et al. (2019) states, “Furthermore, the etymology of the word queer derives from Scottish dialect circa 1500 meaning "odd" or "peculiar." Since their establishments, the act or idea of educating Black communities in America was the responsibility of HBCUs” (p.101). Educating Black people in America was not the intent of slaveowners and many states banned educating enslaved Black people. As mentioned earlier, if the decision to educate Blacks rested on the shoulders of racist whites, Blacks would not be educated today. whites held the belief that Black education was “odd” and “peculiar” which defined, equates to queerness (Anderson, 1988). Connected to the queerness of HBCUs based on their establishment in America are the people who have attended and led these institutions that are often erased

from history, which is unfortunate. Thus, I will share brief biographical information of five queer HBCU stakeholders and their contributions to the world.

I want to start with Bayard Rustin. In African American history courses, the contributions of Dr. Martin Luther King are highlighted; however, the life and influence of Bayard Rustin, who served alongside him, was viewed by the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) and other Black leaders as an "embarrassment" to the African American community and Civil Rights Movement because of his sexuality (D'Emilio, 1996; Strayhorn & Scott, 2012). As a result of his queerness, like most Black people who also identified as queer, the request was for him to keep his sexuality silent as racial concerns were more important to progress civil rights (D'Emilio, 2004). Rustin was a major strategist for the Civil Rights Movement, a confidant to Dr. Martin Luther King, and an organizer of the March on Washington (Podair, 2009). He attended Cheney and Wilberforce Universities and was a member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Incorporated, a historically Black Greek-letter organization.

The second queer stakeholder is Lucy Diggs Slowe, who was one of the founders of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated which was the first Black sorority in the Divine 9 (historic fraternities and sororities established by Black men and women during turbulent racial times in the early 1900s). Slowe attended Howard and Columbia University, founded M. Street Junior High (now Shaw Junior High), and served as principal in 1919 (Anderson, 1994; Miller & Pruitt-Logan, 2012). Slowe was the first Dean of Women at Howard University, she was the first Black dean at any institution of higher education who identified as lesbian. Serving in such a role did not come without challenges. The first Black president of Howard, Dr. Mordecai Johnson, bullied Slowe, which caused their relationship to be highly toxic (Njoku et al., 2017). Dr. Johnson and Howard University's board of trustees publicly humiliated, harassed, and discriminated

against Slowe with the intention of removing her from the institution. Most of the harassment stemmed from the fact that Slowe insisted on living off-campus with her female companion, which prompted the homophobic responses of Dr. Johnson and the board of trustees (Njoku et al., 2017; Sales, 2011). The witch hunt led by the homophobic Black president and board of trustees backfired as Slowe had a great reputation.

Third, I share a brief biographical sketch of Alain Leroy Locke, who was a Black queer male and member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Incorporated (Divine 9) that taught at Howard University and served as Chair of the Philosophy department. Locke resisted elitist behavior even though he obtained his Ph.D. from Harvard University and is regarded as the creator of the New Negro Movement and Harlem Renaissance (Watson, 2007). Locke was not open about his sexuality; however, it did manifest in his work as an intellectual. Connected to Alain Locke was James Mercer Langston (known as Langston Hughes), a mentee of Locke's and the fourth queer stakeholder I would like to lift. Hughes is a famous playwright, poet, and novelist, among other identities. He attended Columbia University but desired a different educational experience without the strict adherence to engineering that his father expected him to pursue (Summers, 2007). As a result, he became the personal assistant of Carter G. Woodson and enrolled in Lincoln University (HBCU) to earn a degree in liberal arts. Hughes was also a member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Incorporated, actively engaged in political discourse, and was a founding leader of the Harlem Renaissance.

The final person I provide a brief biographical sketch of as a queer HBCU stakeholder is Audre Lorde, who described herself as "a black feminist lesbian poet" (Eaton, 2009). Lorde was the first out, lesbian woman to speak at Spelman College, founded as an all-woman HBCU located in Atlanta, GA. Lorde also served on the faculty at Tougaloo College, which is also an

HBCU. As a result of her openness, Spelman College had a project named after Lorde, which was established to investigate the social climate for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) persons, raise awareness to combat heterosexism, homophobia, and create a more inclusive environment at HBCUs (Williams, 2013). However, there are no commissioned papers that speak directly to the faculty and staff who identify as LGBTQ. Lorde acknowledged and practiced talking about herself openly and transparently, which provided her an advantage over others who would discuss personal, private business that most held secret, such as sexuality, hoping that it would be kept confidential. According to Lorde and Rich (1981):

> There's no one to tell you even possibilities. In the hospital I kept thinking, let's see, there's got to be someone somewhere, a black lesbian feminist with cancer, how'd she handle it? Then I realized, hey, honey, you are it, for now. I read all of those books and then I realized, no one can tell me how to do it. (p. 735)

In this interview segment, Lorde also spoke of her battles with cancer. She acknowledged that, instead of looking outside of herself, everything that she needed to tell her story was already in her since she was the one facing the challenges of living authentically in a world that desired her to live otherwise.

Thus, Audre Lorde, Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, Lucy Diggs Slowe, Bayard Rustin, and many other LGBTQ Blacks played significant roles for HBCUs, making it difficult to understand why the institutions as whole continue to wrestle with the practices of deliberate inclusion for LGBTQ faculty, staff, and students. Because they expressed their intersections of identity in HBCUs, they provided a possibility to imagine what an inclusive institution would resemble with Black people who are queer in a community with a strong religious undertone. Their disidentification with heterosexism was a political statement (Muñoz, 1999). Queer people have always in

existed in Black culture, which includes HBCUs and the Black church. Thus, the education of Blacks was queer to whites who did not want Black to be educated. As such, queer Black people per their intersections of race and sexuality have always existed within HBCUs. In addition to the five stakeholders that I have mentioned, I would be remiss if I did not include Dr. Steve Mobley Jr. in this group of queer transformational leaders as he continues to publish about a demographic that has been silenced to provoke questions and engage in models for systemic change within HBCUs. Dr. Mobley is a graduate of Howard University, which is an HBCU, and is recognized as the genesis of Black queer empowerment (Guy-Sheftall & Alexander, 2006). He is a scholar of excellence and serves as a faculty member at the University of Alabama. Mobley's works are centered around the lived experiences of LGBTQ students at HBCUs. His activist voice in the scholarship and public identity as a queer, African American educator is refreshing and acknowledged broadly within the field of higher education.

While cultural dynamics would cause a person to remain silent about their sexuality, Dr. Mobley has chosen to be his authentic self, as Audre Lorde mentioned, to lift and shift HBCUs. Therefore, as I have honored and lifted five primary stakeholders who have led and attended HBCUs in the past, it is great to know that, in the present state of our world, Dr. Mobley is continuing to turn the dial towards a more progressive and inclusive space at HBCUs through his scholarship centering LGBTQ+ students. The issue at hand is that the lives of queer Black folks who have attended and led HBCUs are only acknowledged for what they have contributed to the Black culture from a racial uplift perspective. Their sexuality, which is a significant part of their intersectional lived experiences, is erased from curriculum as a hidden pearl in an oyster's shell at the bottom of the sea. Being openly queer is a privilege for those who have decided to pay the

price to be out. This is a price that many people of color who are queer do not benefit from when compared to white queer people (Garvey et al., 2019). Mobley and Hall (2020) state:

> If HBCUs were to promote cultures where their faculty members could be "out" and serve as "possibility models" for their students, this would lead to vital reciprocal mentorship relationships. These pedagogical acts should not have to be carried out in a clandestine nature. (p. 509)

In this section, I have provided an overview of queer HBCU stakeholders to shed light on the fact that HBCUs have always been queer from their creation. This queerness has manifested in many forms as women and LGBQ individuals have and continue to lead HBCUs. There are still some unanswered questions. How have the politics of respectability, anti-blackness, and other intra-racial issues contributed to the work environment of queer faculty and administrators at HBCUs? These issues are addressed in the next portion of this chapter to further nuance the intersections of the Christian religion, Black church, anti-blackness, and politics of respectability that manifest in HBCUs.

Church Influence and HBCUs: Historical Discriminatory Practices

In this section, I discuss conservative cultures at HBCUs. To address this, I must first address the Christian and Black church, which, as stated earlier, is partially an extension of the Black family and Black schools. From this historical perspective, I address anti-blackness and TPOR while connecting how these challenges implicated the attempted silence and harassment of the five queer stakeholders I mentioned in the previous section. After addressing this topic from a historical perspective, I discuss this topic from a contemporary (modern-day) perspective

as the politics of respectability deliberately influence and govern HBCUs related to the Black LGBTQ community.

Sex has often been a topic that is repressed and silenced due to being uncomfortable, coupled with the risk of harsh judgment because discussing sex publicly was immoral to the religious. Thus, when people confessed their sexual sins, the male members of clergy could provide penance due to their sinful nature as sex was only deemed permissible in a heterosexual marriage. Marriage, as described in religious law, was sanctioned by and an expectation of God between cisgender males and females. As religion is predominately patriarchal, female clergy are not as respected nor accepted in some denominations within the Abrahamic religious traditions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). Foucault (1978) stated:

> We are often reminded of the countless procedures which Christianity once employed to make us detest our body; but let us ponder on all the ruses that were employed for centuries to make us love sex, to make the knowledge of it desirable and everything said about it precious. (Location 2092)

Foucault helps us understand that sex was revered prior to the implementation of religious ideology. To further complicate Foucault's doctrine about religion and sex, there was and continues to be significant hypocrisy as it pertains to the boundaries of sex as described in the Abrahamic religions, specifically Christianity. During slavery, married male slaveowners raped black men (known as breaking the buck) and women as they pleased due to the power differential of racism and the fetishizing/eroticism that whites had of Black bodies (Collins, 2005). White (2001) states, "whites turned to the very deep prejudices based on gender and sexuality to convince themselves that they had to suppress Blacks and to rationalize the evil acts of both the powerful and the ordinary" (Location 319). As a result of the doings of whites towards Blacks from a

sexual perspective, whites deemed Blacks sexually deviant and immoral. Beyond slavery, Christians believed that partaking in anything secular was corruptible to the soul and damnable to hell. Secular behavior included listening to music and engaging in behaviors that the Christian Bible speaks against since it was the "law" to abide by for God to be pleased. This narrative supports anti-Blackness.

Anti-Blackness assumes that everything associated with Blackness is wrong; thus, any reflection of Blackness should be eliminated. Anti-blackness is part of the Afro-pessimism which posits "Black people exist in a structurally antagonistic with humanity…and maintain Black subjugation" (Dumas, 2016, p.13). The assertion of white's rights to destruction, consumption, freedom, blatant dismissal of Blacks, and perpetuation of an antagonistic relationship supports the idea that Blacks are always the problem and are facets of anti-Blackness (Dumas & Ross, 2016). Because of this perspective of anti-blackness, the politics of respectability rose, starting in the Black Baptist church, which continues to be the largest denomination within Christianity.

Though the Black Church and Black families share some characteristics, they are not a monolith, and the belief that the Black community is monolithic actually supports white supremacy and racism. (Black, 2015; Douglas, 1999; Gates Jr., 2021). During slavery, slave owners allowed some Black people to have their own church experiences, following the God of Christianity. It is in the Black church that established a sense of belonging, spiritual cohesiveness, built hope, and served as a place for political activism to make Christianity their own (Higginbotham, 1993). The songs of Black people during slavery had subliminal messages of hope and plans of freedom from their oppression. These coded messages in songs like "Wade in the Water" provided a method of wading in the water to escape from the plantations because the hound dogs could not trace scent within the water. Thus, the Black church and songs of the people always

held significance. While the music was for everyone Black, women were still expected to maintain their place, subservient to males, based on Christian order.

In this country, African American women are often viewed as "too strong" (Collins, 2005), "welfare queens" (Hancock, 2004), and are often objectified sexually. Women often led the church even though they did not hold the roles of Pastor due to the systemic oppression of patriarchy. This same practice spilled over into HBCUs as they are directly connected to the Black church due to the gender disparities of women who accelerate into faculty ranks and administrative employment (Bonner, 2001). However, ostracization did not stop women from providing the necessary support and grassroots movements to ensure that racial uplift occurred through funding schools and providing a plethora of social welfare services that were needed. For this to be accomplished, Black people had to deem themselves respectable in the eyes of whites before advancing efforts that would cause Blacks to climb the social ladder.

These same politics of respectability and conservatism that were based on Christian ideology and the eisegesis (opinion of religious text that is not supported by research) of scripture caused an attempted cultural silence of Black queer people in the church and their varying extensions. According to Barton (2015):

> Those who use scripture to condemn homosexuality do not perceive themselves as homophobic and discriminatory. Rather, they believe they are brave Warriors battling to save another soul for Jesus. In fact, they worry that they are letting God down, and threatening their own Salvation, when they defer to secular norms and do not witness to unbelievers. p. 39

If this belief is true, did the murder of Jesus not save everyone, more specifically the Black queer person? Furthermore, where did Jesus specifically condemn homosexuality or

women in the Torah, Bible or Qur'an? These questions remain unanswered by most religious Christians. The trouble with conservative Christian ideology is not only does it influence the politics of respectability, it also divides families, encourages violence, squanders talent and causes unfathomable spiritual, emotional, and psychological harm. How then, is God pleased when harm is being done to God's children? Because the Bible says so? Many scriptures within the Bible were written by white scholars at the Council of Nicaea with an agenda to create "moral" boundaries (Prothero, 2009). Because of these contradictory practices from the onset of Christianity, engaging in the Black politics of respectability and creating a conservatively oppressive community in the name of cultural uplift has impacted the Black community which impacts the influences in HBCUs (Harper & Gasman, 2008). Commodore (2019) supports this notion by stating "Over time, conservatism has taken on many definitions and has varied depending on context. Conservative ideals are generated from a variety of places that are not bound by race" (p. 456). While the politics of respectability did provide a sense of self-esteem, resistance to racism/dehumanization, and agency in the Black Baptist Women's Movement, it also has stifled African Americans (Higginbotham, 1993).

The stifling and stagnation of the African American community due to TPOR and conservatism that is rooted in Christian ideology did not cease. Another example of the politics of respectability is the Black conservatism that caused the tensions Lucy Diggs Slowe experienced in her leadership. Because Slowe wanted to live off-campus, was a high-ranking woman in leadership, and identified as queer, the patriarchal, hegemonic system of respectability politics and conservatism spawned the discriminatory practices of President Johnson and the board of trustees against her. The same can be stated about the attempted silence of James Baldwin, who identified as a gay man but was expected to place the concerns of race before his sexuality as if

there is a hierarchy (McBride, 2005). In the next section, I have expounded on these same concepts from a contemporary lens while also sharing the strides HBCUs have made as institutions. While most HBCUs have religious affiliations, some have progressively begun to evolve beyond the need to play respectability politics and conservatism related to women in leadership and queer people.

Black Church Influence and HBCUs: Contemporary Discriminatory Practices

Supreme Court Justice Black in *Everson v. Board of Education* discussed the Establishment Clause in the First Amendment that separates church and state. This law prohibits the government from participating in affairs of religious groups, prefer/aid one religion over nonreligion, and setting up churches (Ryman & Alcorn, n.d.). Physical buildings are not void of people. Therefore, while there is a separation of church and state, the people who occupy those spaces are not separate from those institutions. As intersectional beings, people are actively engaged in faith practices, embody and practice these ideologies in the physical spaces that they occupy. Thus, institutions of higher education, more specifically, some HBCUs practice and teach the politics of respectability. This culture of respectability is guided by Christian ideology embodied by those who share the same conservative Christian views about sexuality and women. According to Mobley and Johnson (2015), "Rather than encouraging students to walk in their own truth and embrace their authentic selves, many HBCUs compel students who identify as gay or lesbian to suppress these identities while on campus" (p.79). Silencing sexuality is also true of faculty, staff, and administrators. HBCUs have not publicly acknowledged an openly queer Black HBCU president nor senior administrator. Why is this the case in 2021, where same-sex marriage is legal in the United States and institutions have made progress to become more inclusive to

normalize what has always been present? Why do queer people who are expected to live silenced within the Black church and schools still attend? This causes HBCUs to face their conservative Christian values to effectively serve the diverse populations of the institution, especially in a time where other institutions of higher education publicly embrace and support queer identities (Mobley & Hall, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2018)

In Johnson's (2008) epic book *Sweet tea: Black gay men in the South,* where he interviewed queer men who attended HBCUs, he states, "Some of the narrators acknowledge the homophobia of their churches yet are committed to remaining members. Their explanations for remaining often center how they have separated, at least psychologically, the minister's homophobic discourse from the space itself" (p. 183). Compartmentalization does not eradicate the abuse of the soul. Queer people that assimilate to this psychological harm could be internalizing homophobia. Separating the dogmatic theology from the person speaking it and remaining is the same as "hate the sin; love the sinner" applied to queer people. The difference between the two ideological frameworks is that stoic, cisgender, Christian, Black heterosexuals do not proclaim to love queer people. In fact, the dismissal of the queer community is evident in the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement.

BLM was founded by Black queer women, a truth that is not always publicly shared. In 2020 there were several murders of Black people such as George Floyd and Breonna Taylor that have caused the African American community to protest that Black Lives Matter related to police brutality. In June 2020, Iyanna Dior, a Black woman of trans experience, was brutally beaten and her video went viral on social media (Street, 2020). There was no hashtag campaign for Iyanna to receive justice. The same was true for Nigel Shelby, who was a 15yr old queer Black male who committed suicide a few years ago. Nigel committed suicide because he did not feel

loved and accepted by his own Black community for being both Black and gay. There was no hashtag for Nigel Shelby. If all Black lives matter, where was the cultural uplift for the queer people who have been murdered because of hate crimes and police brutality? In a study of five Black lesbians at an HBCU, the overlapping identities of race, gender, and sexuality caused higher discrimination known as "triple consciousness" (Patton & Simmons, 2008, p. 206), which is a connection to W.E.B DuBois's "double consciousness" (1903). This consciousness only speaks to specific identities; however, humans are intersectional beings and not just created with one identity (Crenshaw, 1991).

Queer constituents of HBCUs have the challenge of navigating their conservative environments based on the politics of respectability and religiosity in order to reconcile the intersections of their race, gender, class, and sexual orientation. This is because HBCUs are extremely heterosexist (Cohen, 1999; Harper & Gasman, 2008; Kirby, 2011). The contemporary impacts of conservatism show that of the 107 HBCUs in this country, only half had a female president of color in their respective history (Jean-Marie & Tickles, 2017). Women often must play by the rules of respectability and conservatism to obtain jobs. They must fit the standard of beauty that has been established for them and are over-policed due to being projected as promiscuous and overtly sexual (Commodore, 2019; Njoku et al., 2017; Patton, 2006). In addition, Dr. Herman Felton (President of Wiley College) wrote a provocative piece addressing TPOR at HBCUs as it relates to the intersections of race and sexuality. Felton (2019) stated:

> Over the course of my career at several institutions, I have lost some good administrators because we failed to provide a safe place. Put more directly, HBCU communities stalled in their efforts to thrive because talented leaders were stifled in having the freedom to

> exist in full authenticity. They could not flourish in administrative performance because they were persecuted in their own personal lives on our campuses. (Paragraph 8)

While Dr. Felton asks critical questions of HBCUs, the experience of white college and university presidents have been published (Leipold, 2014). The negative projections/beliefs of Black women in senior leadership and queer people at HBCUs can create psychologically unsafe cultures that enforce policies (written or verbal) that sustain the systemic oppression of the marginalized at these institutions.

In a study conducted by Harper and Gasman (2008), three themes that emerged in their study of the consequences of conservatism were "sexuality and sexual orientation, self-presentations and expressions, and positional subordination" (p. 342). In their study, students were expected to do as they were told and not ask their superiors any questions, which mirrors slavery and expectations in most Black churches. Consequently, participants acknowledged hearing homo/transphobic remarks made by fellow students, faculty, staff, and administrators. A modern example of this would be the policies implemented by Morehouse College that I discuss in the next section as a contemporary example of the influence of the Black church, respectability politics, the power of conservatism, and student activism that brings about change. Over the past eleven years, Morehouse College, the only all-male HBCU has created policies and sustained a culture that produces a certain type of Black male intellectual. As a result of these historical, institutional beliefs and values, policies have been created to ensure that women of any kind are not allowed for admission nor graduation.

Oh Morehouse

Morehouse College has been the only institution in the media because of the public knowledge of their dress code and admissions policies which may be interpreted as engaging in the politics of respectability. Morehouse College (originally the National Theological Institute) was originally founded as a theological establishment designed to train young men for teaching and ministry in the basement of Springfield Baptist Church in Augusta, GA, in 1867 by Reverend William Jefferson White (College, 2020). In 1879, the institution moved to Atlanta's Friendship Baptist Church and became Atlanta Baptist Seminary. Atlanta Baptist Seminary moved downtown Atlanta to a former Civil War battleground in the West End in 1885 and became Atlanta Baptist College in 1897 (College, 2020). In 1913, the institution changed its name for the final time to Morehouse College after Henry L. Morehouse, the corresponding secretary of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, by the college's first African American president (College, 2020). It is the only all-male school within the HBCU community; however, the institution accepted and graduated women in the late 1920s and early 1930s because enrollment was low during the Great Depression (Suggs, n.d.). The institution has always taken pride in producing "Morehouse Men". Grundy (2012) shared a portion of President Emeritus, Dr. Benjamin E. Mays speech to Morehouse College where he stated:

> There is an air of expectancy at Morehouse College. It is expected that the student who enters here will do well. It is also expected that once a man bears the insignia of a Morehouse Graduate, he will do exceptionally well. We expect nothing less... May you perform so well that when a man is needed for an important job in your field, your work will be so impressive that the committee of selection will be compelled to examine your credentials. May you forever stand for something noble and high. Let no man dismiss you with a wave of the hand or a shrug of the shoulder. (p. 44)

These ideals of manhood are embedded in traditional beliefs and values. These include but are not limited to proper speech, dress attire, academic standards, and masculine ethical behavior. Morehouse has had twelve presidents, all of whom were male. The current president, Dr. David A. Thomas, is the first non-alumnus in 50 years to serve the university. He desires to grow the student population to 2,500 scholars during his time as president. His tenure began on January 1, 2018 (College, 2020).

Morehouse College takes pride in its five pillars of excellence which are expected of every student. These pillars are Integrity, Responsibility, Respect, Fairness, and Community (Conduct, 2009). As these pillars establish, guide, and reinforce their campus culture, it was proven that these pillars only apply to a particular set of Morehouse men and exclude those who present different gender expressions and resemble femininity. Because Morehouse is a private college, they have the autonomy to make changes without state-level checks and balances. In the next section, I share how their historical beliefs and practices caused the college to implement policies with a purpose to maintain their standard of Black manhood needs to resemble. I also discuss the ways those policies require policing gender, conservatism, politics of respectability, homo/transphobia, and hegemonic masculinity (Davis, 1999; Harper & Harris, 2010, Strayhorn, 2012).

Policy 1 – Code of Conduct – Trouble with Number 9 in 2009. In 2009, five students at Morehouse College presented as gender non-conforming, wearing female clothing. As a result of this uproar and the university constituents' complaints, the Office of Student Affairs added Number 9 to their dress code policy. It states that men are not permitted to wear female clothing of any sort while on campus or attending campus functions. The policing of masculinity and dress code is directly connected to conservatism, politics of respectability, and religious ideology. These

students, also known as The Plastics, decided to be their authentic selves in an institution that mandated they present physically as the code of conduct suggested. It took their boldness for Morehouse not to marginalize and continue to render them invisible based on the toxic expectations of the institution (Ford, 2015; Giorgis, n.d; McCready, 2004; Mobley & Johnson, 2019). Number 9 within the dress code policy was redacted due to the negative press the college received about it.

Policy 2 – Progress with Dismissal. In April 2019, Morehouse College, under a new administration, passed a new admissions policy that admits transmen (biological women who have transitioned to male) and will dismiss transwomen (men who transition to women) in efforts to remain committed to their historical founding of being an all-male HBCU. While the school will now admit transmen as of Fall 2021, the culture is not competent at this present time to provide safety and equity to queer students who do not fit within their traditional norms. The inclusion of transmen at Morehouse College is a nice gesture; however, they also have committed to dismissing transwomen students who attend without having an articulation agreement with other colleges/universities for the transwomen to complete their education. This change in policy impacts the college and its stakeholders uniquely. I say this because the policy change comes with the responsibility that Morehouse ensures that queer students are being treated equitably across all sectors of the college. While this is a current stride towards inclusion for students, there are no policies that support queer faculty and administrators at Morehouse or other HBCUs.

Current Strides towards the Inclusion of Queer People at HBCUs

HBCUs struggle with the tensions of LGBTQ inclusion because of the foundational religious beliefs that influence their culture; however, some institutions are making strides towards

stronger inclusion. Today there are 6 LGBTQ centers. Bowie State University in Maryland was the first HBCU to have a dedicated LGBTQ center. Following Bowie State University in establishing LGBTQ centers are Fayetteville State University and North Carolina Central University (Mobley & Johnson, 2015). Women of trans experience were first accepted by HBCUs Bennett College followed by Spelman College. Spelman College continues to make strides as they have a dedicated Women, Gender, and Sexuality studies department, and the Audre Lorde Project. Twenty-one percent of HBCUs in 2013 had recognized LGBTQIA+ organizations (Gasman, 2013). As of 2019, that percentage increased to 32% (34 HBCUs), which is evidence of progress in the right direction (Mobley et al., 2019).

Several HBCU presidents have also made great strides towards inclusion from a student perspective. Presidents Walter Kimbrough (Dillard University), David Wilson (Morgan State University, and Makola Abdullah (Virginia State University) have created LGBTQIA+ advisory boards to reconcile the conservative practices at their institutions to be more inclusive (Mobley et al., 2019). Dr. David Wilson of Morgan State University stated that the purpose of the council is to "promote personal, physical, and emotional safety while identifying ways to create educational and social opportunities and inclusion of issues of sexuality and gender identity and expression in recruitment, accommodations, academic and social programming at Morgan State University" (Morgan State University LGBTQA Advisory Council, 2018). There are also grassroots faculty and staff that have made strides to shift HBCUs to become more culturally competent and responsive to the needs of queer students. Steve Mobley created a framework for Student Affairs professionals to practice in efforts to make them more inclusive. In August 2019, I conducted the first-ever Safe Space training for the Division of Student Affairs staff and student leaders at Clark Atlanta University. I also served as the first openly queer advisor of BlaQ (Black

and Queer), the student LGBTQIA organization. There is still much work to be done which is why this research is essential. The politics of respectability, which influences campus culture at HBCUs, increases the intra-racial tensions of race, sexuality, and religion. As such, it deserves further investigation.

Conclusion

The conservatism and lack of engagement regarding the intersections of race, religion, and sexuality in Black communities call for a further investigation of the nuances of queer faculty and administrators at HBCUs. I have demonstrated this by providing a historical analysis of Christianity, higher education, the Black church in connection to HBCUs, shared the experiences of several Black, queer stakeholders, shared historical and contemporary examples of anti-blackness, the consequences of the politics of respectability, and conservatism as practiced in the Black church and schools. In 2021, no HBCUs currently offer LGBTQ studies as an academic program, with stand-alone course offerings being very minimal (Steve D. Mobley & Johnson, 2015). In addition to this, queer faculty and administrators currently at HBCUs are publicly unknown, which is unfortunate. In the quote at the beginning of this chapter by Dr. Love, Black queer people must do more than survive at HBCUs. As abolitionist-minded people, survival is no longer the goal because we must do more than survive. Unless the prophets (those the divine has called to shift institutions to become inclusive by breaking the strongholds of systemic oppression) rise within and around these institutions, HBCUs will continue to wrestle with sexuality, religion, and race as intra-racial tensions. Mobley (2017) says, “To not acknowledge these extraordinary distinctions is disrespectful of the past, negligent in the present, and an injustice for the future. HBCU communities must strive for and be beholden to intersectional Blackness”

(p.1039). While, as a people, we are thankful for our history and the strides that our ancestors made, however, the fight is not yet over, especially for Black queer people at HBCUs.

As more scholar-practitioner-activists take their rightful place and advocate on behalf of the queer community, HBCUs can experience tremendous growth and liberation by embracing intersectionality through the counter-stories of the people that conservatism has worked hard to silence. As institutions of higher education, there is a mandate to not just theorize about the possibilities. There is also a mandate for praxis to transform systems to be more inclusive, diverse, and equitable. Racial uplift is only one component of the work. If we take a moment to consider Jesus, he was not crucified because of lies. He was crucified because he decided to counter what the religious projected should be his truth. Jesus was peculiar, which equates to queer.

The religious during his time did not expect the Messiah to advocate for the disinherited, but he did (Thurman, 2012). Jesus spoke truth to political powers of systemic oppression, which caused him to be murdered. If most of the Black community are indeed believers of God, there is an accountability to live in the truth of loving, accepting, and including those who are different. John 3:16 states, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that WHOSOEVER believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (BibleGateway, n.d.-a). The love that the God of the Bible refers to should cause Christians of all sorts to understand that God loves the "whosoever" (person of all intersecting identities) and does not ostracize based on the "whatsoever" (i.e., sexuality, etc.,). Thus, engaging with the literature from an interdisciplinary perspective, I have shared the cultural nuances that make this study an important contribution to the field and explained why engaging in this research as a form of activism. This topic has not been previously studied and will provide insight into the lived experiences of queer faculty and administrators at HBCUs.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

Qualitative research requires the ability to "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings that people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 3). As people bring meaning to phenomena, this study was best situated as a qualitative instead of a quantitative study. Numbers and statistics are important; however, every number has a story connected to it. Qualitative research engages in storytelling that provides deeper insight into people's lives and their experiences within social life/structures. This study is considered intersectional qualitative research because it addresses social life and systems by situating identity within policies and practices within institutions. Esposito and Evans-Winters (2021) as the originators of this methodology posit:

> From an intersectional perspective, qualitative pursuits concern itself with all the aforementioned, but also with the political and/or intellectual intent to understand how people come to garner collective agency, resilience, and forms of resistance against oppressive institutions, policies, and practices. (p.7)

In this case, the lived experiences of LGBQ faculty and administrators at HBCUs were studied to garner collective agency and resistance by sharing their stories against institutions, policies, and practices that implicitly or explicitly limit their political impact. Other narratives besides the "master" support the need for the engagement of intersectional qualitive research. From a political capital perspective, the master narratives serve as the dominant discourse to lessen the narratives of others. Intersectional qualitative research is a methodological agent of change because it nuances identity as resistance in institutions or policies/practices of oppression.

When searching for academic articles on queer faculty, staff, and administrators at HBCUs, no data results populated. This is a strong indication that there is a need to research this topic because it has not been studied before. I used a variety of word combinations and phrases across several databases, and the result was the same. The search was performed by using the Georgia State University library research database. I used a combination of search terms such as: (homosexual or queer or lgb* or gay or lgbt or homosexual or sexual minority or gender minority), (college or university or higher education or postsecondary), (faculty or instructor or professor or college teacher or staff or personnel or administrator), (microaggression or bias or discrimination or stigma), and (HBCUs or historically black colleges and universities). In the search fields, I made sure not to include students as there is limited literature about the lived experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, or asexual (LGBTQIA+) students at HBCUs and the student demographic is not part of my research study. When using the search terms, some articles appeared that spoke directly to the student experience, which was not within the scope of my research topic. Thus, these studies are not included in my review and did not guide the creation of my research. The literature review of various methods and methodologies served as a catalyst to identify the way similar topics have been studied and how the researchers made meaning of their results to contribute to the field for further considerations. I created a design to conduct my research by using intersectional qualitative research methodology.

Study Design

A significant aspect of the research process requires the researcher to be reflexive. As a queer, African American millennial, pracdivist (practitioner-academic-activist-artist), HBCU graduate, former employee of several HBCUs, and ordained clergy, I am aware that this topic

reflects aspects of my lived experiences. Thus, it is important for me to name my identities and experiences as my passion for this research topic was personal. From my theological training and experience, we experience challenging circumstances to learn valuable lessons and help others become liberated. This is also the work of social justice as there are many social inequities for LGBTQ people of color within the Black institutions. It is my hope and prayer that this ground-breaking study causes a cultural shift at HBCUs in efforts to embrace and deliberately practice diversity, equity, and inclusion as the Christ of the Christian Bible alludes to through his ministry.

Based upon the literature review of research connected to this dissertation, I was able to learn more about methodologies and methods that have informed the crafting of my research (Dykes & Delport, 2017; Gates et al., 2017; Gess & Horn, 2018; Lineback et al., 2016; McKenna-Buchanan et al., 2015; Misawa, 2015a; Mobley et. al., 2020; Nicolazzo & Jourian, 2020; Dozier, 2015; Reinert & Yakaboski, 2017). In this section, I shared what I believed to be the best approach for my research study. I briefly address the theoretical frameworks, methodologies and methods, data collection, and analysis procedures that I utilized. Intersectional qualitative research is supported and analyzed through the lens of intersectionality as a theoretical framework, methodology, and analytical tool (Esposito and Evans-Winters, 2021).

Because this study explored the experiences of LGBQ faculty and administrators at HBCUs and the intersecting identities of race, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation analyzed within the context of HBCUs heavily influenced by the politics of respectability, this study fits perfectly with intersectionality. The rationale for exploring the lives of LGBQ individuals, specifically with the exclusion of trans* identity, was because they navigate the world differently

than cisgender people. Also, suppose trans* participants actively "pass" (i.e., negotiate the world as a cisgender person instead of as trans based on a physical appearance that reflects their gender identity). In that case, it is often safer to not disclose due to potential discrimination, harassment, and physical violence. "Passing" or "stealth" is understood when a trans* person is not questioned about their gender identity because they aesthetically look like that gender. Trans* persons were not included in this study because it was focused on sexual orientation, not gender identity. Because the trans* population desires to be known as the gender they have transitioned to, it was important to keep their identities safe to prevent further discrimination.

Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks that guided this study design, methods/methodology, and analysis were intersectionality and TPOR. Being cisgender, heterosexual, Christian, well-mannered, and groomed supports the concepts of the politics of respectability, as noted in Chapter 1. Thus, queer Black people are not deemed respectable by the Black, conservative community because their sexual orientation is perceived as deviant (sinful) and disrespectful to Blackness, creating tensions from an intra-racial perspective. The focus on narratives was used to support my goal of contributing to social justice policy changes. As noted in Chapter 1, the politics of respectability are situated in intra-racial tensions that have caused some Black people to assimilate to a heteronormative aesthetic based on conservative religious ideologies that were a direct counter to white supremacy. Intra-racial tensions, as noted in Chapter 1, addresses the nuances of social and ideological practices that result in tensions within one race. In efforts to describe and interrogate the politics of respectability at HBCUs, which are in some instances, an extension of

the Black church, using these frameworks were appropriate to counter the dominant, deficit narratives of LGBQ people in a Black educational institution.

In this study, the narratives were the voices of the participants who had not been heard due to the systemic and oppressive nature that are possible at HBCUs pertaining to sexuality. Counter-stories were designed to counter the dominant white majoritarian narrative, established in CRT and used within TPOR to combat white supremacy. Counter-stories were used to further deconstruct the negative perceptions about LGBQ individuals within the Black community, specifically those who had worked at an HBCU. Intersectionality addresses the fact that we do not live single issue lives and it is aimed at social justice by contextualizing the nuances of identity within systemic/structural oppression. For example, I was born as male but identify as gender fluid. My experience as a "male" is also informed by my race, age, ability, sexuality, gender identity, and socialization, just to name a few intersections. As a result, I do not just live as a male. I live as the fullness of who I am as other humans do the same when critically engaging with one's identity that is not on a single axis. Thus, the purpose of this research was designed to explore and examine the experiences of queer faculty and administrators at HBCUs in hopes that the institutions will shift to become more inclusive and responsive towards their LGBQ faculty and administrators.

Research Questions

Academic studies should have research questions that guide and provide depth into the topic being researched. The two overarching research questions for this study were: 1) How have LGBQ faculty and administrators negotiated/navigated their careers at HBCUs? and 2) How do

LGBQ faculty and administrators at HBCUs influence cultural (relating to LGBQ inclusion) change?

Methodological Framework

Crotty (2013) classifies methodology as "the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes" (p. 3). The methodological framework that I used was intersectionality. The methods of interviews and data analysis were best articulated by using this methodology. It is important to mention that using intersectionality as a methodology is a new framework that I hope this study would be used to inform future studies. Esposito and Evans-Winters stated, "Accordingly, intersectionality as research methodology is about contemplating, interrogating, naming, and simultaneously reclaiming and rejecting that nexus between the *known and unknown*, *invisible and (hyper)visible*, and *humanizing and dehumanizing"* (p.4). Conducting this study provided the ability to perform the steps to contemplate, interrogate and name while also reclaiming/rejecting narratives as LGBQ faculty and administrators are known/unknown, invisible/hyper-visible, and humanized/dehumanized. To properly perform intersectionality as a methodology, the following claims must be accepted by intersectional methodologists. According to Esposito and Evans-Winters (2021):

1. Academe or formal education represents only one way of getting to know the social world. Assumptions and theories about social relationships and institutional authority are also born out of having to survive under hostile conditions and (unequal) power relationships.

2. We must accept our own lived experience and how it shapes our critical consciousness and approach to the research process.
3. We must embrace differences within and across communities to better understand the social world and how our research participants, especially those multiply marginalized, operate within and across communities.
4. Research is the opportunity to learn with and from the Other; we challenge the assumption that researchers only have something to give or take from participants.
5. We seek a collaborative research experience in which our differences can help us imagine a better world where we all can do more than coexist; we can thrive together. (p.13-14)

Using intersectionality, the assertions made by Esposito and Evans-Winters spoke to my experience as a researcher and as a person who has worked at HBCUs as openly queer. My lived experience is only one experience. Therefore, engaging in this methodology allowed me to learn from the experiences of others. While I do acknowledge my own experiences, those experiences were not projected onto the participants. Using intersectionality as a methodology is relatively new; however, the assertions mentioned above further support the theoretical framework of intersectionality. Thus, for continuity of the study from this critical lens, using intersectionality as a methodology was most appropriate. This is further defined in the following sections of the research design.

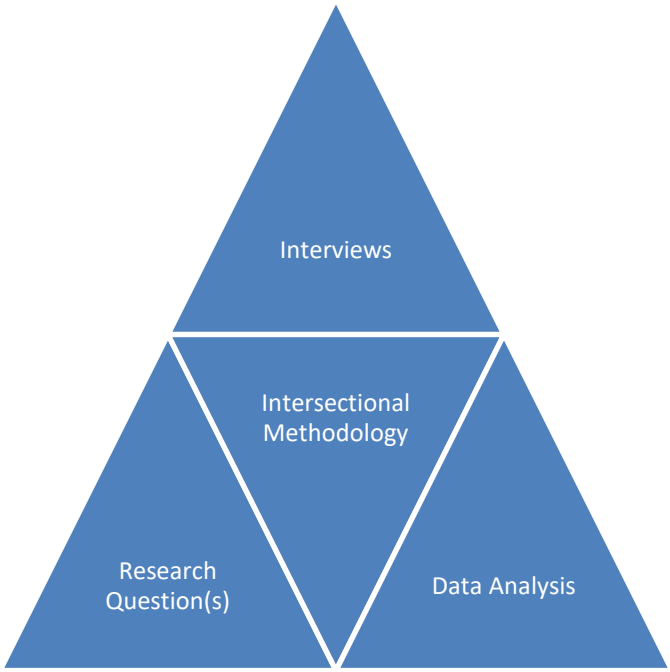
Methods

As an intersectional qualitative research study, interviews were the best method used as other methods, such as document/photo analysis, focus groups and participant observation were

out of scope for this research study. Also, considering the current COVID-19 pandemic and CDC guidelines, participant observations and in-person interviews were not advised unless socially distanced. The contemporary, real-world phenomena was defined in my study as the treatment and agency of LGBQ faculty and administrators at HBCUs. By reviewing interview transcripts, I was able to identify themes through thematic and theoretical coding of behavior and events. The overarching research questions, and participant criteria bound this research tightly. For example, this study focused on the experiences of LGBQ faculty and administrators at HBCUs. Below is a graphic that shows intersectionality at the core of intersectional qualitative research methodology.

Figure 1

Intersectional Qualitative Research Methodology



At the time this study was conducted, most institutions of higher education were delivering services fully online which limited the interactions of faculty, staff, and students. As a result, virtual interviews were the best option to engage with participants to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19. Demarrais & Lapan (2004) said, "Interview researchers select people to talk with who have the knowledge and experience about the particular focus of the study" (p.59). The focus of the study was bound by specific criteria for participants which strengthened my choice of using intersectional qualitative research methodology. The interviews cover multiple areas of the participants' lives which lead to a robust conversation about their lived experiences. All interviews were semi-structured as outlined in the interview protocol and interview guide.

Roulston (2010) asserted:

> Another point on the spectrum of structured to unstructured interviews is that of semi-structured interviews. In these kinds of interviews, interviewers refer to a prepared interview guide that includes several questions. These questions are usually open-ended, and after posing each question to the research participant, the interviewer follows up with probes seeking further detail and description about what has been said. (p. 15).

As outlined in my interview guide, there were additional probes to questions that provided further detail into the experiences of LGBQ faculty and administrators at HBCUs. Semi-structured interviews were also best suited for intersectional qualitative research methodology (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017).

Participants

To provide additional clarity on the roles of participants, there were specific criteria that had to be met to participate in this study. Twelve participants were recruited using snowball and purposeful sampling as there was not a strong niche community of HBCU queer identified faculty and administrators. To use snowball sampling, I created a written communication (approved by IRB) that was disseminated via email, LinkedIn, Facebook, and potential private groups where LGBQ higher education employees gather. In the message, there was a brief overview of the study and a link to a Qualtrics demographic questionnaire and electronic consent form (See Appendix A and C). The demographic questionnaire was designed for prospects to complete preliminarily to determine their eligibility for the study. If the participants met the criteria, they were eligible for the research study. Once prospects were confirmed as eligible by meeting the criteria, I sent an electronic communication via email with dates and times for participants to select from to participate in a semi-structured interview.

The criterion for participants were as follows:

- Identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer for sexual orientation
- Identify as Black, African American or of African descent
- Identify as cisgender
- Currently or previously served as a full-time faculty member in the ranks of tenured (assistant, associate, or full professor) and non-tenured (lecturer, instructor, or clinical) **OR**
- Currently or previously served as a full-time administrator within enrollment management, student and/or academic affairs at the levels of Department Chair, Assistant or Associate Director/Dean, Director/Dean, Assistant or Associate Vice

President/Chancellor/Provost, Vice President/Chancellor/Provost, and/or university/college President.

- Worked full-time a minimum of one year at an HBCU (One year is defined as an academic fiscal year)

I chose these specific criteria because study criteria had to be specific to participants to gain the necessary understanding to answer the research questions. This specific criterion further strengthened this research as a intersectional qualitative research methodology with a tightly bound population to be investigated. I do not believe that my study would have been as sufficient for part-time employees and some full-time employees in other functional areas of the institution because academics and administrators are considered to wield the most power within academia. Since intersectionality examines identity in relation to power dynamics, full-time employees within faculty ranks and administrators are perceived to have the most power. The autonomy, influence, and impact of cultural climate/change is predicated upon the curriculum, those who teach it, and those who provide leadership to the institution.

Data Collection

To conduct qualitative research, I was required to receive IRB approval since I was engaging with human subjects. To ensure that this study was ethical, an IRB application was submitted upon the successful defense of my prospectus in April 2021. After IRB approval was granted several weeks later, I began to use snowball and purposeful sampling to identify participants. Prospective participants electronically signed a consent form and completed a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C) to verify candidacy. Upon review of the questionnaire, I

contacted prospects to select a day and time to engage in the interview process. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted and recorded virtually with my personal zoom account on my personal, password protected computer.

I interviewed 12 participants that met the criteria listed in this chapter. Virtual interviews were between 60-120 minutes in one sitting. I asked probing questions to further understand their lived experiences. Interviews were semi-structured and followed the interview protocol located in Appendix B. As I wanted to be mindful of participants' time during the pandemic, only one semi-structured virtual interview was conducted. Pseudonyms were used to protect their identity and the identities of the HBCU(s) referenced in their experiences. Since I was engaging in creative arts methods, I asked the participants to think of a performance name. This name was intended to be unique to them. Most participants allowed me to create a name for them based on the interview. The interviews took place virtually in May 2021. Participants were required to electronically sign an informed consent via Qualtrics before they completed the demographic form, which used the same software. There were no incentives, risks, or benefits for participating in the study. Once the interviews were completed, they were initially transcribed using a third-party vendor and sent via email to participants for member checking with a 48-hour window to review/provide commentary. Once member checking was completed, I began analyzing the data.

Recruitment

I intentionally distributed my recruitment email to every active HBCU. Active HBCUs are defined as those institutions that are currently functionally operable per the standards of accreditation and the Department of Education. There are some institutions that have HBCU

designation, however, those inactive institutions have been closed. Thus, they do not have active faculty, staff, or students to recruit from. I specifically emailed the institutions' president, vice presidents/deans/provosts/chancellors of academics, student affairs, human resources, enrollment management, and select faculty members that were referred to me through some of my participants. It took approximately 17 hours to compile email addresses. After emailing over 300 administrators to share my recruitment email with their institution, I only received four responses acknowledging that they received my request. The emails that were sent requested a read receipt and confirmation that the email was successfully delivered to them. Most of the messages were received and read, but not responded to. In addition, I also posted my recruitment message in multiple social media locations that included Facebook, LinkedIn, and professional organizations that have an LGBTQ presence which were not HBCU specific. From that outreach, I only received one response and that person participated in this study. When participants began to interview, they recommended others who would qualify to participate, yet none of those whom I outreached responded to my recruitment message, nor completed the demographic questionnaire. Of the 12 participants, 8 of them I have known personally. Had I not developed relationships with those individuals throughout my career, I would not have obtained the sample needed for this study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred using intersectionality and ethnodrama between the months of June and July. Intersectionality was the dominant theoretical framework of my study and served as a methodology, and method of data analysis. According to Edwards and Esposito (2020), "Intersectional analysis is used to solve problems, bring equity, make visible the overlooked, and

gain knowledge from the human experience" (p. 47). This approach was chosen because intersectionality uncovers and addresses power, privilege, and what it does to people impacted within systems and structures. Thus, intersectionality as a theoretical framework and method of data analysis was much more than the surface naming of identity politics. Data were also analyzed and reported using ethnodrama. Saldaña (2005), one of the foremost practitioners of ethnotheatre and ethnodrama, stated,

> Anchored in arts-based tradition of qualitative inquiry, ethnotheatre employs the traditional craft and artistic techniques of theatre production to mount for an audience a live performance event of research participants' experiences. An ethnodrama, the written script, consists of dramatized selections of narratives collected through interviewing and participant observation. (Location 104 – eBook)

Ethnodrama is the dramatization of ethnographic work (Saldaña, 2011; Stephenson, 2018). While ethnodrama as a research method is not as mainstream in social science research, the tradition of using art to tell historical and personal stories is not new (Beck, 2011). Ethnodrama can be used in social science research to realize Denzin's (2003) assertion that ethnodrama is a viable method for communicating and encouraging people to embrace racial diversity and social differences. The use of ethnodrama allows participants' experiences, or the way that the researcher understands their stories, to be heard clearly by the reader. As Saldaña (2008) noted, the use of ethnodrama allows researchers to closely study a component of the human experience. That study is then presented as a performance or dramatic play for those who will experience the stories.

As a research method, ethnodrama also means that results of the study are presented in a fashion that can be very different from the traditional presentation of research findings. The dramatized results are often presented in the form of a stage play that includes stage notes and other descriptors to aid the reader in engaging with the participants' narratives. In this way, the reader becomes part of the audience and is experiencing the story in a more meaningful way (Pollock, 2005). Instead of simply reading the words on the page, the reader/audience member is experiencing the full range of emotion that the participants bring to their narratives (O'Connell & Lynch, 2019). Ethnodrama provides the readers the ability to get to the heart of the answers to my research questions and other emotional connections that provide a greater insight into individual lives in ways that other methods would not. This is an important distinction that sets ethnodrama apart from other data analysis methods. As Stephenson (2018) noted, "People believe theatre" (p. 207). This belief in the emotions that stage performance and drama elicit in those who consume them offer a promise for those whose voices and narratives are often omitted when it counts. It makes their stories and experiences real and, hopefully, encourages a new level of empathy and commitment to honoring their humanity despite social difference.

Davis (2014) used ethnodrama to explore the lived experiences of people who were 18-25 years old that were transitioning from high school into an adult basic education program. The 12 students involved in the study were interviewed by Davis and their narratives were presented in the ethnodrama tradition. Davis used ethnodrama to re-represent the participants' data to honor the voices of her participants. For Davis, lifting the participants' voices using ethnodrama allowed the reader to create their own meaning and interpretations regarding what the participants' lived experiences meant. In the presentation of the data, Davis (2014) created an ethnodrama in four scenes based on how she interpreted participant narratives. Relying heavily on her

own imagery, Davis' scenes were centered on participants' high school experiences, deciding to leave high school, thoughts about leaving high school, getting a GED, and transitioning to adult education. It is important to note here that Davis also chose not to provide a formal interpretation of the ethnodrama for readers because "the script itself is an interpretation of the data" (p. 243). This is a strategy commonly used in the presentation of ethnodrama (Saldaña, 2011).

Baur et al. (2012) also used ethnodrama as a framework for the presentation of their research around client interactions with professionals in a residential care home. The ethnodrama they presented was based on observations of the participants and included all the voices of both the participants and the team that provided care for them. Baur et al. chose to use an ethnodrama to communicate their findings because they wanted the readers to experience the participants' narratives "as if they were part of the project team themselves" (p. 274). Readers were intended to become part of the learning process to allow them to better relate to the experiences of those they were reliving in the ethnodrama presentation. Baur et al. (2012) also justified the use of ethnodrama as a research method by emphasizing the way that it allowed them to consider and embed their own personal experiences as they were present in the data collection. The authors also noted that their ethnodrama was presented through their lens but was approved by the participants before being presented as a final work. Unlike Davis (2014), Baur et al. provided a thorough analysis of the major themes of their ethnodrama as part of sensemaking exercise with the reader.

O'Connell and Lynch (2020) used ethnodrama to communicate the experiences of deaf people working as interpreters in Ireland. Centered on the experiences of six deaf interpreters, the ethnodrama was used to ensure that the readers and audience members could access and

experience the thoughts, feelings, and ideas of the participants through the script. Again, there was a personal element to the work of creating the ethnodrama as both O'Connell and Lynch were also deaf interpreters. Following the presentation of their ethnodrama, O'Connell and Lynch (2020) wrote an epilogue that provided deeper analysis of the central themes of the ethnodrama. This epilogue was included as a way of translating the experiences of the deaf participants in a way that made their experiences clear to the reader. These authors' goal for using ethnodrama was to make the experiences of deaf interpreters more accessible to the population. Similarly, the use of ethnodrama also presented an opportunity for those who participated in this study. Their participation gave them the opportunity to speak their truth to power and own their experiences and narratives in a way that they may not be able to do in life due to the pressures of society and the politics of respectability (Stephenson, 2018). Ethnodrama provided an opportunity for their voices to be lifted without being watered down through the lens of appropriateness or an attempt to protect the reputations of these sacred Black spaces in my study.

I chose ethnodrama because it is an arts-based approach that aligned perfectly with my background in musical theater and the published author of *You Said One Thing…God Said Differently*. Also, a major part of Black culture is storytelling, thus it was culturally appropriate to tell the stories of the participants in a different way than traditional social scientific methods of analysis (Black, 2015; Douglas, 1999; Gates Jr., 2021). According to Grbich (2013), "Situations are presented with the view of confronting the audience and challenging their positions in such a way as to lead an epiphany – an acute realization with the potential for emancipation and empowerment" (p. 144). This method was closely associated with ethnographic studies and was connected to my background as an artist as well as a theologian whose desire is to emancipate and empower. In ethnodrama, interview data and other methods are dramatized to highlight the

cultural perspectives and aspects of disempowered people. At HBCUs, LGBQ faculty and staff are disempowered to live openly due to conservatism that is oppressive and rooted in Black Christian, heteronormative ideology. In the next three sections, I have detailed my process of coding the data for validity, followed by a review of ethnodramatic research and the creation of the ethnodrama.

Coding

According to Saldaña (2016), "A theoretical code specifies the possible relationship between categories and moves the analytic story in a theoretical direction" (p.251). This coding practice closely aligns with intersectionality, and ethnodrama as theoretical codes were established by intersecting nuances of identity within structures which provided the arguments that are described in Chapter 4. On Table 1, you can see examples of how I coded the data by following the examples of Esposito & Evans-Winters (2021)

Table 1

Codes	***Subcodes***	***Relation to Theoretical Framework***	***Categories/Themes***
LGBQ Experiences	LGBQ Challenges	Intersections of worth as a human connected to religious beliefs have caused tensions for most participants	Acts of Survival
	Coping Strategies	To cope with not having a sense of belonging in some areas, participants found ways to handle life as black and queer	
Navigating Landscape	Engaging at work	As queer Black people, engaging with others at work was limited pertaining to personal dialogue about life outside of work.	Navigating the Politics of Respectability
	Developing a Sense of Belonging	Some participants relied more on Blackness than queerness at HBCUs	

	Career Trajectory	The presidency is a goal for some, but there is uncertainty of career advancement based on sexuality	
	Encouraging Inclusivity	Some participants shared how they encourage a more inclusive environment for the queer community	
Power Dynamics	Agency and Accountability	Personal agency to impact change was only mentioned within their sphere of influence.	Agency vs. Autonomy
	Mentoring	Mentoring of students occurs, however, mentoring of other queer colleagues was not reported	

Within the table above, I provided codes, sub-codes, their relation to intersectionality, and the arguments that emerged from the data after several cycles of coding. The first theme that emerged was Acts of Survival. In this argument which has been further explained in Chapter 4, the stories of participants indicated how they had to act in order to survive. The acting included the denial of sexuality and passing in efforts to fit into the social norms of heteronormativity. These acts led to the second theme which was navigating the politics of respectability. Because heteronormativity in the Black community is the most acceptable sexuality, engaging in the politics of respectability was an act of survival for most participants to navigate their careers at HBCUs. The final theme was agency vs. autonomy. This argument supported the notion that because of the politics of respectability, the participants did not feel as if they had the agency nor autonomy to make a larger systemic impact at HBCUs to make the environments more inclusive and rooted in an authentic state of belonging. All themes are further detailed in Chapter 4 and were analyzed following each act of the ethnodrama. Considering that intersectionality is situated within identity and systems/structures, it was important for me to provide connections in the table to the codes and sub-codes to demonstrate how I arrived to the arguments which are detailed in Chapter 4.

In the first cycle of coding, I coded the individual transcripts by the participants' thoughts and feelings of their lived experiences. In the second cycle of coding, I compared the lived experiences of the participants based on the questions asked during the interview. As seen in Appendix B, the questions posed started broadly and became more concise as the interview progressed. For example, in questions 1-3 that inquire about the lived experiences of participants, they discussed their lives and I coded it as LGBTQ experiences with sub-codes of LGBTQ challenges and coping strategies. For each of the participants, I thoroughly read and listened to their responses to each question and coded accordingly to make meaning of their stories. The emergent codes consisted of the ideas, actions, and meanings that were present in the participants' data. The codes from the second cycle were encouraging inclusivity, LGBQ experiences, politics of respectability and sexuality, and sense of belonging at HBCUs. Encouraging inclusivity referred to instances where participants described, directly or indirectly, how they and HBCU leaders could improve campus culture to increase acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community. LGBQ experiences referred to excerpts in the data where participants either directly described their experiences moving through life, both inside and outside of HBCU campuses.

In the final cycle of coding, I placed the transcripts together to discover the common themes and began to question how they connected to my chosen theoretical framework. From coding and continued comparisons, themes(arguments) emerged through the process. Charmaz (2006) asserts

> Be careful about applying a language of intention, motivation, or strategies unless the data support your assertions. You cannot assume what is in someone's mind – particularly if he or she does not tell you. If people tell you what they "think," remember that they provide enacted accounts reflecting social context, time, place, biography, and

> audience. Participants' unstated purposes in telling you what they "think" may be more significant than their stated thoughts. If you reframe participants' statements to fit a language of intention, you are forcing the data into preconceived categories – yours, not theirs. Making comparisons between data about what people say, and do, however, strengthens your assertions about implicit meanings. (p. 68)

In considering authenticity, through coding and creating the ethnodrama, I did not force my thoughts or beliefs into the data to construct a story. I used their direct voice to inform the arguments and the flow of the ethnodrama. Those arguments were Acts of Survival, Navigating the Politics of Respectability, and Agency vs. Autonomy. These arguments emerged by making meaning of the coded data, answering my posed research questions, and provided a foundation in the creation of the ethnodrama.

Ethnodramatic Research

Since the emergence of the gay rights movement and related cultural revolutions, the use of theater for telling the stories of LGBTQ+ people are ubiquitous in queer culture. The development of ethnodramatic research as a methodological design for qualitative research has led to the emergence of poignant retellings of the experiences of LGBTQ+ people that are then documented for the future of the movement. The monologues or other theatrical modes of communication were drawn from the transcripts of the participants as well as the extensive collection of reflective notes and additional data resources that were collected for the study. The participants, once informed, are then part of the process of crafting stories for future generations of LGBTQ+ people.

Performance autoethnography and ethnography is a methodology focused on creating a piece of literature like a play or a monologue from the collected data as part of a means of creating a performable piece that is usually part of a larger social justice focus (Denzin, 2018a; Denzin, 2018b). Billingham (2019) puts for its usefulness in addressing the systemic marginalization and abuse of LGBTQ+ students. Salvatore (2020) identifies five major scripting conventions, including monologue, duet, trio, quartet, and montage as the primary tools for crafting an ethnodramatic pieces as a result of the analysis of qualitative data. The goal of ethnodrama is to explore positionalities and challenge negative social paradigms that oppress marginalized groups (Malhotra & Hotten, 2021). As part of the purpose of this research is to reveal the stigmas and challenges Black LGBTQ+ people face while trying to integrate into a social paradigm that potentially is lacking in terms of support, ethnodrama is an appealing and logical choice.

Ethnodrama is the use of monologues or a theatrical piece like a play to organize the themes of the research into a unique piece that can be performed for audiences as part of the storytelling experiences of a unique culture or ethnicity (Given, 2008; Mienczakowski, 2019; Salvatore, 2020). Gay culture has historically employed the use of theatre in its expression of the varying social injustices LGBTQ+ people face daily as part of a larger part of resistance of oppressive social forces (e.g., religion, violence of others) that seek to send LGBTQ+ people into the shadows of society (Denizen, 2018b). Ethnodrama has also been used to document the experiences of religious LGBTQ+ people, LGBTQ+ high schoolers, Trans people, sex-selective abortion, and racial groups like African Americans (Hogan & Omasta, 2021; Koriko, 2018; Krack, 2020; Mienczakowski , 2019; Sweet & Carlson, 2018; Salvatore, 2020; Tomczyk, 2020). It is part of a long tradition of giving voice to the people who are routinely set aside by society and

helping shift attention for social change that results in the protection and safety of LGBTQ+ people, who have been historically abused by law enforcement and society.

Denizen (2020) begins their ethnodrama with the following: “Dear Reader: What you are about to read is intended to be a subversive manifesto, a call to arms. A non-history, a story of an arranged marriage, a marriage of convenience, and necessity” (p. 453). This kind of call to narrative and story for the purposes of subverting oppressive moral codes or discrimination because of gender or sexual orientation is what defines the use of ethnodrama as critical issues faced by marginalized groups are explored. Challenging norms through stories, ethnodramatic methodology provides a means of maximizing the impact of this research, ensuring the experiences of the participants are shifted front and center. Teman and Saldaña (2019) do highlight the importance of going beyond the role of social scientist and emerging as an artist, which means this methodological angle requires more than an analytical mind. As Lawrance (2015) puts it, the data must be danced with, not merely expounded upon fully.

Works like The Laramie Project and The Vagina Monologues seek to put a voice to the kinds of horrific treatment that women and LGBTQ+ people face in a more formal way that traditionally has been done in drag comedy clubs (Denzin, 2020). The goal with these performance pieces is to enact social change by challenging the views of the audience (Denzin, 2020). LGBTQ+ people of color represent a unique culture with unique experiences and stories that should be documented to help challenge how varying cultures manage their treatment of LGBTQ+ people as well as what their expectations of LGBTQ+ people are. This methodology reflects the ideal design for investigating the stories of Black LGBTQ+ people working at HBCUs, as it has uncovered the kinds of issues, they specifically face that LGBTQ+ people of

other racial groups might not have experienced. Those stories are valid, and this research intends to create a means for them to be told.

Black culture has also employed the use of theatre to tell stories of resistance to oppression and evoke responses from audiences that cause them to evaluate their positions to the point of epiphany (Black, 2015; Douglas, 1999; Gates Jr., 2021; Grbich, 2013). Stories have been at the forefront of some of the most powerful social movements of the postmodern period for their ability to drive movements and inspire people. The use of stories to affect change for social justice purposes is at the heart of ethnodrama, and its use for the research at hand provides a critical step forward in modern day issues that Black LGBTQ+ people face daily.

Religious themes are common throughout the employment of ethnodrama, as often culture clashes arise because of spirituality, especially so with LGBTQ+ issues. Hogan and Omasta (2021) shared a playscript that was generated from interviews with LGBTQ+ individuals from religious backgrounds that explore the inner world of an LGBTQ+ individual as they engage with religious people and contexts, finding themselves written neatly out of the story. The intersectionality that arises because of being LGBTQ+ and also being from a Black community that is extremely religious can have profound impacts on a person's life, and as such, this topic warrants further investigation to uncover the stories of Black LGBTQ+ people working at HBCUs. This research employed ethnodrama as a means for these stories to be told and generate healing by inspiring viewers to challenge their perceptions of LGBTQ+ people and the way they should be treated in efforts to fuel the movement for the acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community. Challenging ideas within the Black community regarding LGBTQ+ people are at the center of this research, and as such, ethnodrama was selected as the optimal methodology.

Within the bounds of ethnodrama, there are several types of theatrical devices that can be employed (Salvatore, 2020). As this research deals with people's life stories, monologuing was selected as the optimal device to represent the participants' responses for this research as participants engaged in semi-structured interviews designed to draw out narrative responses about their life experiences. Monologuing is the form frequently used when speakers tell long stories about their life (Saldaña, 2005; Saldaña, 2010), and therefore reflect an optimal device to represent the life stories of the participants in the current study. They logically connect to the type of interview being conducted as well, as semi-structured interviews are ideal for drawing out longer, narrative responses to the questions assisted with follow-up questions probing for additional detail. In a way, as semi-structured interviews are attempts to draw out monologues to comb for themes, they might produce monologues because of their nature (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). They also provide a means of an individual offering a critique or alternate view of potentially oppressive religious social paradigms that are in power (Denzin, 2018b).

Creation of Ethnodrama

After the completion of coding, I wrote the traditional analysis based on the themes that emerged within the data. Following the traditional analysis, I creatively crafted individual monologues so that the active voice of the participants was authentic. This was done by taking excerpts from each individual transcript to share their lived experiences as Black and queer people. In ethnodrama, monologues (also known as one-man/woman shows) can range from overtly political, confessional performances, to autobiographical entertainments (Bonney, 2000; Horwitz, 2002, Kalb, 2001). In monologues within ethnodrama, Saldaña (2016) informed readers that,

"You don't have to compose what your participants tell you in the interviews, but you can creatively and strategically edit the transcripts, assuming you wish to maintain rather than "re-story" their narratives" (p.19). It was not my desire to re-story the narratives of my participants; thus, the monologues used the most important aspects of their interviews to tell a collective story of the experiences of LGBQ faculty and administrators at HBCUs.

The thorough engagement with each individual transcript in efforts to state their story in an ethnodrama was very difficult because the process to determine what remained in the ethnodrama meant carefully weaving various aspects of the interview's transcript into a succinct story. Interview transcripts ranged from a minimum of 12 pages to the maximum of 36. As the artist and creator of the ethnodrama, I used the most viable portions of the transcripts that answered the questions posed during the interview and my research questions which resulted in ensuring that each transcript was scaled down to rich data to tell a provocative story within the authentic voice of each participant. In creating an ethnodrama, it is important for the artist to determine the most salient information to evoke emotions and critical thought which leads to actions of social justice such as equity in the treatment, policies, and protections that are afforded to heterosexual people that should be the same for the LGBTQIA+ community. Every aspect of the stories shared was important. Thus, the biggest challenge faced was determining the anchor to ground the stories in a creative way to tell their stories meaningfully.

Since this is the first study of its' kind, I infused my experiences within as an autobiographical sketch that set the tone for each act within the ethnodrama. In paying homage to ballroom and popular culture, I ensured that the names of the acts reflected the hit television show

entitled *Pose*[2]. The way that the names of the acts emerged were based on the questions posed during the interview. For example, the first few questions in the interview protocol focused on how the participants lived their lives. Thus, the first act is called *Live.* The second act was entitled *Werk,* which demonstrated how the participants engaged within their HBCUs. Lastly, the final act was entitled *Pose* which shows a posture of power within the system and structure of HBCUs. The names of the acts directly connect with intersectionality as a theoretical framework by addressing identity within the context of power that exists within HBCUs. According to Johnson-Bailey (2004), "stories exist on several levels- the macro through the micro-which include the community, regional, national, cultural, and individual" (p.126). In the monologues, based on the posed questions in the interview, these nuances were told in a dramatized, storytelling format to evoke emotion and critical thought into each participant's lived experience that has not been told prior to this research study. The ethnodrama produced in this work is likened unto stage plays, soap operas, documentaries, and the likes which make them dramatized, yet, informative with a thematic storyline. For example, one of the questions that I asked all participants was to name a song that described their lived experiences as Black and queer at HBCUs. Their songs of choice are named in Act I and signifies their cue to come to center stage from the back of the stage. Their songs were personal to them that which reflected their encouragement to themselves navigating their careers at HBCUs. In addition, the flow in which the participants spoke were nuanced. In Act I, participants spoke based on the chronological order that I interviewed them. In

[2] *Pose* was a popular culture drama that aired from 2018-2021 that was set in the 1980s that addressed the nuances of the New York ball culture for Black and Brown LGBTQIA people which can be found on Netflix. I related it to my inspiration in crafting this ethnodrama because *Pose* was a dance musical. In essence, it is an ethnodrama as it started out as a script that was designed to bring awareness, empathy, and social justice to a community that was so marginalized that they created their own spaces known as ballroom to be fierce where learned how to *live, werk, and pose*.

Act II, participants spoke in the order that their work experiences connected or contrasted considering that some participants worked at the same institution without knowing one another. In Act III, participants spoke based on their order at the front of the stage.

Methodologically, the difficulty experienced in writing this ethnodrama was ensuring that as the researcher, I did not add anything to their stories that would risk the integrity of the participants. The participants are real individuals whose stories have never been told through research. When writing in a dramatized format, it was essential for me as the researcher to ensure that the authentic voice of the participants as presented in the interviews remained consistent throughout each act. I ensured this by using their direct words from their scaled interview transcript to tell a meaningful story in which the participants were very vulnerable in sharing their respective truths. In addition, creating a cast list as personas was also difficult because it was hard to make a persona from real people who are currently alive to tell their own story. I wrestled with this for several weeks until I landed on making their physical appearances in the ethnodrama as unique as possible for the sake of protecting their identities. In the informed consent, I promised to protect my participants. As an artist, I was able to accomplish that goal with much nuance and struggle. What became most important was ensuring that their stories were told in a way that was cohesive, provocative, and life changing to those who engage with this work.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this topic had not been studied. In addition to this truth, the lived experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer-identified faculty and administrators in higher education remains understudied. There are a variety of methods, methodologies, and frameworks that a researcher can use to conduct a research study about the lived experiences of LGBTQ faculty

and administrators; however, in this chapter, I shared what I believed were the best methods and methodology to gain substantive answers to my research questions. Reading the limited literature on the experiences of LGBTQ educators was enlightening because the lack of literature proves that the lives of sexual minorities are not valued as highly in the academy. Conducting this study while using the newly created intersectional qualitative research as the methodology has provided new scholarship to the field. My research design was carefully crafted from previous research that addressed a similar topic and the infusion of the methodology/methods that I, as the researcher, found most intriguing to tell the stories of the participants carefully and effectively. Hopefully, it will also empower LGBQ faculty and administrators at HBCUs to make greater cultural shifts that will liberate them, their colleagues, and the LGBTQ students who are seeking possibility models.

Chapter 4 – Results and BlaQ Disciples

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of faculty and administrators who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer (LGBQ) and work/have worked at a historically Black college/university (HBCU). In this chapter, additional details are provided about ethnodrama, character profiles, and the script of BlaQ Disciples, followed by a traditional analysis per the requirement of my institution. The overarching research questions for this study were:

- How have LGBQ faculty and staff negotiated/navigated their careers at HBCUs?
- How do LGBQ faculty and staff at HBCUs influence cultural (relating to LGBQ inclusion) change at the organizational level?

There was a need for this study as it adds to the body of literature pertaining to sexuality, intersectionality, higher education, HBCUs, and religion which are aspects of diversity, equity, and inclusion. As a result, I have written an ethnodrama to present my findings.

Traditional social scientific methods are one way of telling stories through data, however, for some of us, that method is not sufficient. I am a pracdivist (practitioner-academic-activist-artist). Engaging in other forms of social scientific analysis and presentation did not allow me the opportunity to create a compelling product in the way that arts-based research does. Thus, the ethnodrama is a dramatized, creative non-fiction, written script of selected narratives that were captured during participant observations and/or interviews (Saldaña, 2005). Within the ethnodrama, it is the responsibility of the readers (audience) to build relationships with the characters and make meaning of the ethnodrama. It is the intentionality of the ethnodrama to serve as a public voice ethnography that provides educational potential and emancipation (Mienczakowski, 2001). This arts-based presentation essentially gives voice to previously silenced voices through the stage which makes room for discourse and dialogue (Madison, 2003).

Participants

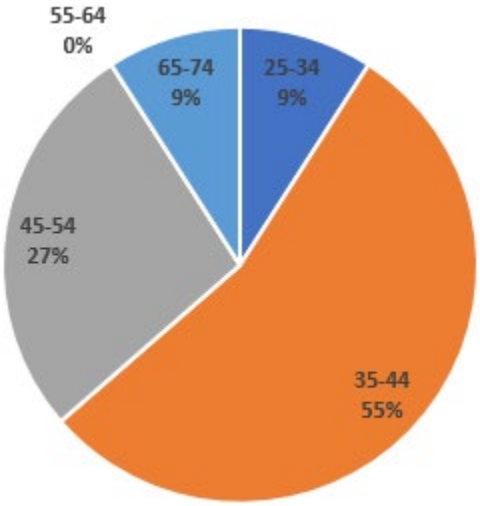
The data for the ethnodrama were collected from interviews that were conducted virtually. Twelve interviews were conducted and transcribed. The data were uploaded into Dedoose for coding and thematic analysis. Interview questions were focused on understanding participants' lived experiences as LGBQ, how they have navigated employment at HBCUs because of their intersecting identities and sharing how they would like to see change within these institutions.

Demographics

To provide deeper insight on participant experiences, each of them answered questions pertaining to their demographics. Their primary responses were about their age, birthplace, religious affiliation, and HBCU experience. Some data were not reported in this study to protect the identity of participants. Their demographic responses are captured in the figures below.

Figure 2.

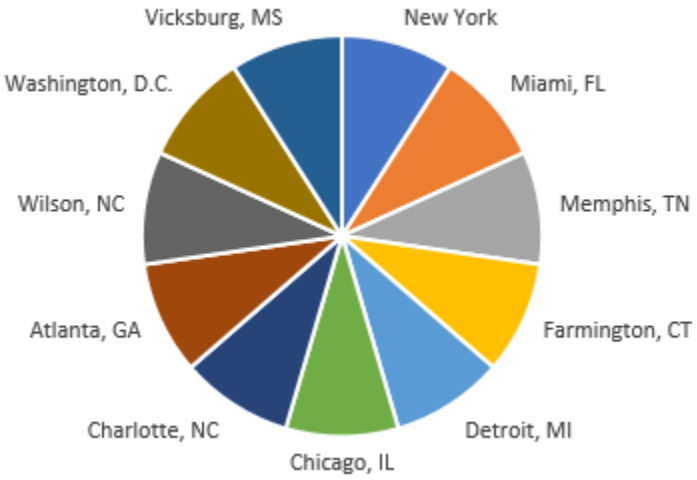
Participants' Ages



As depicted in Figure 1, most of the participants in this study fell in the 35-44 age range with the next largest group being those between the ages of 45 and 54. This is important to note because these are mid-level career professionals. Professionals at that level are unique in that they may not feel the freedom that is assumed with senior career professionals, but they also may not feel the restrictions of those who are early career professionals. Those in the early part of their career may feel increased pressure to conform or meet image expectations in the workplace.

Figure 3.

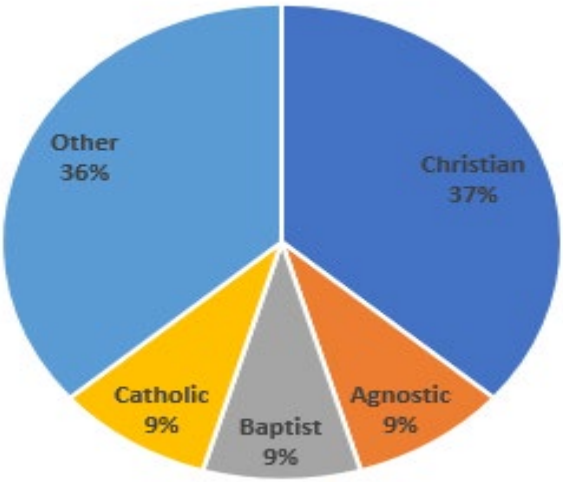
Participants' Birthplaces



Each participant was asked to disclose their birthplace to explore how their upbringing impacted how they show up as queer individuals in their workplaces. As shown in Figure 2, each candidate was born in a different city, with most of them being born and raised in the southern part of the United States. Location may have implications for their personal narratives. Despite being born in different places in the country, all the participants are currently living in the South. This was not surprising, as most HBCUs are in the southeastern region of the USA. The exact locations of the participants and the names of their institutions are not denoted in this study to protect their identity.

Figure 4.

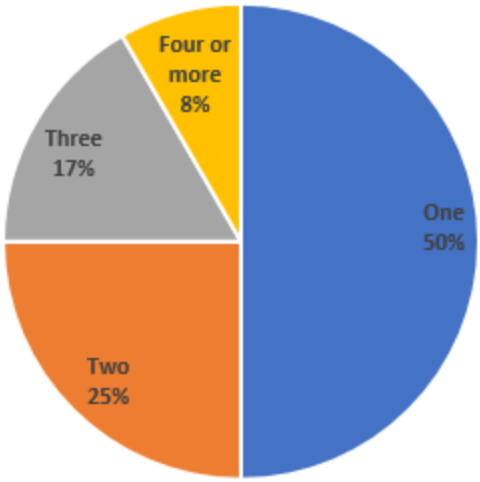
Religious Affiliation



For this study, the "Other" category was used to capture any religious affiliation that was not represented by Christian, Agnostic, Baptist, and Catholic. The "Other" category consisted of participants who practice yoga or were Jehovah's Witnesses. Knowing which religious traditions participants grew up was important for this study because religion has a way of guiding an individual's moral compass and, as a result, their behaviors.

Figure 5.

Number of HBCUs Worked For



As a final question, each participant was asked to identify the HBCUs they had worked for. To protect the identities of the HBCUs represented in this study, the HBCU information was anonymized and displayed in the number of HBCUs participants worked for. Knowing how many HBCUs participants worked for was an important factor in identifying patterns and trends in their work experiences. Most of the participants had only worked for a single HBCU. Only one of the participants had experience working with four or more HBCUs, giving them a wider range of experience with different HBCU cultures.

This participant demographic data preceded the participants' personal narratives. Their personal narratives are presented in their own voices in the ethnodrama below.

Characters & Reading BlaQ Disciples

Considering how much I love theater; I drew inspiration in creating this ethnodrama from the film *For Colored Girls* which is based on an ethnodrama of poetry that depicted the lived experience of several women who became connected because of their individual lived experiences. I also drew inspiration from the iconic book *Sweet Tea* by E. Patrick Johnson as he shared the

stories of Black gay men in the south through oral histories. While the film centered three women, my ethnodrama centers the lives of twelve people. Even though twelve is a high number to engage within an ethnodrama that are monologue based, this is the first time that the participants' individual stories have been shared. Therefore, it would be unethical of me as the artist and researcher to consolidate their stories into three or four monologues. Every story in this work is important and has been treated as such through the creation of this ethnodrama.

The cast members are all part of Ja'Dor's family and are disciples. The use of the term "disciple" is a play on Jesus and the twelve disciples from the Bible. There were twelve participants who were commissioned by Ja'Dor to participate in this study and continue to carry this work forward. Ja'Dor Sinclair Dupree represents me as the researcher and participant in the ethnodrama. Per the recommendation of one my committee members, it was necessary to weave my experiences into this study in a creative way. Thus, Ja'Dor was born. The cast are all different shades of Black and Brown, identify somewhere on the spectrum of queerness, have some religious connection, and have worked at an HBCU. All character names are pseudonyms based on how Ja'Dor made meaning of their lives as they shared their stories through the interview process. The names of the HBCUs where the participants have attended or worked for have names that resemble Ballroom houses. For example, The House of Excellence represents an HBCU, however, the pseudonym is to protect the identity of the institution and participants associated with the institutions.

To develop the ethnodrama, I spent about 100 hours with all transcripts to create this queer work of art known as *BlaQ Disciples*. BlaQ is the abbreviation for Black and Queer. I used the term "disciples" to provide symbolism of the religious disciples who are tasked with spreading the good news. The good news in this work is the BlaQ people exist and want others to come

into the light of liberation to make systemic change within HBCUs. Therefore, it is imperative that, as readers, you engage with each character very carefully by reading their narratives closely to develop a relationship with them. It is also imperative that while you are reading, that you listen to the songs that are woven throughout the ethnodrama.

The lyrics of these songs have significant meaning to the individual cast members as well as the spiritual connection of the entire production. As a note, this is a script which is designed to be acted out by people. Scripts come to life when the thespians create a meaningful relationship with the script and rehearse with other cast mates to provide a stellar performance. Therefore, readers are the thespians in this production readers engage with your creativity as to how the characters say their lines. To use individual creativity, this script is a strong guide for you to imagine how this is depicted in real life. To do this, the reader must be fully present and centered while reading this work so that one can truly feel and make additional meaning of what it means to be a BlaQ Disciple. The traditional analysis is interspersed between acts to help the readers make meaning of the stories and the arguments that support the social justice nature of intersectionality and ethnodrama.

Cast	Brief Bio
Daddy D	Second most senior member of the cast, Student Affairs Professional (VP), Married and parenting, currently works at HBCU, First- Generation college student, 6’1, Salt and Pepper curly hair, slim build
Cousin Locks	Student Affairs Professional (VC & AVP), Engaged, HBCU Alumni and currently works for HBCU, First Generation college student, 5’7, medium build, colored dread locks that are shoulder length
Uncle Ned	Comical, math whiz, currently works for HBCU as faculty in STEM, attended prestigious PWIs, 5’10, short hair
Brotha Jade	Reserved, nervous/tense energy, HBCU Alumni and currently works for HBCU, diverse lived experiences, former faculty, 5’10, thick, bald
Gentle Karta	Youngest of the cast, Student Affairs Professional (Director), Partnered, HBCU Alumni and current employee, 5’6, slim, short cut dark hair
Auntie G	Married, HBCU Alumni and currently works for an HBCU (Director), Mother, Doctoral student, 6’0, thick, short cut blonde hair

Uncle RayRay	Former opera singer, Sarcastic, yet comical, Student Affairs professional (former VP), HBCU Alumni and currently works for HBCUs, Ordained member of clergy, 5'2, goatee, bald
Auntie Star	Currently works at an HBCU as faculty, Social Worker by training, chosen mother, innovative, 5'5, grey and black locks that touch her knees
Brista	Raised in church, singer by trade, embraces his femininity, HBCU Alumni and former employee (Director) in Student Affairs, 6'5, thick and curvy, long brunette hair
Sista Soulja	Raised in a social justice/activist environment, came into queerness later in life (married to a male), Faculty and private practice, HBCU Alumni and former employee, 5'7, curvy, wears glasses, silver hair
BBM	Musically inclined, Millennial, HBCU Alumni and former employee as a faculty member, 5'8, slim build, mohawk of dread locks that are golden colored
Motha Soul	Most senior member of the cast, Dancer/choreographer by training and practice, longest tenure within HBCUs (30+ years), Socialized as Christian – Evolved into Spiritual Practitioner, Black dreads, 5'6, slim build, glasses
Ja'Dor S. Dupree (Narrator)	Gender-fluid/non-binary, Millennial, Member of clergy, HBCU Alum and former employee, 6'0, slim-thick, silky blonde hair down back

To better protect the anonymity of the participants, I took creative license in the description of their identities. Some of the demographics reported here (such as hairstyle and height) do not align with exactly who the participants were and what they looked like. Crafting a caricature of each participant except for Ja'Dor was extremely difficult because it felt unethical to present to my participants in character form. This was done strategically because the network within HBCUs is small and limited. If there were more information added about the cast from a descriptive perspective, there could be a possibility that others would determine who my participants were. As a result, I created different physical attributes for each cast member to disguise their physical identities. The stories that you will read are all factual accounts of their experiences. Without further ado, I present to you *BlaQ Disciples.*

“BlaQ Disciples” – Based on a true story

Scene: *The stage is oval shaped with thirteen chairs lining the oval from the back of the stage. The backdrop of the stage is inside of a church with banners of HBCUs all around. The curtains lift and a deep mahogany light is on the stage. Each cast member has their back to the audience as they are currently sitting in front of their own individual vanity mirrors. In the mirrors, the audience can see the reflections of the cast as they are staring in the mirror with a serious look. The back of each individual chair has been decorated in a color that represents the spectrum of queer pride along with words that describe living in the intersections of their identity. In unison, while the music of the song is playing, each cast member slowly turns to the face the audience while singing the lyrics and music below which are an adaptation of Nina Simone’s “Four Women” that were written by Ja’Dor. The beat, rhythm, and key of song are the same as the original. The only thing that is different are the lyrics. This song is called “BlaQ Disciples”*

Our skin is B. L.A.C.K (emphasis on “ck”)
Our life has been tough
Our sexuality
Has not always been approved
Being ostracized changes my mood
Yet, we’re still standing
What do they call us?
We are God’s Chosen
We are God’s Chosen

Our skin is BLACK
Our hair is all different
But we are more than what meets the eye
Our lives really do matter
We’re awfully confused these days
'Cause our BlaQ role models were erased
What do they call me?
Disgraced Human

What do they call me?
Bulldagger and Sweet Thing

What do they call me?
Who really cares??

What do they call me?
Our name is DIVINE

Ja'Dor (*dressed in a couture, navy blue gown, adorned in silver crystals and a good stiletto heel – enters from the back of center stage as song ends to front center of stage. Lights are on Ja'Dor*).

Act I– LIVE

Ja'Dor: Beloved (*said loudly, with enthusiasm)*. Give yourselves some love for being here (*takes a moment for applause*). Now, give us on this stage some love for being here to tell you a few stories (*takes a moment for applause*)! We are gathered here today to embark upon a journey to lift the voices of some BlaQ disciples. Now I know you are probably thinking "They are trying to recruit other queer people", but that is not the tea. These (*points at the cast*) disciples have been some form of a role model to the people whom they have served within Historically Black Colleges and Universities. So, baby listen…get your Kleenex ready while you laugh until you cry… laugh to keep from crying, and for some in the room, your eyes may not be dry this entire production. This (*with emphasis and sobriety*) is real life, beloved. Real life. We have several acts for you, and I will be your narrator throughout to prepare you for what is to come. So, without further delay, I present to you the BlaQ Disciples.

(*Ja'Dor walks off stage left and lights on stage brighten so that all cast members can be seen sitting in their chairs that are still facing the audience. As the chorus of "Strange Fruit" plays by Billie Holliday, Daddy D rises from his seat and slowly walks to center stage. Daddy D is wearing a navy-blue suit, white collared shirt, and brown loafers.*

While walking to the center of the stage, the look on his face shows of concern. As he gets closer to the center of the stage, the spotlight focuses on him and the music fades away. When he reaches the mark on the stage, he looks up and begins his monologue)

Daddy D: You may ask why this song is my introduction. Well, when I think of my experiences, this song comes to mind because Strange Fruit is just that haunting space (*said softly*). I think many queer people feel that they would be professionally lynched if they come out or if they "slip up" pertaining to their sexuality in the public eye. I am a native of Atlanta, born in 1968. I come from a working-class background. My mom was in the hospitality field. My dad was a fire-man, but they were divorced. My mother raised me, my brother, and my sister. We were under-resourced, and my mother had not gone to college. I had done very well in high school but didn't have the money to go to college. I wanted to go to The House of Excellence and couldn't afford to. One day I just woke up and I decided to go into the Navy because I knew I couldn't go to college. I went into the Navy for four years, came out, and then had planned to go to The House of Excellence again and still couldn't afford it. I've recognized is that this desire to go to The House of Excellence was twofold. One, it was affirming my social-economic status. The second thing was affirming my sexuality (*snaps fingers in a flamboyant way*). There was something in me that needed that affirmation. I ended up going to Minority State University where my degrees and most career experiences came from.

I always knew that I was queer! I recently start using queer as a term because when I was growing up, it was such a negative term, but I think it's very empowering because it just encompasses all aspects of life. In the 70s, nobody was talking about gay communities. The '70s became the height of the Gay Pride movement. I would see white men there, (*leans back and says with sass*) but I never saw a Black man in the park. I grew up in the church…so you definitely

don't or feel that you don’t belong there (*Pause*). I remember being a teenager, and this minister did this sermon. He always talked about these switchy men and these derogatory terms that made you ashamed. I remember this minister talking about he would spew these men out of his mouth (*said in a disgusted tone*). The imagery of God not wanting you then that means man can't possibly have the capacity and the humanity to want you. This is something I struggle with, even today. I have a tendency when I'm uncomfortable to default to humor. I tend to overshare. It all relates to feeling as if you don't belong with people that look just like you. That's a real impactful, and hurtful way to feel. I'm 53 years old, and still feel that some of the time, but definitely, that's what I struggle with the most. It's trauma! What I'm learning now is that Black folks just don't deal with trauma well. We push it down. We don't address it. We try to Jesus it away, but we never face it, or if we face it, it's like anger.

For a very long time, I tried to be a normal queer man. I think lots of us do that, and particularly those of us that go into education. I think Black men shroud themselves in their intellect because it explains the way your sexuality because people left you alone. We shroud ourselves in intellect, and then when the intellect begins to yield rewards (*said sarcastically*), then some of us start to use it as a weapon which is another sense of trauma. My now-husband and I have been together for 27 years. We have two boys and a house. I drive a Nissan (*laughs*). I try to just be very normal.

(*Daddy D begins to walk towards his seat on the stage while saying the last line*)

I've been a lot more introspective, meditating and trying to adjust to being a middle-aged, queer man, which is quite different from being a young queer man. At this age I realize that I'm not like everybody else and (*takes seat back in chair and faces the vanity mirror*) that's okay.

(*Song chorus of "For Once in My Life" by Stevie Wonder plays as Cousin Locks takes center stage. He is wearing a mustard-colored suit with brown loafers, a white collared shirt, with a bowtie. Once he reaches the position, the music stops*)

Cousin Locks: Daddy D is an older man (*said sarcastically*), but I am one of the younger men he was referring to. For once in my life, I believe I can be what I aspire to be. I was born and reared in New Orleans, Louisiana. At the time of my birth, my mother was 16 and my father was 18. I was reared by my paternal grandparents. My grandmother is an African American cisgender woman, and my grandfather is a white cisgender man. I attended the first school in New Orleans that educated Black people at the high school level (*said proudly*). I wanted to attend another HBCU besides the one I ended up at, but as a first gen, I didn't have anyone really to guide me through that process. My mom said that I was going to the other HBCU, so I did. My high school was predominantly Black, and I knew that I was going to an HBCU to major in mathematics education…I ended up earning a bachelor's degree in business education. I obtained my bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degree in a short period of time. I have worked across different institutions and found my most rewarding to be at HBCUs (*said proudly*). When I was the Dean of students and chief student affairs officer, I quickly learned that this PWI wanted my face, but not my voice. I was the youngest and the only person of color on the president's cabinet… that didn't work out for me…so I am at an HBCU as the vice chancellor.

I struggle with having to be having to represent the LGBTQ community. I don't want to be the representative because oftentimes I'm in a space where I'm the only, youngest, or the first and while as a millennial, we often celebrate those things, it comes with a lot of responsibility (*said with conviction*). Being same gender loving is not one of my salient identities. Because of that, I have not necessarily championed or shared it. I've always lived authentically…yet at the

same time I have suppressed certain things where one who is heterosexual could easily just compliment those they are attracted to. Whereas if I found someone attractive, I didn't have the space to make those acknowledgements. Very recently I shared publicly that I was engaged and, in this day, and age as a millennial, sharing publicly really means putting it on social media, which for a number of people, was the first time that they knew or received confirmation that I was not heterosexual…some people were shocked. I was shocked that they were shocked.

I acknowledge (*said expressively)* that I waited until I had a partner to make that public display because I have the protection of my partner. I don't care what my fraternity, lodge, coworkers, or alumni are going to say. (*Cousin Locks begins to walk back to his seat while saying the last line*) This is who I am! I think for so long to keep other people happy with us, we kind of suppress our identity instead which in turn leaves us not happy (*takes seat back in chair and faces the vanity mirror*).

(*Song chorus beings to play of the song "Umi Says" by Mos Def as Uncle Ned makes his way to the center of the stage. He is wearing a black suit with black loafers, a bright yellow collared shirt. Once he reaches the position, the music stops*)

Uncle Ned: Once upon a time in my younger years, I was fearless just like the song that was played (*said passionately*). Overtime, I realized that the fearlessness that I once had has been curtailed in certain ways. I'm from Charlotte, NC where we were raised as Jehovah's Witness. Religion played a very interesting role in how we were brought up. I'm the middle of five children. I have an older brother, an older sister and two younger sisters. My mom worked as a school bus driver, and she worked with preschool youth. My dad worked at Duke Energy his whole life and was very into church in the Kingdom Hall. My mom's side of the family were very much cookout culture. My dad's side of the family were like your middle-class black

family. I've been modeled very much after my father. I went to schools that were in predominantly white neighborhoods. I tended to be in classes that were academically gifted classes and honors classes.

I wanted to go to an HBCU for architecture, but I didn't really know much about colleges (*said sadly*). I didn't get enough financial aid to attend the HBCU I wanted and as a Jehovah's witness, going to college, wasn't really what we were supposed to do. I needed to get up out of there as a gay man and I knew that school would be the sure way to get away. I grew up feeling very much in contradiction to what I was learning and preaching every day. Heaven and Jesus…I ain't even going to be there (*said comically)*. I ended up going to a big white school because of a full scholarship and studied math and sociology. I ended up moving to NY after undergrad and went to NYU. I registered for my PhD at Columbia, and I spent five years basically trying to replicate math how I had done with my high school teacher.

I'm just so happy that this production is happening! Many of us young people in the Jehovah's Witness church were gay. I was baptized at 14 and I remember crying because I was like, I am going to hell because I knew that like I've dedicated my life to God but felt I was lying to God. I always liked to push the bounds of the religion so coming out to my parents (Dad first) changed my life because I've never felt the need to hide because they were okay with it. (*Heads back to chair on stage while saying final line*) There was another person that was in the Kingdom Hall whose parents he was not able to tell his truth. He ended up in this very different place and I don't think he is happy (*takes seat back in chair and faces the vanity mirror*).

(*Song chorus "He Loves Me" by Jill Scott begins to play. Brotha Jade begins to head to the center of the stage from his seat. He is wearing an olive-green suit with black loafers, a black collared shirt. Once he reaches the mark, the music ends*)

Brotha Jade: Happiness is a struggle (*said with disdain*). In the song that just played, I can say that some people love me. At HBCUs, they love me because I can write their reports, because I can go into these meetings with all these white folks in the south without being deemed ghetto. I speak very well. I am intelligent. I have my Ph.D…so that's what they see. They see I am non-threatening which is why they love me. I'm one of three kids. Florida raised, graduated in 1999 and never looked back. I attended The House of Excellence for my undergrad studies and attended two additional HBCUs for graduate studies. I earned my PhD at 26 and my goal is to become a college president, particularly at a HBCU. I worked at predominantly white institutions until my experience as Chief of Staff at another HBCU. Now, I am the Vice Chancellor for an HBCU. My journey has been unique. I've been a member of the faculty, served in student affairs, DEI, and I have also staffed three presidents.

I've been exposed to the LGBTQ community since I was five growing up in the city of Miami (*said happily*). My mom is a registered nurse, and the hospital administrator was a woman who was partnered to another woman. My sister worked as a manager at McDonald's down the street from our home in Miami. The store manager was a male who was queer. If I would not have been raised and gendered in Miami, my experience would have been totally different. I have an uncle who's part of the community. We did brunch every Sunday after church. He allowed all my gay friends and the likes come to the house. I saw Blacks that were gay, had money, resources and were killing it in their fields.

I've dated females and males. I still have sex with both (*said nonchalantly)*. I've been in counseling. I was suicidal twice. I was depressed as a result. I have done risky behavior as to why I'm in counseling now. I've been suicidal all as a result of my sexuality. I would say that I now have a supportive group of friends and I have a support system at home, but I'm not

partnered. When is that going to come (*said with concern*)? When am I going to meet somebody that opens up and wants me in a committed relationship with another male? I tend to meet men who are married. I've always met men who have a female partner and I'm the side chick essentially. It is the quadruple consciousness...where you're gay, Black, and male. I have struggled with my sexuality, and I believe that I will continue to struggle until I meet a partner (*said sadly*).

I cope with fraternity brothers that have served as my support agents... We send out the message from service every Sunday. They come to visit and party with me for my birthday. We support each other. I pray and that's about it. I'm at a point now in my life where I'm about to be 40. I'm going to be me. When I worked at my previous HBCU, I didn't date, interact, or have sex with anybody for seven to eight months because I knew the street committee. I'm doing the same thing at my current HBCU because I know that anything that transpires, I can lose my job. I'm not logging on to the apps. I'm not interacting with young, Black gay males. I don't know a lot of young, Black gay males in higher ed per se. Most of the communities I hang out with are Black or white women. Those are the ones that have said "Hey! You know, we love, adore, and want to support you". I don't have a group, a young, Black gay males that I hang out with. I have three Black gay male friends and only one of them are in higher ed that have said "Hey! Be your authentic self" (*said passionately*). (*Jade begins to head back to his chair on the stage as he says the last line*) Even in that, I go to work, the gym, and go home (*takes seat back in chair and faces the vanity mirror*).

> *(Song chorus "I Was Here" by Beyonce begins to play. Gentle Karta begins to head to the center of the stage from his seat. He is wearing a black suit with tennis sneakers, and an orange collared shirt with a necktie. Once he reaches the mark, the music ends*)

Gentle Karta: Everywhere I go, someone will know that I was here. I love Beyonce (*said proudly*). Don't yall? You better or this beyhive will sting you to life and love. I am originally from M.I. crooked letta, crooked letta, I, crooked letta, crooked letta, I, humpback, humpback I…For those of you who do not know, that spells Mississippi. I attended all public schools, and my high school was predominantly white. I went to a HBCU for my undergraduate studies. Very interesting transition coming from a predominantly white high school. Grandparents and parents are products of HBCUs. I do not think I truly understood what an HBCU was. All I knew was that it was Black people (*said comically)*. Not knowing what to expect, within that first semester, I truly fell in love with being at an HBCU which was small. I went to Minority State University, like Daddy D (years later of course since I am the youngest of this cast-(*said sarcastically*) which was different. I got halfway through my master's program and I kind of realized that I have a passion for higher education. I am a social worker by training and found a niche at the intersections of social work and student affairs. I did some social service work for about a year all while looking for opportunities to get into higher ed. One came along, and I have been here ever since 2017.

I've always known that I was gay! As far back as I can remember, heteronormative behaviors influenced me by my family. I grew up with girlfriends and having an alleged interest in women. During my freshman year of high school, my parents find out that I was gay. That meant was a difficult time for all of us. It put me into a space where I had the mindset that I did not care anymore . No need to hide or be closeted. For about a year or two, we pretended that it did not exist. I slowly started to bring people around to see what their reactions are and that progressively grew and got better. The level of confidence that I grew into carried me into college and I went into college openly gay from the beginning (*said with confidence*).

I can honestly say that I never once felt judged or discriminated against. At my under-graduate institution, I felt very free and comfortable to be who I was at all levels. Moving to my current city only added to that because you can truly be surrounded by people who are extremely open-minded. I carry that same competence into my professional career working at a HBCU. I have not felt any type of judgment or discrimination or need to not be myself. That's not the case for a lot of people (*said with concern*). What was most concerning for me growing up is that my family would not be proud of me because of my sexuality. That was extremely important to me. To be so involved in the church was for me to feel like they weren't proud of me in the beginning because of my sexuality. I was raised in the church, and we are taught that gay people go to hell. (*Gentle heads back to his seat while saying the last line*) I struggled with that internally for a while (*said with concern*). Truly questioning my faith beliefs and if God was going to send me to hell because of who I decided to love (*takes seat back in chair and faces the vanity mirror*).

(Song chorus "Shackles" by Mary Mary begins to play. Auntie G begins to head to the center of the stage from his seat. S*he is wearing a dark gray pant suit with 3-inch heels, and a pink blouse.* Once he reaches the mark, the music ends)

Auntie G: Praise the LORD folx. Take these shackles off my feet so I can dance (*said passion-ately*). Dance! Dance! (*Cues shout music track, does a quick two step across the stage and comes back to center stage*) Alright. I am done now. I can dance now, but that has not always been my truth. I was born and raised in Chicago. My mother lived until I was 10 because she passed away from breast cancer. I was a single child up until that time. I moved with my grandmother who was very religious and spiritual. So, I went from not having church on the regular to attending three, four times a week and all day on Sunday. My family was Pentecostal…COGIC to be ex-act. Girls wasn't wearing pants (*said with conviction*). Couldn't go to the movies. Life was

different. I went to an all-girls Catholic high school because my grandmother was determined for me not to allow boys to affect my academics. However, little did she know…In theory, it was the right place! I was looking at the girls, but at that time I was very unsure of what life looked like. Trying to understand who I was and be in Pentecostal church four days a week. That was the devil. It was an abomination. That was not even something to have conversation about. I just went on through life as if I was supposed to date a boy as Gentle Karta talked about.

I finished high school and went to an HBCU in Atlanta. I still hadn't quite figured out who or what I was. I knew it was there but didn't really know what to do with it. I continued that same path of being in relationships with guys to the point where I had my daughter during sophomore year. I struggled through the academic part of it just because I spent a whole lot of time doing everything other than going to class and my work. I spent the next three years getting my life together working and in school. I struggled through life for a whole lot of reasons. Part of that was not being able to be true to myself and still trying to live in the idea of who my family thought I should be (*said with concern*). That put me in a really dark place. However, through God's grace, it was at that point that I figured out who he was to me and not the one that I had been raised on. I was able to, with his assistance, get out of that dark space. It was at that time that I kind of found some resignation about who I am, my attraction to women, and no longer wanting to live the life that other people thought I should be living. I decided to be authentically myself. That was the beginning of my adult freedom, and it's been up from there.

I spent my entire adulthood trying to live authentic, but still be invisible by not wanting to shine my light too bright. Being a feminine woman, it's easier for me to camouflage in certain instances which I found myself having to do. I met someone who is presently my mentor who was just like “be you”, however that looks, but as long as you do your job and do it well, there's

nothing they can take from you. The experience of trying to figure out who I am considering this person that was raised in the COGIC faith and around a family as I can watch the language that I use when I talk about my wife. She's oftentimes my spouse, not my wife because that seems like it's more acceptable. In the workplace, it still shows up in instances I find myself questioning whether I should bring my spouse with me because then that creates more conversations or possible issues (*said with concern*). If you walk into my office, you're going to clearly see her face on my desk. but that's when you're in my space. When I go into other people's spaces, I find myself to be a little more cautious.

My grandmother ultimately died without ever knowing a hundred percent. After her death, I realized that I didn't want to live like that anymore. That was in 2007. I sat my aunt down who was like my grandmother junior and had a conversation with her. It didn't help when her response was “Well, you know, your partner would never be welcome in my home”. Well then that means I'm no longer welcome in your home. I honestly coped by avoidance. I stayed away. I showed up for holidays just because that was what I was supposed to do. Oftentimes I showed up by myself and we didn't have a whole lot of conversation about my life. I don't really give a fuck (*said comically)*. For the most part, most of the family is very young and very accepting. It's just the older folks that's stuck in their ways and I have to leave them where they at (*said with conviction*). Everybody else loves my wife, so we keep it pushing. (*Auntie G heads back to her seat while saying this last line*) I have a motto…If you ain't feeding, fucking, or financing me, then your opinion does not matter (*takes seat back in chair and faces the vanity mirror*).

(Song chorus “Encourage Yourself” by Donald Lawrence begins to play. Uncle RayRay begins to head to the center of the stage from his seat. *He is wearing a light gray black*

suit with black dress shoes, and a plum collared shirt with a necktie. Once he reaches the mark, the music ends)

Uncle RayRay: I know we just listened to a gospel song, but Auntie G just gave us a word of encouragement (*said with conviction*). I picked Encouraged Yourself because being BlaQ is a very lonely existence. When I was on an HBCU campus as an administrator, my entire support system for my private life was two hours away. I didn't have the people on the campus. Those people are not always going to be your friends or people that you can trust because often they have alternative motives. So, you must figure out ways to encourage and motivate yourself, especially on days where you just want to do it no more. I grew up in a family of educators on my mother's side. I went to private schools. I went to one of the top high schools in Detroit. I went to The House of Excellence for undergrad and the oldest conservatory in the country for graduate work. I also got two degrees from Minority State University and did my doctoral work in dealing with HBCU.

Sexuality has been a portion of who I am, but I've never really focused on that part of my life (*said expressively)*. It impacts my decision-making and sometimes when I take jobs. It has not been a benefit or hindrance because I'm Black, and gay. They're all parts of who I am. The way I have coped with my sexuality is the fight for equity for everybody. I don't have to just cope with my gender, identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or cultural affiliations because I have made this decision in my life to focus on equity for everybody (*said with confidence*). I have made a conscious decision that equity for everyone is important. (*Uncle RayRay heads back to his seat while saying this last line*) Anyone who interacts me knows that's the case (*takes seat back in chair and faces the vanity mirror*).

(*Song chorus "Unwritten" by Natasha Bedingfield begins to play. Auntie Star begins to head to the center of the stage from her seat. She is wearing a business skirt suit that is red, with black 5-inch heels. Once she reaches the mark, the music ends*)

Auntie Star: The song you just heard connects to what Auntie G was saying. Other people are not always able to do what you do. At an HBCU, generally, your story isn't written (*said with disdain*)! You know, you are overlooked. I grew up in a small town in North Carolina. I was raised with my mom and my dad, both very religious. We went to a Baptist church. My sister was about three years younger than me. She passed away probably about six years ago. I graduated and went to Eagles Landing University where I obtained my bachelor's and master's in social work. After that, I obtained my clinical license to become a therapist, I began working with Methodist home for children. In 2012, I began at my HBCU as an Assistant Professor of social work. I am in the social work department where I teach the adult and non-traditional learners for the social work program. Since my sister passed about six years ago, I share custody with my mom and dad of her kids…my nephews who are now 16, 13 and 12 . I also have a seven-year-old daughter. I'm considered a choice mom which means I had my daughter on my own through the use of donor sperm. I became closer with my family since the death of my sister. My mom and I are not close, I guess. We have become closer by having to deal with the changes of my sister passing away and my dad's health condition (*said with disdain*).

Life as a lesbian woman has been a breath of fresh air (*said happily*). I came out late in life. As a child, you can't really think about things that aren't options just aren't options. In my family, there wasn't an option to be a lesbian. That's just not acceptable. I feel more comfortable with myself. When someone sees me with my daughter, it is generally the assumption that I am not a lesbian. It's been having to make those decisions of coming out because if they say coming

out is not a one-time process. I have to make careful decisions. I am 40! There's still the part of me that is concerned about simple things. I don't necessarily feel as comfortable with heterosexual Black men (*said softly*). Life is really balancing not only your Blackness, but also your gayness. My HBCU is a faith-based university, affiliated with the Baptist church. I attempted to implement the safe zone program at the university and that has been interesting. The privilege of me knowing that I can pass you while not being able to find community is challenging and lonely also.

I looked around the truthfully and all of my friends, 90% of them are gay. I had support of a small circle of friends who were all lesbian women. There was a sadness because I knew that it would be disappointing to my family. I knew even though I had achieved, this would be what defined me. I have friends who family relationships were cut off (*said with concern*). I was very active in a non-denominational church that was not affirming but more tolerant. For 15 years, I ran the nursery, developed programs and friends with the pastor. I stepped away from there too. When you go have a baby on your own like I did, you really stop caring what other people are thinking. I walked away from a lot of stuff. I never went back to initiating friendships to avoid rejection. I began to reject people before they had opportunity to reject me. When people began to be accepting and let me know that they were accepting, then I would make steps to being in relationship with them. (*Auntie Star begins to move back to her seat on the stage while saying this last line*) I experienced some depression and anxiety around it. Especially as crimes occurred because I knew a guy, I went to school with that was a victim of the Pulse nightclub shooting. Makes me really feel unsafe at times (*takes seat back in chair and faces the vanity mirror*).

(Song chorus “Take Me as I Am” by Mary J. Blige begins to play. Brista begins to head to the center of the stage from his seat. *He is wearing a pink and blue polka dot dress, with pink heels that are 4-inches and wide brimmed hat.* Once he reaches the mark, the music ends)

Brista: You know who you're getting before you hire me! Before you send the offer letter…you are very aware of how I'm going to show up and who I'm going to be (*said comically)*. So, take me as I am or have nothing at all because I have nothing else to give if I can't give you who I am. I grew up in a very small rural town in North Carolina and my schools were predominantly white from elementary to high school. I was often the only Black person in classes because I was academically gifted. I wanted a different experience, so I went to an HBCU in NC for my undergraduate and graduate education. While I was in my master's program, I became a grad assistant in housing which is how I started working in higher ed. I worked in housing for like four years. Then I moved into the Dean of Students office, student conduct, and multicultural affairs. I've been in multicultural affairs pretty much ever since.

I'm not currently working at an HBCU, but most of my career has been in that space. I've always been me even as a child…I've always been feminine, flamboyant, loud and lively. As a child, I did not like sports. I was on the dance team in elementary and middle school. I cheered in high school. I'm a singer by trade. I grew up in the Black church and sang a lot. As a child, I was called names. The typical slurs… Faggot, punk, and sissy (*said with concern*). I didn't know how to make sense of most of that as a child. When I got into my twenties, I found my groove somewhere around 21 or 22. I became very comfortable with me. I'm 34 now. I've been real comfortable in my same gender loving experience for a long time. I struggled with family, church, and navigating the intersections of religion. I did not have the option to stay at one church as a child,

but when I became an adult, I definitely picked and chose not to. I felt like what I was being taught did not align with who I felt I was and how I lived my life as an adult. Navigating my parents and their beliefs about my sexuality were the biggest challenges (*said with concern*). Once me and my mother were able to come to a good place about who I am and how I identify, I think became okay. My coping mechanisms were my friends. My college friends have become lifelong friends. Many of them are gay or if they weren't gay, they were just really close females to us. I met maybe three or four, very close gay friends in college, and we were our own support systems. We talked about everything. (*Brista begins to move back to his seat on the stage while saying this last line*) Since we couldn't call home and talk about certain topics, we did that with each other. Even today, there are things that we cannot candidly talk to family about (*takes seat back in chair and faces the vanity mirror*).

(Song chorus "Golden" by Jill Scott begins to play. Sista Soulja begins to head to the center of the stage from her seat. *She is wearing a well-fitted white dress with miniature heels and brown head wrap.* Once she reaches the mark, the music ends)

Sista Soulja: The light shines through all the cracks. You know the sun going to shine through the clouds. Being a Black woman is fraught and almost any step I take, somebody can decide how they can transgress upon me (*said passionately*). The world is conditioned to keep me in check, and I am insistent about shining through the cracks of other people's limitations.

I was born and raised in Washington DC proper in August 1967. My mother was a freshman in college and the pregnancy was an interruption in that trajectory for her and my father was in bootcamp about to be deployed. My parents were both living with their parents at that moment. My grandmother was an international management trainee that was traveling the world. My father's mother was living in a housing project with her husband who was a painter. I came

into the world really going in between those two environments. My parents never legally married, but I was officially raised by both families in a real hands-on way. I adored my father and I spend quite a bit of time with his family. I miss him so much. He was very overt with the idea that I deserved love that I was brilliant. His idea of a bedtime story was from Langston Hughes.

Being a part of political action was ingrained throughout my development from elementary through college. It certainly colored my college experiences at The House of Class and beyond. I really believe that it is my generation X that really started to question justice, and our children are the generation who started to not only question but demand it. I refuse to be daunted. Period! I have large shoes and I'm filling them. That's my anointing (*said passionately*). I'm not afraid to speak. (*Sista Soulja begins to move back to her seat on the stage while saying this last line*) Our role in this new paradigm of finding ourselves is to make sure that we are clear about what we are saying so that we are resolute about getting it done (*said with conviction*) (*takes seat back in chair and faces the vanity mirror*).

> (Song chorus "Love on Top" by Beyonce begins to play. BBM begins to head to the center of the stage from his seat. *He is wearing a red, Black, and green daishiki and pants with sandals.* Once he reaches the mark, the music ends)

BBM: I do not have a sad, sappy story (*said comically)*. Yes, my life has had some challenges, but there is another side to life that speaks more so to my experiences. My experiences at the HBCUs where I have worked, I was highly admired by faculty, students, and I think administration because I was pretty good at my job. Also, I am open, honest, and no bullshit type of person. I grew up in Memphis, Tennessee and lived there most of my life until about age 18. As a child, my mom was single while raising me and my younger brother. We moved a lot trying to chase financial security. I transferred schools like 13 times before I was finally stable around high

school. My parents have always had unconditional love for me and expressed it. Even through all that, my parents would have always recognized my scholastic aptitude and made sure that I was enrolled in enrichment classes. I can remember being attracted to boys in first grade. A lot of people recognized that in me very early. My family were never outwardly homophobic in words, but there were things that boys do and do not do. I can remember when I was about 10, my mom was working and I was with her. She was driving the truck and we went to a beauty shop somewhere. There was this really a feminine guy doing hair and when we got home, my mom found the passages in the Bible that talked about being gay is a sin. She warned me against stuff like that and we were also pretty involved in church. That set the stage for my adolescent development and a lot of the confusion that I went through then which set me up for my first sexual encounter, which was a little predatory. After I graduated high school, I decided to come out to most of my friends. I still had not talked to any of my family about it (*said with conviction*).

I coped as a teenager by keeping busy and lots of internet porn (*said comically)*. I have not had a lot of distress because of my sexuality. When I moved to SC around age 25, I came out to my dad which was the largest source of distress. He was never disapproving, but he certainly was never approving and made that very clear. He would equate me being attracted to men to murdering somebody. I finally had to talk to him because he would say "I am still praying for you to find a wife". He's Uber Christian.

I was able to get a full tuition scholarship to attend The House of Excellence which is where I did my undergraduate work and had not lived back in Memphis since then. Once I moved away for college…I moved away. When I went to college on a campus full of boys…I found heaven. I was super lucky because my roommate was super gay and was out to his parents. Between him and his friends, I was able to find community early as a student. Receiving the

training as a kid about being super feminine also made me as hypermasculine. It was at least helpful to have people there who helped me navigate. I met my second boyfriend who I really consider my first boyfriend and we were together from sophomore through senior year. I moved to St. Louis…tried to go to a PhD program and was very comfortable in my sexuality. I attract the best people all the time who have my best interests in mind (*said comically)*. (BBM begins to move back to his seat on the stage while saying this last line) After finishing my master's I went to teach at two HBCUs in STEM. I left my last role to pursue my Ph.D. which I just finished this summer (*takes seat back in chair and faces the vanity mirror*).

(Song chorus "I am Light" by India Arie begins to play. Motha Soul begins to head to the center of the stage from her seat. *She is wearing a burgundy sun dress, and sandals.* Once she reaches the mark, the music ends)

Motha Soul: Self-love, knowing who I am, my value and being willing to live authentically as myself (*said passionately*). Here I am. I am LIGHT! I have something to offer. If you don't want it or don't see it…that's fine (*said sarcastically*). I grew up in the Midwest by southern parents who moved to Detroit when they got married. My mother was a kindergarten teacher. My father was a lawyer…the first black lawyer in Jackson, Michigan. I graduated from high school in 1970 and went to several different colleges before I finished. I'm an artist that transferred, dropped out until I eventually found my way to dance. I have an MFA in dance and then came to The House of Class. None of them HBCUs. I looked at The House of Class because my dad attended a nearby HBCU. I was a free spirited, Black hippie flower child. The House of Class just felt too conservative for me even though I ended up back there as a professor, which is perfect.

My boss said I needed a PhD if I wanted to stay. I didn't really have to, but it seemed like I did at the time (*said with disdain*). So, I went to an ivy of the South to get an interdisciplinary

PhD in African American studies. I decided to be “normal” which caused a bunch of bad relationships with men. I realized the person who had all the qualities that I wanted in a partner was a woman. I called myself bisexual, but now I call myself queer. My spiritual path is of Eastern spirituality which started with meditation in 96 which caused me to move into contemplative pedagogy and practices. I led a lot of meditation on campus as I am retiring after 33 years at The House of Class (*said happily*).

I see gender and sexually as fluid. For me it’s who I fell in love with. I have always got my deepest conversation with women my age. The arts have always been much more accepting of queer folks. I would say half the faculty were queer in that department. I was tenured. If the school had a problem with it by trying to get rid of me because of my sexual orientation would have been problematic for them. My current city is very queer friendly, and my family also was very accepting. My mother worried that I was gonna lose my job. Like BBM, I haven't had any issues. Maybe because of my age…I came out late and I am the most senior member of this cast. (*Motha Soul begins to move back to her seat on the stage while saying this last line*) When I was experimenting in college, I wasn't really sharing that with folks (*takes seat back in chair and faces the vanity mirror*).

Ja’Dor (*stands up on the side of the stage with lights shining on her and speaking to the audience*):

Unresolved childhood trauma leads to adulthood drama (*said with conviction*). It is hard for us Black and Queer people to live to heal the trauma when we sometimes are re-traumatized by the things and people who were supposed to love us! Therefore, trauma follows us. It follows us because of our Blackness and our queerness. We cannot have one without the other. Can you

imagine living while battling your sexuality internally because you fear backlash and rejection from everyone around you? Some of you know what that feels like because as you were listening and I look over this audience, I see tissue in your hands. There is a difference in living and living life more abundantly. The abundance of living for Black and queer people is to be loved, accepted, and affirmed for all of who we are, which includes our sexuality. Sex and sexuality are beautiful things that cannot be constrained to a binary understanding (*said with sass)*. How many more of us could have lived a better life if only we were loved unconditionally?

They may call us deviant. They may call us ungodly. They may wrestle with who we are…in the beauty and the deity of who the divine created us to be. WE call ourselves resilient, powerful, unique, Black, and Queer (BlaQ). Beloved community, we are the BlaQ Disciples. I am glad that you listened attentively to as much of the lives of our cast as they felt comfortable sharing in this act. Bring your tea chile because we have some sipping to do in the next scene now that we have taken this act to get to know one another. In the words of Mama Ru Paul "If you don't love yourself, how in the hell are you going to love somebody else (*all said passionately*)?"

Curtains close - End of Act I

Act I Analysis: Live – Acts of Survival

While reading Act 1, readers learned about the disciples which included many elements of their upbringing. During the interview process, participants shared a song that spoke to their lived experiences per their intersecting identities at HBCUs. Before each monologue, their songs of choice served as their introduction to telling their story. A theme through their song choices showed that the disciples chose songs that were liberatory and motivational which provided them

with hope throughout their experiences as BlaQ people. All songs called for deep reflection of the lyrics, which is why it was noted in the beginning of the ethnodrama that the songs should be listened to while reading the lyrics to obtain a deeper understanding of their lives. The songs reflected a mix of R&B, gospel, hip-hop, and pop.

Within these experiences that the participants shared, there are some commonalities about their lived experiences. Daddy D, Motha Soul, Auntie Star, and Uncle Ned wanted to attend an HBCU for undergrad; however, their circumstances did not allow them to do so while the other participants did attend an HBCU. Even though they did not attend an HBCU, they have worked at an HBCU. As BlaQ people, the acts of survival that the cast learned through their lived experiences were directly connected to the Black Christian Church experience as all of them shared their journey. In Act I, most participants discussed their traumatic engagement with Black religious ideology that caused them to endure trauma as early as their childhood. As evident in Act I, most of the challenges centered around the acceptance of their queer identities by their biological families and some of the institutions that they attended. The correlation, as noted earlier in this work is that HBCU culture is an extension of the Black Church as described by the participants. Within Christianity and the teachings of the Bible, non-heterosexual partnerships are thought and taught to be sinful. As a result of this toxic ideology, the treatment of BlaQ people from other Black people was the most difficult for the disciples to survive.

Amidst the trauma of their experiences with the institution of religion within Black culture, for most, being their authentic selves had proven to be meaningful to them; however, one participant (Brotha Jade) did not feel the same based on his lived experience. While Brotha Jade has a small community of support and was socialized in a diverse city, the trauma around the reconciliation of sexuality and spirituality positioned him differently than the cast members because

of the advice that he has been given in his current role. It is also important to note that out of the participants, Brotha Jade has the shortest tenure. Within his short tenure and working within Black environments, Brotha Jade expressed his attempts of suicide because he struggled and continues to struggle with the acceptance of his authentic self. The argument here is that HBCUs must be mindful of how the ostracization of BlaQ people can impact mental health. Most of the participants acknowledged the mental and soul anguish they experienced growing up and coming into alignment with their sexuality.

Some of the participants acknowledged that at the intersections of their race and queerness were the tensions of existence and determined how they survived in their earlier years. We see this in the stories of BBM, Auntie G, Daddy D, Uncle Ned, and Auntie Star. In Brista's narrative, there are details about the slurs he heard as he presents more feminine in nature. This posed a challenge until he found his footing to be confident in who he is which was an act of survival. While Brista could have attempted to conform to what people wanted him to be, he chose that his act of survival was to allow the slurs to become water off a duck's back. BBM's act of survival was to become hyper masculine because of the experience with his mother who read him Bible scriptures about queerness being sinful. Cousin Locks, Uncle RayRay, and Uncle Ned do not claim queerness as a salient identity.

To cope with their queerness, disciples acknowledged different ways of processing the acceptance of their sexuality. They found ways to cope because non-heterosexual identities are still not widely accepted in the world due to the influence of religious dogma that is practiced by people who believe in it. As of result of the religious dogma practiced by people, the environments that those people occupy reflect what they personally believe. Daddy D spoke about how he attempted to be a "normal" queer male because he believed that if he did this, he would not

have issues as other queer men that were much more publicly expressive of their queerness. His ways of coping did not last that long because he felt as though he was at war with his authenticity which is why he ultimately chose to reside in spaces that were male centered such as the Navy. It is important to note that Daddy D is the oldest male disciple, thus his ways of coping were different because of his generation. Cousin Locks coped by sharing his sexuality after he was partnered which provided a sense of security for him. Security in this case meant that because he is engaged, he has the support of his partner which provides a sense of security that other disciples did not always have.

Uncle Ned expressed coping by leaving home to attend college to escape the conflict with his religious identity and sexuality. Leaving home proved to be beneficial because he did not have to attend church with his family and continue to be forced to listen to homophobic doctrine. Brotha Jade and Uncle RayRay coped by not discussing their sexuality. Brotha Jade is not interested in coming out because of the fear of backlash from others in Black spaces. Within his narrative, he shared that as a bisexual person, he does not discuss his sexuality in Black spaces, but he does freely in white spaces. The act of survival for Brotha Jade is cognitive dissonance, avoidance, and self-denial. Once his parents accepted Gentle Karta did not have any concerns. The support of his family provided him with the ability to move through life much differently. Auntie G, Motha Soul, and Auntie Star attempted to cope with their sexuality by engaging in relationships with men until they came to accept their sexuality, which changed their trajectory.

Brista and BBM have coped by being who they are in all spaces without regard for how people will receive them. As Sista Soulja grew in education and lived experiences, she coped with her queerness by discovering the language to define it. These various acts of survival were necessary in order for the disciples to tell their stories. HBCUs should engage in how they make

LGBTQIA+ people feel at their campuses and how that impacts their mental health. How can queer people live their life at work when they are retraumatized through their lived experiences daily? BlaQ people at HBCUs should not have to create systems of survival to thrive an HBCU because their heterosexual counterparts do not have to do the same. There are direct inequities in how BlaQ people live at HBCUs in comparison to their heterosexual counterparts. These acts of survival that they learned outside of the HBCU have helped them to navigate the Politics of Respectability within HBCUs which is depicted in Act II.

Act II – WERK

Ja'Dor (*wearing fitted Black jeans, with a House of Confidence hoodie on with Timberland boots and a fitted hat)***:** Welcome back beloved (*said passionately*)! In Act I, Live, the cast discussed their lived experiences as LBGQ people. Each of them had a song and a story…just like you. I must say that while I was listening to the stories of my disciples, I experienced a roller-coaster of emotions. I connected with their lived experiences in many ways. There is a difference between living and existing. What we heard was how these disciples danced between those two realities as they negotiated their intersecting identities. How do we live when others may choose not to acknowledge our existence (*said in a disgusted tone*)? How can we thrive when heteronormative structures and systems that are upheld by people continue to prove that queer people are not wanted? What do we do (*said with disdain*)? Baby… WE WERK! Werk in this context signifies how the cast engaged at their HBCUs as BlaQ folks. Sometimes, it is hard to werk as BlaQ folks, but these divine beings made it werk at work. See what I did there)?! So, again, center yourselves, reflect on what you have heard in Act I, and grab your napkins because the tea is coming (*Walks from center of stage to off stage*).

(*Curtains open as "What If" by India Arie begins to play. All cast members are wearing Black pants, tennis shoes and a hoodie. The hoodie that each cast member wears represents an HBCU that they either graduated from and/or worked at. This is the first time that they will be able to see the connections based on their HBCU experience. The furniture on stage has been changed to reflect a living room with couches and love seats where the cast is sitting at the center. The cast members are talking among themselves like a family reunion. In Act I, they were all strangers, which reflected in their distance on the stage per their individual vanity mirrors. Due to their vulnerability about their lives in Act I, in Act II, they are more familial because they have gotten to know one another. The familiarity has provided them the comfort to share more detailed details as a collective. Gentle Karta starts doing the Mississippi Cha-Cha slide line dance and the other cast members follow. As the song is coming to an end, they take their unassigned seats in the living room, where intimate conversations happen.*)

Motha Soul: At my HBCU, people in my department knew and as time went on, more people knew. There was a year where someone in women's studies had a "coming out day". I remember being on a panel and I outed myself (*said with confidence*). I didn't make it a point in all my classes. If it came up, which it rarely did, especially in office hours with a student, then I would be open about it. I would say in the past few years, more students are open about it, so I have been more open about as well. White faculty, especially white male faculty could be out, and it was fine…but for Black faculty, especially Black women, it was more problematic because the House of Class was quite homophobic for a while. In more recent years, things have changed quite a lot.

At House of Class, the politics of respectability have been rampant. Some of the core values at the institution have been based in the politics. Students had to go to chapel every day. If they went downtown or attended traditional ceremonies, they had to wear dresses and gloves. Now they can wear pant suits or pants, but they had to be dressed. Some students never wore dresses, but they had to have a dress because of the politics of respectability. I was a free spirit, flower child smoking weed. Then I became professor where I straightened up and adopted some of their middle-class respectability attitudes and values. The school's motto is "our whole school for Christ". People whether students, faculty, or staff have used Christianity as a way of finding fault with queer identified people (*said with disdain*). I didn't have that cause I'm not Christian…not anymore (*said with conviction*).

My experience at an HBCU as queer faculty with some administrative oversight has been fine. Sexuality hasn't been an issue. Some of it is just being there for so many years and people know me. I could have been somebody in the dance history realm. You go to a conference…they tear down somebody else's work and put theirs forward. That whole dynamic just left me cold. I discovered my spiritual path into meditating. I was not chasing a promotion. I wanted to be a monk, but I couldn't do that as I had to have a job. I never became full professor nor desired to be provost. I was fine with the administrative roles that I had and doing service for the college. Maybe if I had been more ambitious, I maybe would have tested what it meant for me trying to advance… I wasn't moved to do that. It's about the creativity and the spiritual thing for me. That's much more meaningful than a title or even money (*said with conviction*).

I wish I had done more for the students. I was the advisor for the queer student organization; however, I don't know that I did that much. I think it's been more like office hours conversations or in class. I had a trans student in the class and said they wanted to be referred to as

"they, them" and I said something about "she" and they corrected me (*said comically)*. I apologized and thanked them for the correction. Be gracious when you've made a mistake. With my colleagues, I have not really built relationship with them. We know about each other and interact as colleagues. We have this knowledge about each other, but not really beyond that because I don't really interact with that many of my colleagues outside of work. I really liked some of my colleagues, but it's my job. I was just more interested in my spiritual community, family, and friends.

Brotha Jade: I'm not out! If someone comes up to me and asks if I am in a relationship…I'm single with no dependents. If someone asks if I am gay…I say "no" in those Black college environments. If someone asks me at my white schools…I will always say "yes" (*said with conviction*). At my current HBCU as a senior administrator, I will have a female date at every event. This is how I can also advance at an HBCU. I can't be my authentic self. I can be a president at an HBCU, but the homosexual practices must be behind closed doors as an arrangement. That's why you got a lot of young Blacks going to predominantly white institutions where they can be their full, authentic selves (*said with concern*).

There was an HBCU senior administrator that was on Grindr. He was married to a woman. Supposedly, they were doing a threesome with him and a white dude. Threesome went bad and now he doesn't have a job... Black colleges are not prepared. I am going to do my three years up and I am out the door to get a presidency. Senior leaders at other HBCUs call and tell me what I should and should not do. Let me do what I need to do so I can keep this job. I don't want to lose this opportunity. I want to go in and do well, but I'm setting myself up for a situation where I have to settle. If I were partnered, things would be different, and I would be okay.

Heterosexual people can get on Tinder, get they life, hang out, have a good time, but for us, they'll screenshot. Next thing, you know, you're unemployed for doing what the heterosexuals do. Some say don't talk to certain gay people because they are going to turn others gay when behind closed doors, having sex with the gay boys, essentially on campus where they work because they're married and in situations that they don't want to be in. Interactions with students are also different because of my sexuality. I make sure that I keep my door open if young men come to the office. My heterosexual colleagues close their doors (*said with disdain*). They don't have to keep looking over their back with people saying that they've had sex with students. HBCU rumors can be the worst. If I was married to a woman, it wouldn't be that he's doing those things…even though half of them are still doing those things.

Most of the SGA presidents I've mentored were gay, but they were not out (*said with concern*). I recommend Prep and use of protection. As far as my LGBTQ colleagues, I haven't established relationships with them. I work from 7:00 AM to 10:00 PM. I won't be establishing a relationship with LGBTQ faculty and staff at my current institution either. I will work, go to the gym and go home. If I want to interact sexually, I will fly the person in or fly to them in a secure location. I always find myself in situations where the schools are in disarray and that's the HBCU environment. I'm not going to hang out with gay folks going in. That's not my impetus of going there. Quite frankly, I don't want to meet the gay folks on campus because my experience with the gays…they're very messy. I'm not pressed to interact with LGBTQ folks on my campus or within a community because I already have my community of external LGBTQ folks that I want to hang out with.

BBM: I have always been out because I simply do not give a fuck (*said comically)*. A lot of my students knew I was gay when I was working at my first HBCU. I would get people trying to be flirtatious. I think I am attractive, and a lot of people tell me that I am attractive. Some of them would ask "Have you seen the new math professor? Girl he gay (*said sarcastically*)!" Since high school I do not think that I have ever been intentionally closeted. Hypermasculinity has helped me in that respect because people do not assume too much about my sexuality. I cannot say that I have ever really seen that conversation come up. The first HBCU where I worked was a very progressive institution and has grown to be even more in the past 10 years. Do not get me wrong…there was a lot of homo/transphobia. Nowhere near as pronounced as it was at the House of Excellence.

The HBCU I worked for in SC is a church school and it was very church heavy. I do not remember ever being ostracized or seeing other people being ostracized for their sexuality. I had a female student that was very masculine. She was one of the best-known students on campus. Everybody loved her. She was a math major and had not really had an adequate math education up to high school. By the time I got her, we had a lot of catching up to do. I think an advantage that both hyper masculine gay men and masculine lesbian women…people don't question you. I do not know that bringing my partner around would have been easily accepted. A lot of my heterosexual counterparts do not have to worry about that.

One of my personal goals is to be president of the House of Excellence, thus I do believe I can advance at an HBCU, as the first openly gay president. I have never really been good at paying attention to politics that involve my career. I would imagine and hope that when I get to that place in 10 years that I would probably have a long-term partner (*said with confidence)*. With a lot of those high-level administrative positions, your family becomes important. When I

was at the HBCU in SC, I did not do a lot to mentor students honestly. I tried to avoid seeing them on the apps or having them flirt too much with me. It was probably a lost opportunity. Most of my mentoring of students has come with either gender nonconforming students or women. I like having sex and I have always been afraid of my male students hitting on me. I established relationships with other queer folks simply by organic connection. Ja'Dor was my homo at the HBCU in SC and I had a home girl who went to college with me who was slowly discovering her queerness in her thirties while we were teaching at the House of Class.

Auntie G: I consider myself to be out because I'm not trying to hide or conceal it from anyone. Anybody that asks knows I have a wife…Now I don't walk around with it stamped on my forehead. I don't find myself filtering what I say to people either. If anyone asks, I'm going to be honest. It's no question that my institution is based on heteronormativity (*said in a disgusted tone*). The discrimination is extremely subtle, and it depends on the rooms that you're in. I've been there almost six years. Up until the moment, I'm about to explain, it wasn't blatant to me. I was sitting in an interview for a faculty position and a person presented as a male in the interview, however, the credentials on the resume showed both male and female. I don't think they made the connection initially when they looked at the resume, but it wasn't until he showed up in the interview that people really got so uncomfortable to the point that they were rushing him through his process. I sat through interviews before where we listened to this old ass woman just drag on and no one was rushing her. I listened to a brother who didn't know what that fuck he was talking about, yet nobody said anything to him. They got to this gentleman who was probably the most qualified out of all the candidates and literally rushed this man through the interview. He was given 35 minutes…but everybody else got an hour and a half.

It wasn't until then that I realized that that space is still not as accepting and inclusive as it should be in 2021. Just mind yo damn business (*said passionately*)! There's a lot of us on these campuses. They are not creating spaces for students, faculty, and staff to be safe. In their mind, as long as their insurance benefits will allow you to add your same-sex partner and recognized as someone who can get a tuition waiver, then they feel like they're doing their part when in fact they aren't. I can't say that I've been discriminated against, however, what I can say is who I am has been brought to question. At one point I hired an office manager who was out and loud which I'm fine with…however, there was someone else that worked in our department that was not so fine with that. She went to HR saying that I was only hiring people that were gay or lesbian…I had hired one damn person.

I do recognize this school is still very male dominant because all the top positions are filled by men and I'm struggling with that. Being a woman…Whew… Jesus. I must be mindful of what I say and do so that I don't find myself back in HR. I'm more cognizant of the people that I bring in for interviews after that circumstance. When I hired again for the role, I found myself questioning my own ability because I was worried about that coming back…I didn't give somebody the position for that reason. My heterosexual colleagues don't have to consider that.

When I look at the full gamut of the institution and the leadership body, I would probably say I would not be able to advance. I haven't decided figured out if it's the fact that I'm a woman, queer, loud, don't kiss ass, not a brown noser, speak my mind, challenge folks when they don't really want to be challenged… If the position reported to my current boss, I could be whatever the hell I want to be. If I had to report to the president or to the provost, probably not. As queer people, we are not as accepted or included in conversations. There is a woman I am 95% sure is queer that has not come out. I am pretty sure that is because she believes that her position will be

in jeopardy even though she has been here for decades. They continue to bring someone in above her when she could easily do the job. She used to present more masculine, but lately her presentation is becoming more feminine …yet they continue to bring more men over her for a job that she could easily do.

At my institution, I have not been a good ally at all (*said sadly*). If I was at the table, this conversation will be going completely different. In my program, I offer safe zone training for my staff as well as my peer academic leaders to ensure that the students feel inclusive, welcomed. In my program, we don't tolerate discriminatory behavior. In my current doctoral program at my HBCU, I made sure that my assignments are queer focused. When it comes to finding community with others like us, I find them and hold onto them…especially when they come in new. I try to make them aware pretty early on that they're not here by themselves and that I am here as a friend. I find us by relying very heavily on my intuition. I just follow where the Lord leads. I feel a drawing to them and then eventually I will usually say something about my wife and then that generally opens up the folds of communication most times (*said with confidence*).

Gentle Karta: Auntie G, you have a very interesting perspective. Mine is different, even though we work at the same institution (*said sarcastically*). I am open about my sexuality in the workplace. My partner was sick a couple of weeks ago and my supervisor called to check on him. My students know that I'm saying gender loving and that I'm partnered. I think what I've noticed is that we show up as who we are, and we're still all of these things that we look for in "respectable black folks", but it does not dictate how I do my job. I honestly don't believe my sexuality has played a factor in my experience…it's just part of who I am. Because I openly identify, the students are comfortable coming to me. I had a student come to me and asked me to help him figure

out how to tell his parents that he was gay. We talked about it for months and he told them which was meaningful to me. My sexuality is not as loud as others, so people can deal with it better. Because of that, I do not think about my struggles in comparison to my heterosexual colleagues.

I can advance within HBCUs because I have advanced this far as a director in student affairs. I have no aspirations to be a college or university president, but I wonder if that journey would be more difficult as someone who's openly, same gender loving. I think there might be some challenges there. There still would need to be this image that we as Black people look for being married and having children. My goal is to become a vice president of student affairs for several years at an HBCU, then as an executive vice president, and retire from there.

I advocate and mentor students by challenging programming that speaks to the binary of male/female without the inclusion of marginalized identities. I discussed this topic at my current institution because I was passionate…nothing changed, and they continue to do the sessions that the way they choose. Upper-level administration is not ready for that. That calls into question the age, generation, and era of our upper administration. If the upper-level administration is not advocating to senior administration and the board of trustees in the manner they need for these changes in policies, I'm not sure if anything will happen. Currently, I can only think of one openly gay colleague. There are others that you have your speculation, but not openly same gender loving (*said with sass)*. Our queerness is the not the start of relationships. Once that's discovered it helps to have a colleague on the team somewhere across campus.

Sista Soulja: Allow me to add to this as I also worked at the same institution as GK and Auntie G. When I was a student at the House of Class, the idea of hooking up with a girl was not something people talked about. Finding the lesbian voice was never a discomfort for me, but it wasn't

necessarily my particular voice (*said passionately*). I was like eight years into my marriage before I started understanding terminology to further define myself as a queer woman. There's no place where I question when you became this thing…I was always this thing. The understanding of it is something I am still developing, and it is joyful. The revelation of my queerness is at odds with the status quo, and it is losing its grip. I am so excited to see this bitch crumble. So, I'm constantly kicking her in all the spots where she's weak. My work is about making peace and fluidly integrating that throughout my life. I think the place that's most missing is in my career.

I was regarded as a qualitative methodologist with a tenure track position at a research-intensive institution and I felt like I hit the lottery at this PWI even though it was a toxic environment. Then the HBCU pursued me but there was a contingency of us who were not going to deal with the bullshit. I don't have time to sow seeds of petty by trying to rip someone off their post because I don't really care. The HBCU is very patriarchal in its leadership style, though it is predominantly female. I have come to a revelation about myself. I wanted to reach the associate professor level, but my advocacy takes more of a precedent. I'm the president of a national organization and it gives me gravitas that saying I was an assistant professor does not. I want to be in places and leadership where I can be my full self unapologetically.

Uncle Ned: I've always been a Black gay man ahead of being a gay Black man. My students asked questions if my nephew who came to class with me was my son and if I was married. I would say things like "I didn't realize all I could have was a wife" (*said sarcastically*). I joined a fraternity in college and was out which caused me to receive a lot of hell while pledging. Learning how to deal with heteronormative toxicity while pledging was like learning how to deal with my students now. Learning how to be quick, but not quick to anger. You know how like light-

skinned people can pass…I've been able to pass as a gay man by acknowledging that privilege and making sure that I never use it to recreate oppressive structures. I've definitely allowed my professional identity to take precedent in how I work with students and colleagues while finding ways to be authentic. What's the mathematics behind inequity when it comes to being a gay person? Math class is the last place that students would expect to have these conversations.

I'm open about my sexuality, but I'm also very mindful of modeling. That may be respectability…comes from this short period of my life where I felt like I had to hide (*said with concern*). I unfortunately have adult male friends who are also in the professoriate, and they are afraid to be out. What is my commitment to my community at the intersection of being Black and gay? My second-year teaching, my boyfriend came with me to an event and I ain't never really thought if people were homophobic. I did feel a sense of pressure…I still do. Are they looking at me weird or am I making this up in my head? I became a little bit hyper aware. I don't know if it was about my career advancement, but something was going on in those moments.

Some queer students gave a presentation to my class, and I invited them to give presentations to other faculty classes…none of the faculty responded to the email. If I could go back in time, I would speak up at faculty meetings (*said passionately*). I would have done more than an email. Faculty at HBCUs tend to be older and more institutionalized. The school has a transgender policy I was against, but that was the hill that issues died on. Most of my other LGBTQ faculty and staff friends are women who've sort of admitted to me that they've been or are gay or lesbian in their past. I wish there were other ways that we could have interacted that weren't on a dating app. At my current institution, there's sort of a hierarchy between faculty and staff. I assimilated into that culture; I'm not going to befriend staff members in a personal way.

Daddy D: I don't think I could be, and I am not looking forward to being a President at an HBCU. HBCUs culture is liberally conservative. Very liberal in terms of social inequities that relate to race, a little bit to gender depending on where you are because they are still very patriarchal. Not many of them discuss sexuality. They don't bash it per se, but they don't necessarily discuss. So much of the culture around HBCUs surround the president. If I were single, maybe it would be easier. I have a husband; I don't know if they ready for the first man. They might take the president and two kids, but to be the president and have a first man there…I don't know. I thought I was going to have a much harder time about my sexuality, but I haven't. I think people appreciate my authenticity. I do believe my sexuality has helped aspects of the work because I came into the job understanding what they needed.

A lot of HBCU's are in small towns where people may not be ready for that. Some HBCUs are in the Don't Ask, Don't Tell space. I probably get challenged more at an HBCU than I ever did at a PWI because those students hold us accountable, and they are looking for themselves. We did a lavender ceremony and what I see for many queer students that I encounter, they come to college expecting their whole identity to be embraced. It's all about acceptance and belonging for queer Black people because our community is really based on this collective. It takes a village to raise a child. When that village doesn't embrace the child, well, what does the child supposed to do? I wish there were more openly queer individuals at HBCUs that will just say fuck it. In my age group, there is some shame or fear surrounding that.

Our schools can be like the Black Church that many of them have grown up in (*said with concern*). When they come to an education environment and faced some of the same things that they might've found in the Black Church…that just does something to the individual (*said with concern*). You don't have to pay to go to church. You are paying to go to this HBCU. I'm not

paying y'all to not affirm or embrace me. I've worked here for three years, and I never would've thought I would've got hired. I didn't have an HBCU on my radar, but I have learned so much more at this institution than I probably would have learned if I had kept my trajectory of being a senior administrator at a predominantly white, knit size to large institution. I've gotten the experiences that I would not have gotten any other place in my career. This has prepared me the most to be a President.

Sometimes students go to HBCU expecting it to be a resistant place, but maybe they are a little bit more progressive than what we want to believe them to be. We talk a lot about the queer community…yet we don't talk a lot about the junk we got inside our own community. We got a lot of stuff within our own culture that we have to deal with. Older members of the queer community don't necessarily understand the younger community because this younger community is so open and so out in ways that we couldn't be (*said with conviction*). I can probably count on one hand who have identified to me that they are queer which is very different from other environments that I've worked at. I can't say that I know any that are at other HBCUs. Wow! That speaks volumes whereas in the predominantly white institutions, I know lots of people. Some Black men I have encountered feel or seem to display that if their sexuality is centered, they're not going to move through the ranks. Faculty lean towards their Blackness more than their sexuality (*said with confidence*). In my professional association, it was always a challenge for me to connect. The men that started it are all about my age, but I never felt like I belonged. They never reached out, embraced, or tried to mentor me. I have a mentor now, but I've never really had a mentor. I was never that one that went to NASPA running behind people (*said comically)*.

Auntie Star: When I came to my current institution, we had a white department chair. I remember seeing a rainbow sticker on her car that said, "Don't use my God to defend your bigotry (*said expressively)*." When I had to teach human diversity, one of the assignments was "If you woke up gay one day, how would this affect your life?" That gave off an impression that sexuality is a choice and an assumption that everyone is heterosexual. When I began to speak up for more assignments that were up to date with language and on par with where we are in the world, my sexuality became obvious. I toted my rainbow. When I came out, I came out. Social workers are literal change agents. We can't graduate students from our program without knowing the basics or thinking of intersections of diversity. I'm the only one that knows information about this in my department. I also recognize half of the board of trustees are pastors of Baptist churches who preach binary. Do I risk that call to the president's office or stay quiet about these issues? The politics of respectability is throughout my institution, especially when it comes to dress code and how one must present themselves to attend functions and class. I cannot imagine gender nonconforming students being comfortable at my institution. When I worked off campus, I could dress a bit more relaxed. When I was stepping on campus, there was makeup, heels, and dresses. When I pull out the slacks or heels, there's a difference. We had a white male professor in the back who had a red Mohawk, but our students can't come to class like that.

A professor and I were going back and forth about the need for safe zone. I was having to argue part of my humanity with another grown-up who really could not understand why it would be important (*said with concern*). Everything is assumed heteronormativity built into the structure. It is assumed that if I'm coming to the ball, the person that I'm bringing is a male. Am I willing to risk this? Do I have to say this is my friend? Do I say my roommate? Who do I introduce this person as? Especially having a child, it has also been doubly assumed. I am very

careful at my institution. I don't want to cause problems for myself right now. My heterosexual colleagues talk openly about their lives outside of work… for me, that looks different. It is challenging because they don't recognize heteronormativity as an issue. They are as blind to it as white people are to racism. HBCUs can jump hoops through racism and talk about that. We cannot get through heteronormativity. I could advance at a public HBCU faster than a private. I'm generally not masculine presenting and I would pass enough so that I'm not that threatening. My sexuality isn't something that is out front and center as some of the others have mentioned as well. I would have to downplay somethings to get the position. They wouldn't have a way to count me out because I have done so much. If it hasn't been done, I am on my way to doing it. Where I am now, I probably could advance however, there's just not much advancement there. Some heterosexual people feel like we like them and that is not always the truth. If I try to have a conversation with you and you find out that I'm a lesbian, are you going to think I'm liking you? If I have to downplay my sexuality, I'm okay with that because ultimately my goal is to feed my kids.

I don't advocate or build relationships much. I tried to implement safe zone when arguing with my colleague about the importance of it…that didn't go anywhere. A white, bisexual faculty emailed me after to say how happy she was to meet me but was very disheartened that someone on faculty was so negative. Unfortunately, she is no longer with the university and there has not been another faculty member that I have located that is same gender loving. Relationships amongst LGBTQ faculty just doesn't exist.

Uncle RayRay: I was not out either at my former institution and no one ever asked. I didn't discuss any aspect of my private life in the work setting. If you look, you can see it, but it was not

discussed. If anyone asks, I will not hide it, but I intentionally do not bring it up. I have not experienced any discrimination or been hindered because of my perceived sexual orientation. I'm also not overly flamboyant. I have seen more effeminate men overlooked for positions they were qualified. If you can pass, then we can promote. If not, then there are going to be very clear limitations to what you can do. The work I do is with HBCUs. Anything that is outside the established norms is not addressed or is intentionally squashed. Most HBCUs were founded by a church. There is no separation of church and HBCUs because it is ingrained in the system, and no one can avoid connecting the two. Part of what we are taught in our schools is not to fall outside the established norms and that is what respectability politics promotes (*said with conviction*). People who identify as LGBTQ in 99% of situations would never discuss that on the campus because that is not considered part of the normative society. It's a little different in public HBCUs because there are federal and state guidelines require a certain level of freedom. You can be Black and heterosexual, and that's fine, but being Black and identifying as anything else is outside the norm…you can be here, but we won't acknowledge that part of who you are because that's not okay.

In professional settings, you can only go so far and still reach the caliber I have because I became a vice president. There is a certain level of expectation that certain things are not discussed. Relating to students has been a big benefit because I have been able to provide guidance, support, and mentorship to LGBT students across country. In many of our schools they are either overlooked, ignored, or tolerated. There's only so much authenticity I can bring to the space and still support my students in a way that my heterosexual peers don't have to think about. For instance, what if I get married? How does that work with my career? In the city where my job was at my former institution, as Jade said…I worked and did not date at all because my position was

high profile. That was almost over seven years. Heterosexual colleagues don't have to think about if they get married. There's always a certain fear that your job might be impacted. For instance, if you bring your gay male staff, , then male students start making accusations… the assumption will be that the accusations are accurate. If you have an old, patriarchal conservative male president, then it is going to have implications. We are fortunate that some of our presidents are more liberal, but they still answer to in most cases, to very conservative boards.

Advancing to a cabinet position is possible because they can always justify it by your work product. They can overshadow anything else based on that, especially if you're someone like me who does scholarship and writing. We don't have a single openly, same gender loving, trans gay, bisexual, whatever you want to say, president (*said with concern*). I have seen in some situations where allegations have been potentially proven and people's contracts terminated. I do not think the way the system is currently set up, that you would ever be able to advance beyond the vice president level on the administrative side (*said with confidence*). A faculty member can advance to become a fully tenured professor. The president is the chief fundraiser and not only reports to the board, but to most times very conservative funders. That's when you're going to have the problem because people who fund that institution are not liberal.

I started a support group for our LGBTQ students. We can't expect them to be paying, but then tell them they can't be who they are. I mentor 40 or 50 LGBTQ students across the country because many of our campuses don't have support systems for them. A couple of them are trans and navigating the HBCU which are not set up for that option. It became very clear during the Black Lives Matter movement, all black lives matter, except the gay, lesbian, or trans.

I build relationships on other social media platforms. In the professional space, we don't discuss sexuality (*said with conviction*). Not just on dating apps…we don't address it because we

know the impact that could potentially have on our careers. Even at professional conferences, HBCU administrators that go avoid any sessions that are LGBTQ focused unless they are talking about students very intentionally and strategically. I have a lot of colleagues that are members of that community, and I don't think any of them are out on their campuses. Unlike faculty that are on contracts, all administrative contracts at-will. If it got out and your president found out, you could just be immediately fired the next day and they don't have to give you a cause. There is no tenure on the administrative side. You serve the leisure of the President where job security is different without a faculty appointment (*said with disdain*).

Cousin Locks: Like Uncle RayRay, I didn't have those conversations with anyone who didn't identify the way I identified (*said with conviction*). I certainly would not have those conversations with women, regardless of the way they identify and very rarely with heterosexual men. With those who I did, who were heterosexual, it was oftentimes that they initiated the conversation, and it was almost as if they were telling me, it's okay and let's move forward (*said comically)*. The space had not been created for me to feel like I belong. It's interesting how we love the church, but the church doesn't love us. When I interviewed for my current position at this HBCU, one of the employees asked about professional dress for our students and encouraging young men to pull their pants up. All of that is rooted in respectability politics and I don't subscribe to any of that because I'm not the clothing police. What I will do is help our students understand the implications of these choices and make sure that they are prepared to respond to it. I'm a firm believer that if you can't bring your full self to the place, then that's probably not a place that you want to be.

I aspire to the presidency, and I still have not seen a president with locks nor openly gay. The reality is HBCUs are some of the most conservative spaces in academia where we were created outside of necessity. We are becoming what we hate and trying to create spaces where our universities are equitable. Two of four flagpoles on campus were always empty. During pride week, we wanted to raise the flag…you would've thought I was asking to change the name of the university the way that it was kicked around. One of our main tenets of this university is social justice yet, we often pick and choose what social justice looks like and who it is for . Oftentimes, I'm cautious of how I push back against something simply because by being a member, it could make it seem like your advocacy is self-serving . The HBCU community was in an uproar because a Mr. HBCU did not perform gender the way that believed he should. What it did is it represented a whole lot of boys and girls in our campuses that have never had that type of representation.

This whole notion of respectability…I push back against it every chance that I get. I advocate for students through the HBCU Human Rights Campaign initiative. I've made sure that every time that there's an opportunity for our students to participate with them, I tell the students they will participate (*said with conviction*). I hold a purse as a cabinet member. I continue to push having a center on our campus specifically for this work. With faculty and staff, I build relationships through professional organizations. It's not necessarily hard because I work in student affairs where those who identify as LGBTQ are over-represented (*said sarcastically*). In the research, it's possible to create romantic relationships. Being real, if we're out at those conventions, then there are tools and resources, if you will, to figure out how to create those relationships.

I have not been discriminated against in a way that was brought to my attention. I don't think that anyone has ever found the courage to say that type of thing to my face or publicly .

We are having a retreat soon and the challenge for me is do I bring my partner because I'm wondering how I will be perceived. What explanations am I going to be asked to give? Sometimes I feel like a fraud because I'm not open and out front enough. It would be so much easier if my cisgender heterosexual colleagues were willing to be that advocate and make sure that that representation was there. It's such a heavy lift that…sometimes I just feel bad because I'm not doing all of that work. I just don't want to. I want to live free and be me, but there's a cost and responsibility.

I am going to be the first openly gay HBCU president (*said with confidence*). I was created to serve these institutions. It is because of HBCU that I am who I am. They're waiting for us to boldly step up. We will be foolish to think that there's never been a gay HBCU president. I say I will be the first because I know that I intend to begin competing for those in a couple of years, but it's not even about being the first. I would be delighted to know that I'm not the first because being the first is lonely. Outside of HBCUs, there are not a whole lot of openly gay college and university presidents and chancellors. There is opportunity. When I begin to compete for those positions, I will have a spouse which gives me a sense of stability. I don't want to serve an institution as a president, other than an HBCU and specifically a public HBCU. Are we ready? I'm ready. I hope they're getting ready.

Brista: Unlike most, my first job was at my Alma mater. I did not always talk about sexuality, but I was open (*said with confidence*). I do diversity for a profession, and I was always challenged in Black spaces because we didn't have certain conversations. HBCUs function very much like Black church. That same respectability politics that happen in church was the same at work. There was no difference. When you start talking queer initiatives…that is a red flag to

those church donors. It helped that I went to an HBCU because I was very familiar with the culture of the institution and Black folk.

When I worked in housing, I didn't have a ton of challenges. When I transitioned to another school, there was discrimination for sure. I was the only out person in my department. In that space, it hindered my professional growth, promotion and people were uncomfortable. They didn't know how to take me. I showed up my first day with a Michael Kors bag (*said proudly*). They were like, oh hell. Being my authentic self in all spaces really helped me build relationships with students. The students always felt more comfortable with me because what you see is what you get (*snaps fingers in a flamboyant way*). When I moved to my third HBCU, I ran a queer center, so my office became a safe haven for everybody and not just the queer students. When I ran a center, I mentored all the queer students. I was like the mother to all and not just the queer students. The straights will come to my office too, but I was the go-to for LGBTQ students. They knew I would advocate on their behalf, ask the tough questions to my colleagues, and push the envelope if it needed to be pushed. I spent a lot of energy fighting with people. Months with an S! If my supervisor was not on board with the changes I proposed, it wouldn't have happened since I was just a director.

Living authentically has hindered me in Black spaces, but it has also enhanced my marketability because I became a critical player. People who are not familiar with seeing an out flamboyant, educated Black man who can speak the language, build relationships across an institution, and doesn't feel limited by who they are get confused when they see me (*said comically)*. When I first got into the field, it was hard to build relationships with male students because they automatically have this wall up…especially at a Black school. Queerness is taboo and talking to you might cause people to think they are gay. It's the same thing I experienced as a student. The

female students were a magnet to me, but the male students didn't know how to take gayness or queerness. That challenge existed with Black male colleagues and not the students as time progressed. Heterosexual Black men hang with their homeboys and did not try to form a relationship with me. It was political. I felt excluded and not as important to the institution. I was used to it. In those moments, I knew that I was going to go get a doctorate because I needed to make this experience better for someone else.

I can advance at an HBCU, but I wouldn't come back if offered a position lower than a vice president or chief of staff. Do I think that could advance past that to presidency? They want you a picture-perfect heterosexual family and that will never be me. If I did go back, I would use it as a moment to shift the culture and the thinking of the institution and for us to be a model for others at an HBCU that is in Virginia or further north. I do not think I always did a good job of building relationships with colleagues. I didn't seek them out. They might've sought me out because everybody knew me. When I worked at an HBCU, we had a gay man in housing I connected with immediately that was very flamboyant, carried a purse, Greek, thick, and curvy just like me. One of my best gay friends was a faculty member that was a white woman at the last HBCU that started the LGBTQ resource center prior to my arrival.

(*Lights drop from the cast in the center of the stage as they remain in their seats in the living room. Ja'Dor walks to the center of the stage, sipping on what seems to be tea and stops at center stage where the spotlight falls to him*)

Ja'Dor: Whew Chile! That was some good tea! I cried a few times listening to my family talk about their experiences because I resonate with them in some respects. We were able to hear some examples of how these BlaQ Disciples werked at work. Through navigating the politics of respectability, passing to get promoted, and challenging the status quo, we can see that while the

cast has some similarities, they also have differences in how they werk. When I werked at my HBCUs, chile, I got the smoke either way (*said comically)*. I got smoke because I was young, effective, queer as fuck, vocal about injustice, and the people had a hard time. I am a prophet for real…prophets speak truth to power. I remember working at one HBCU where my female supervisor called me into a meeting with her buddy who was the director of human resources to talk to me about my fitted clothes. They told me I need to wear suites. I told them unless they buy my clothes, I am going to wear what I am wearing. It was a showdown from that day forward.

I had another supervisor at another HBCU who made an accusation that the queer male students and I were having sex because they all gravitated to me. Once I filed a complaint, she said I took what she meant out of context. How in the hell do I misinterpret what you directly said? Make it make sense!!! At my last HBCU, I had a Black male Dean that was who was an older queer but closeted. I thought we would get along…until the campus leadership started calling on me to discuss queer issues within the institution. He became jealous that I, as the only openly queer person on the entire campus was the one consulted. He then began to do some pretty shady things in which I reported him to HR. Sadly, he is still employed. I chose to leave the institution because the salary was not cutting it and a much greater opportunity called me, so I answered. That opportunity was not at an HBCU. I got three promotions at the institution I left the HBCU for. How telling is that? Amidst the struggles, I still werked at work (*said with sass)*. I made meaningful and lasting impacts. I didn't leave because of the work at HBCUs, I left because of the environment. I loved my students and they loved me. It became tiresome to fight every day with a system that showed they did not want to change to become more inclusive of the young employees nor the LGBTQ+ employees.

Who is to blame for them feeling as though they do not belong? What the hell do we do from here? Do you stay in these institutions and pray to Jesus for the best outcome, shake tables to ensure that equity as Jesus died for is established/maintained, or change the environment subtly? There is not a one-size fits all prescription to being an agent of change. What is certain is that in order for change to happen, somebody has to do something (*said with conviction*).

(*Curtains close*)

All Cast: Who is responsible for this change? Is it me…you…the students…the faculty…administrators…board of trustees…alumni? Is it all of us? If not you, then why? If you, why? Why? Why? Why is the question that remains unanswered for now? As we prepare for the final act, I want you to say it with your chest… BLAQ lives matter. Say it with me!! Say it again!! Say it again!! *(Entire quote is said in unison very expressively with crowd participation at the end)*

(*Lights on stage go off as the final scene is being prepared behind the curtains*)

Act II Analysis: Werk – Handling the Politics of Respectability

In Act 2, disciples described their experiences working at HBCUs as an LGBQ person, which answered the first research question, "How have LGBQ faculty and staff negotiated/navigated their careers at HBCUs?" Referencing the TV show *Pose,* when people in the queer community say "Werk," that means they were doing an excellent job of giving confidence, performance, and working hard. *Work* and *werk* have two different meanings. Thus, this act is a combination of how participants werked at work, meaning they described how they previously or currently navigated and negotiated their careers at HBCUs. The main challenge of navigating and negotiating their careers at HBCUs were shown through how they handled the politics of respectability that existed at each institution represented by the lived experiences of the disciples.

Auntie G, Sista Soulja, and Gentle Karta worked in different areas of the same institution, yet the way they navigated the politics of respectability was different. Sista Soulja was a faculty member who discussed queerness in different ways based on her development of sexuality which has evolved. She and Auntie G made very straightforward correlations between being queer and female. The intersecting component of their gender identity in a patriarchal institution further made their experiences challenging relating to promotion, acknowledgment, and respect. While these three disciples became acquainted in the ethnodrama, they are not familiar with each other in real life. A common notation of their navigation also included their sexuality not being too loud. Auntie G and Gentle Karta noted that they are open about their sexuality and their partners; however, they do not wear rainbows. Sista Soulja does not wear the rainbow either; however, she does discuss queerness in her academic work as it is a newer identity of hers.

Most of the participants addressed the subtle ways that discrimination manifests for LGBQ faculty and administrators. Auntie G addressed an engagement with HR because one of her staff members alleged that she only hires queer people. In her monologue, she shared a very compelling experience of being part of an interview committee where discrimination was present, yet she did not file a complaint with HR nor confront the interview panel. Motha Soul and Daddy D had very different experiences of navigating sexuality. For Daddy D, sexuality at his HBCU has not been as much of a problem as being a male. He also noted when people assume that he is heterosexual because he has children, he does not correct them. His handling of the politics of respectability is more focused on his gender identity than his sexuality because of the demographic of the institution. Motha Soul was a faculty member in the arts department. She noted that being in the arts as a queer woman was refreshing because most of the faculty in the department were queer, and queerness is more acceptable in the arts than other disciplines. In

addition to that, Daddy D and Motha Soul work at the same institution but did not share any connections with each other. BBM also worked at the same institution for a few years as a faculty member. Motha Soul noted that the politics of respectability have changed over the years as she was there for over 30 years. The campus used to be homophobic; however, over the years, the campus has evolved. Motha Soul and BBM only discuss sexuality within their teaching context while Daddy D discusses it in all aspects of his work at HBCUs. .

Disciples like Brotha Jade and Uncle RayRay both navigated through avoidance because they did not talk about it. Uncle RayRay shared if it came up; however, people did not ask him because he was a private person. Brotha Jade, on the other hand, was out at PWIs but did not feel safe being out at HBCUs. Thus, he navigated HBCUs as a heterosexual. Brotha Jade also noted navigating the politics by ensuring that he keeps his doors open when talking with students. The notion of "passing" and queerness being digestible was consistent with most disciples except for Brista. Brista navigated by being his authentic self in every space and embraced the consequences of that decision every day. Auntie Star navigated by her appearance that she is not masculine presenting. Uncle Ned learned how to navigate heteronormative toxicity due to his experience in undergrad pledging a Black fraternity. He navigated as a faculty by not directly answering the questions of his students who inquired about his sexuality.

Several of the participants acknowledged that they would like to be a college president. Because of HBCUs' culture, Daddy D aspired to the presidency, but is not looking to be an HBCU president. Based on his engagement in this work, he acknowledged that this study empowered him to reconsider applying for a presidency at an HBCU. BBM and Cousin Locks aspired to be the first openly gay HBCU president. They have these aspirations because they want to be possibility models to those who aspire to lead within HBCUs in the fullness of who they

are. In addition, many of the disciples acknowledged some points of tension with being partnered when it comes to leading an institution because HBCUs are not ready for a "first man or woman" of a same sex couple. As the Black church typically has a heteronormative leadership (male leader and first lady), so do HBCUs. Other participants did share that they were interested in advancing; however, they would not seek a role unless it is cabinet position. Entering the institution as anything lower than that would be problematic because they would not be able to impact systemic change at a lower level. Auntie G referenced being able to advance with her current boss, but outside of that relationship, not so much. Uncle RayRay also alluded to the fact that the vice presidents serve at the leisure of the institution's president. If the institution's leader is homophobic, the likelihood of having an openly queer cabinet position would be a challenge.

Most of the participants acknowledged mentoring as a significant component of their work within and outside their HBCUs. For some of the participants, mentorship was more engaging than others based on their roles. For example, Cousin Locks acknowledged that he does not engage as much with the LGBTQ+ community because he does not want to be the only one carrying the load. Uncle RayRay mentioned mentoring queer students across the country because the students cannot find any queer mentors at their campuses which showed a lack of visibility of queer faculty and administrators at HBCUs. To Uncle Ned's point, mentorship can be beneficial; however, he recommended that a line must be drawn in the relationship because students want to know things about mentors that may be too personal to share. In Brotha Jade's mentorship, he typically mentors SGA Presidents that are not out, just as he is. He mentors them on how to navigate the conservative spaces of HBCUs to survive in a heteronormative environment. BBM referenced that mentoring students when he worked in SC was a lost opportunity because he did not

want the male students making passes to avoid an entanglement which could have resulted in losing his job.

The nuances of navigating the politics of respectability at HBCUs for BlaQ people are more challenging than those who are heterosexual. The amount of daily concern that must be taken into consideration is detrimental for the soul and personal development of BlaQ faculty and administrators at HBCUs. The blatant and palpable fear that exists for BlaQ people within HBCUs is highly troubling based on the experiences of the disciples in this work. Why make environments much more difficult for BlaQ people based on their sexual orientation? How and where is that equitable? How and where is that Christlike? The reality is that for the HBCU community, teaching the politics of respectability is racist and homophobic. To one extent, the initial teaching of the politics of respectability was to counter the deficit narrative that white people held and continue to hold for Black people. On the other side within the intra-racial tensions of the Black community in HBCUs is teaching heteronormativity to be the standard of acceptable Blackness to other BlaQ people. Therefore, creating environments that are not equitable, psychologically safe, and just for BlaQ people is just as bad, even not even worse that white people exuding racism towards Black people.

Act III – POSE

(Before the curtains open, "Imagine Me" by Kirk Franklin plays and slide show of BlaQ people throughout history are being displayed. The slide show is one minute long and designed to center the audience for the final act. The final slide has directions for everyone to read the following statement aloud.)

All: Imagine us being free to be ourselves in all spaces that we exist. Imagine us. We need ourselves and others to do more than imagine. We need everyone to see that we exist. We have been here. We are not going anywhere.

(*Curtains open as "Stand Up" by Cynthia Ervivo begins to play. The furniture has been removed and the backdrop of the scene remains inside of a church with HBCU banners on the walls. The window in the center of the backdrop with the cross illuminates the stage. All cast members are standing and lined across the middle of the stage. Brista and Ja'Dor are leading this song, while the cast is singing in the background. Motha Soul is performing in dance while they sing. As the song comes to an end, Motha Soul take her place on the stage with the other cast members. When she reaches her place, everyone on stage strikes a mannequin pose that is held until it is their time to speak. All cast members are dressed in Black Couture Elegance with an accent of colors that represent the LGBTQ+ community)*

Brista: Posing is a posture of power (*said expressively)*! We all possess power, however, the power to change things does not just belong to us. If I could do something with more significance for HBCUs, I would infuse mandatory training and development for all stakeholders that focuses on best practices for engaging LGBTQ students. I would also continue challenging the norms because HBCUs are run from a very heteronormative lens. Until someone challenges the system, nothing will change. When I think about who needs to enforce change, I would say the president because institutional culture will not shift from a bottom-up approach. It needs to a meeting in the middle. We haven't continued the civil rights agenda when it comes to sexuality, gender identity, sexual orientation, and intersectionality in terms of our students, faculty, or staff

that people bring with them to campus every day. Why do we have pageants, but everybody can't participate? Why would we have coronation, but only cis women can wear a dress (*said with concern*)? All of the things need to be re-imagined.

For those queer folks who desire to work at an HBCU, I have some advice for you. Live in your truth and navigate the politics which are hard things to do in Black spaces. You have to know how to navigate the landscape and the politics to get what you need. In doing that, still live authentically because trying to live a double life in the HBCU will only hurt you. As a queer person, working in an HBCU is difficult, but it's also rewarding. Some of the best relationships that I have built were in HBCUs which were built on me being as raw as I wanted and giving the community the ability to do the same. When I left my last HBCU, I left in tears because the students and colleagues told me about the impact that I had on them. Despite the negative experiences, the fact that I was able to help people come out, shifting mindsets and the way they treated people in the past because they got to know me has meant the world to me *(strikes[3] a new pose to hold until the end of the scene)*.

Auntie Star: I would rehaul the curriculum because it is very heteronormative. If your math problems just have Johnny and Sue, and no they/them…send it back! We are including everyone. There would have to be more diversity on the board of trustees because they are the power holders and generally Black male preachers. These are mostly people who are getting up on Sunday morning, preaching damnation for this group of people. The president goes to them. Have someone on the board of trustees that represents us. Make the invisible very visible. The change in

[3] The pose is a pose of power. It would be up to the actor to determine what that pose is for them or the reader to envision said pose based on what they have read about the characters.

visibility would make it more comfortable for faculty, staff and administrators and decrease the harsh conversation around trans people because comments that come out of the mouths of leadership are troubling.

To my other queer folks seeking to work at HBCUs, be prepared for the exclusion and decide within yourself whether you're ready to address that. Be prepared for the automatic judgment. Have your own self-assurance because you're going to have to be confident in yourself. Develop a support system outside of the workplace. Remember that at the HBCUs, this is church…and every heterosexual person considers themself a pastor (*said with disdain*) *(strikes a new pose to hold until the end of the scene)*.

Cousin Locks: Change begins with me embracing the courage to show up authentically (*said expressively)*. I've never worn the rainbow ribbon. I'm thankful that students continue to choose to be here even when we are being a disservice to them. The first thing that we can do is intentionally recruit, hire and promote us as queer people while making sure there are centers on campus to support. We also must continuously assess the climate and use that data to create a campus that's just, equitable, diverse, inclusive, and creates a sense of belonging for us. No one wants to be an only. We'll be the first…hopefully not the last. After you hire us, make sure that you don't only want our face, but you also want our voice. Once we call things out or talk about how we can become better… don't stifle us from promotion. We're not only bringing in a speaker during pride month, but we're thinking about it in everything that we do. We must bring people along because if we don't bring people along then whatever we're doing won't be sustained. We're going to have to bring our partners around the table and we're going to have to push and pull them. As the millennial population, we'll come to your place, but if your place is not serving us, we

will leave. We get questioned about how often we move around and it's really, we had to bounce around cause we're trying to survive.

The boards, presidents, and chancellors are responsible for providing the change, especially as it relates to the faculty and staff experience. If a president as the chief spokesperson for university makes it known that this is a safe space, it impacts the culture. As it relates to the student experience, it's really upon us as chief student affairs officers and senior student affairs officers who have the ability think strategically and cast vision across the university to make sure we are responding to the needs of our students. From the academic side, our chief academic officers have that responsibility for us to be represented in curriculum because our students spend a lot of time in class.

I'll tell you one of the things that this pandemic has taught us…we can do anything that we want to do. Somehow, we figured it out because we had to Any institution that is just trying to go back to the way they were in February 2020, won't exist. To my fellow queer folks aspiring to work at HBCUs, be courageous in showing up authentically and do good work because we are often the only and the first (*said passionately*). We must make sure that we are not the last. When we get into those spaces, we must do good work *(strikes a new pose to hold until the end of the scene)*.

Uncle RayRay: Black culture does not promote that God wants you to be authentically yourself. We are taught to conform to these guidelines as a Christian, none of which lead you to be authentic (*said with disdain*). It leads you to perpetuate an image of what a Christian is. Black church does not promote you being authentically yourself. They got all these pastors that sleep with everybody, but when it comes to same gender or gender identity, we can't have that here.

It's the same microcosm on our campuses. We don't believe as a culture that God wants you to be authentically yourself…so why would we accept anything that's outside of what we have established as appropriate?

I would hire some who are out because including them in the space begins to shift mindsets. I would do more scholarship on that aspect of our schools because there is unfortunately not a lot of academic work related to that in the cannon. We can pretty much write about dirt and trash, but our schools, that is just not a topic that is often addressed. From a broader perspective, the presidents need to make some formal statement because they are the leaders. Those of us who worked at second level are not the heads of the organizations. Our boards need to go through training regarding real equity and inclusion because sometimes some of the pushback is from them and presidents can't refute because they report to the board. Anybody who doesn't represent the established board culture is never going to get on there. They're highly conservative, mostly religious, and very formal. You can be the most flaming person in the world, but if you are a millionaire, potentially you can still get on the board because money speaks louder than anything. Lastly, I think the students need to demand equity. No matter who's in charge of the school, the students have the largest voice, especially at private HBCUs. That will force administrations to start developing services, which will roll over to other leadership areas because they will have to have people there that the students identify with. We can't just be Black and heterosexual. If equity and inclusion become a principal for accreditation, any school that wants to maintain their accreditation will have to address and incorporate that principal.

For my fellow queer community that aspires to work at an HBCU, you have to be okay with having a double consciousness. If you expect to advance…fair or not, that's the reality. Secondly, at all costs, your work has to be impeccable you must be above reproach because even if

other things come up, you can always defer to your work cannon. Whether you're faculty, administrator, third assistant from the left…your work is what's expected. Some other things can be overlooked because you are a benefit to the institution when your work speaks for you *(strikes a new pose to hold until the end of the scene)*.

BBM: At an institution like the House of Excellence, I would try to model a lifestyle of openness and one that shuns secrecy. There are LGBTQ student organizations that I would be interested in funding. Even as a faculty member, I have tried to introduce concepts that avoid gender norms. I try to be open about the fact that I am gay. I have really tried to modify my aesthetic to more outwardly present because people pigeonhole me. We need to have anti-discrimination laws and policies at HBCUs and ensure that the leaders are down for the cause…all skin folks are not kin folks.

Advice for my fellow queers is simple. First and foremost, let your work speak for itself. Meritocracy has a lot of problems, but a lot of HBCUs at least give lip service to that. If you out here publishing, being the shit and on TV shows…if you want to be an academic, that is what you need to do (*said comically)*. Make sure that your work is the best quality. In my experience, coming out to people have always been easy or helpful. It is either gonna to make them stop flirting with me or make them more intrigued by showing them I am probably not the person that they were assuming based preconceived notions. Be yourself and do not hide *(strikes a new pose to hold until the end of the scene)*.

Brotha Jade: If I was to make change at an HBCU, I would hire a LGBTQ director, endow that center with an alum of the LGBTQ community, and market nationwide that we are an institution

that is inclusive of all (*said sternly)*. Providing financial resources for LGBTQ research, conferences, symposiums, and affinity groups. My advice to others who are queer is that you don't go to an HBCU unless you're a vice president or above. Your businesses is your business. Come in, do your job, and go home. Everyone is a colleague…not a friend. Do your job for five years and get out *(strikes a new pose to hold until the end of the scene*).

Gentle Karta: From the employee side, if there's an organization that's formed, I'll be a member and support. I don't want to be a leader in that aspect. I would take a more active leader role in the change for the students. We need physical space on campus for students to fellowship. From a larger context, HBCUs need some sensitivity training, but particularly focused on same gender loving communities for faculty and staff. We do not talk enough about these things and an employee resource group would be helpful. There should be an added position to the HR team to focus specifically on these efforts. We add things to people who already have jobs to do, and it doesn't get the attention that it needs. I think my current institution would be open to the two things that I named as I believe the president to be open-minded. I'm not sure what the board's thoughts would be. To my fellow queer comrades, while I am the youngest on this cast, my experience still matters. My advice to you is to be yourself, comfortable, and competent. It is easier for people to accept if you are comfortable and competent in who you are. Know your surroundings. Figure out how you deal with people in certain environments. I think that's just part of playing a politics of higher ed *(strikes a new pose to hold until the end of the scene)*.

Auntie G: We can work at the same institution with different experiences. GK and I work at the same school and have experienced our lives differently. Making people more aware of the subtle

discrimination and equity issues that oftentimes they're not thinking about because it doesn't affect them is part of my calling. They sent us through all these other bullshit trainings… conflict resolution trainings and stuff. Developing and implementing mandatory safe zone training and making sure that it is available to anyone who is interested is important. You can be an ally, but that don't mean you got to go to the gay club. Nobody said that. They sent us through all these other bullshit trainings…conflict resolution trainings and stuff. We need a mentoring program for LGBTQ people who are out to fully participate so that they know that they're not in this by themselves. Eliminating some of those folks who have been stuck in tradition would be most helpful, but the leadership has to have the balls to make some of those changes.

It won't be until I get into an executive leadership position that I'm going to be able to affect change across the institution. It must be vice-president of equity, access, and inclusion or something similar. I don't think that position will ever be at this institution. Change starts with the president, the board, and executive cabinet. They tend to focus with these blinders on and we gonna pretend like this ain't happening until it happens…then we got to respond. I mean it's a clusterfuck. They will not do anything that is going to impact their bank balance…even if the whole system around it is crumbling. There needs to be a shift of, of new perspectives. We like to say that we are student centered when we're really not. The things that are important to the students, those are not things that we put our money towards. We want to spend a million dollars on the inauguration, but your tutoring center is open three hours for the week (*Pause*).

To my other queer kin, my advice to you is to set your expectations low. We want Black excellence and end up disappointed as fuck (*said comically)*. Set your expectations bar a little lower and hope for the best. We must be the change that we want to see. Be courteous to people, respond to emails on time, and make sure that someone else knows how to do your job. Be

open…not to the bullshitters. Give yourself an opportunity to engage and interact with folks so that you can find like-minded people that'll help you navigate that process *(strikes a new pose to hold until the end of the scene)* .

Sista Soulja: The true power lies with the board… not where I'm sitting currently. If I'm going to get to a board, I have to see myself as a leader for more than the auxiliary organizations around my career, but as a change maker within it. I do not aspire to be a dean or vice-president at my former HBCU because that system was so closed. We don't always know how to advocate for ourselves and get into leadership positions. I need to go on and boss up some more myself (*said with sass)*. By continuing to be a bad ass a leader, setting standards, showing how it's done … it's not enough to include us. Let's stop talking…we need to do it. We've got to walk our talk now. Discrimination around our sex and sexuality is still very entrenched in higher education. It's an opportunity for us to strike while the iron is hot around our marginalized identities. HBCUs are going to be all right, but they are at the beginning of this process. I cannot totally de-construct a system that is resistant to change. My intersections do not define the sum of my worth. So what business is it of yours who I am going to grow into loving? Why would there be any barriers around that when Black folks need love so bad? It has really brought me to my knees, and I refuse to abide it. I want to be a part of the battering ram to bring us to a new kind of light.

To other queer beings desiring to work at an HBCU, do you boo and bring your own watering can. Enjoy your process along the way. I'm 53 and I am certainly becoming a better version of myself every day. Had I gotten there at 23, I'd be coming up on some other obstacles (Pause). We never arrive! Figure out a way to bloom where you are planted, knowing that a

transplant is an option once you have strong roots *(strikes a new pose to hold until the end of the scene)*.

Uncle Ned: I don't think that HBCUs are less inclusive. I've witnessed my students talk about their boyfriends and their girlfriends. Many of them are fine with who they are. There is an inclusive part that is unseen by those of us who may be older. Advocacy is very important, and I would if I could, go back in time to speak up sooner and louder. Students are part of who I want to follow and give them the mic to find ways to empower their voices. I really would like to find ways to situate youth culture and let them be the space and voice of what's possible for our communities being more visible to our colleges and institutions (*said passionately*).

There are three things I believe HBCUs can do to make our schools more inclusive for the LGBTQ+ community. First, we can take notes from a PWI. It can't be enough to sit on the fence anymore. HBCUs sometimes get away with tradition, which increases being complicit in silence. Secondly, institutions can force faculty to be together at a meeting and bring in external consultants. Lastly, I let my students do the talking for me. We don't need to give the voice to the voiceless…just pass the mic (*said proudly*). The students need to be working in tandem with administrators to write the policies because I see that like a white institution who has all white administrators saying we had a focus group with our black students and ain't no Black people in administration . If an institution won't promote me for who I am…I don't want to be there. Tenure goes beyond whether you are liked the institution. My words of wisdom to my fellow queer people are as hard as it is, do not walk in fear. As a Black community, we've gotten this far by being fearless. We're experiencing these compounded intersectional oppressions together (*strikes a new pose to hold until the end of the scene*).

Daddy D: In my own sphere of influence, I would make changes from a policy perspective. Queer students need to know that they can go to HBCUs because if not, they're going to go to the predominantly white institutions because they think that the white folks will accept them better. We must understand the trauma that queer Black folks come out of. They're coming out of their houses and churches with trauma. HBCUs should make sure that they create spaces where people feel they belong…not just half of their identity, but all their identity. You can't have these students on campus, and you never teach a class on James Baldwin, Bayard Rustin, and Audre Lorde. You never call their name. You never identify the queer members of your alumni. Just as readily as you can speak out on the death of George Floyd, we must speak out on the death of the countless transmen and women of color that got killed. You're not just bringing in gay students, you're bringing in their whole family. I'm not prideful that I'm the only one…that's not a point of pride. It should be others. There's something in the environment that is stymieing that experience, and nobody seems to address that or feel it's important.

This is a collective effort. It must be at the senior level to set the tone, include faculty members to present classes just on sexuality that are outside of the women's center, and infusing that in the first-year experience. When students come to mid-level administrators and deans to talk about gender, don't just send them over there to me to talk to. You can talk to them too because they're human. I think it is our fraternities and sororities who are probably the greatest offenders of perpetuating a heteronormative behavior. Not talking about it reinforces that it doesn't exist. HBCUs are going to have to shift because the market for students is competitive. Many of our students are coming more entuned to their racial identity, but not so much their sexual identity.

My advice to you who are queer and aspiring to work at an HBCU, don't stand in your own in a way and push out of your own queer comfort because there's a level of comfort for us at predominantly white institutions (*said with confidence*). Do not assume that as queer person, you will always struggle at an HBCU. Again, it's the trauma. By the time you get to be an administrator, you have a certain level of power behind your role. When you're a faculty, the autonomy of being a faculty member empowers you. Coming out for us, it means so much more loss. If I come out, I could risk losing my family, church, and culture, unlike our white counterparts that come out…they don't. What we're looking for is affirmation that we should be in these spaces. When I think about HBCUs at large, I'm doing everything and y'all still don't accept me. Think of the double impact that has for a queer person of color in an all-Black environment. It's double trauma.

You would just damn think that the Black schools would support you. One of the biggest stressors at an HBCU, if you slipped up around your sexuality that was out of the normal, they're going to get rid of you so quickly, viciously and distance themselves. That is stressful as hell. You could just post something and just think in the back of your mind in ways that I never thought about at white schools. For HBCUs, good God, just think about the talent pool that they're missing out on. Shame on us for not taking that. This has inspired me…Maybe I will be courageous and try for the presidency at an HBCU (*said with confidence*) (*strikes a new pose to hold until the end of the scene*).

Motha Soul: I echo the sentiments of my family that has shared today. As the eldest of this cast, our root has to be love. I facilitate contemplative retreats and I've done them for folks. My focus right now with those retreats is to work with Black women on self-love as a way of dismantling

racism. It's kind of like dismantling racism from the inside. When people are intolerant of others, it's because they're lacking their own self-love. In order to be able to love themselves deeply, then they can love and accept other folks as well. I would find professional development to help people love themselves deeply and unconditionally. The times that we're in right now call for us to love. No bullshit! There should be no-hate policies where there are serious consequences for people who violate them. Actively recruit and do what's needed to retain folks.

Advice for my fellow queer friends is to make sure you have a community outside of the institution. It's time for people be bold. It's time for the world to grow up. If people aren't willing to stand up and be fully who they are, then folks who have a problem will continue to have a problem. I don't think it's Black people's job to educate white people unless somebody is called to do that…if they are then great…I'm not (*said sarcastically*). It's not queer people's job to educate straight people. People have a very narrow understanding of Christianity because a lot of what we hear about Christianity is not Christianity at all. It's certainly not Christlike. It would be great if we could take more of a spiritual approach and less of a religious approach. This comes from my belief that the answer to everything is spiritual. People must love themselves to love other folks. We still have ways to go… It's time to live authentically and grow up (*said sternly) (strikes a new pose to hold until the end of the scene)*.

Ja'Dor: We all have our own way of making change in the earth. As you have heard from the other disciples, the power is partially with us, but it is mostly with those who truly set the tone for the institution. We are committed to being agents of change as we have been called to be in earth…discipling others to love themselves, others, and make their institutions more equitable for us (*Pause*). We must continue to push and challenge the theology and psychology of our

colleagues let them know that we are BlaQ. You cannot have one without the other. WE have always been here, and the truth is… WE will always be here. We may not fit the heteronormative mold, but we do fit the mold of the one who created us. So, we say to you…stand with us. We can do more together in the name of love and justice to not just been seen…but to be heard. How will you make a difference at your institution after this final curtain has closed? This was not just for your entertainment…it was for your soul to be transformed, mind to be renewed, and provocative enough for you to act as an agent of change. Our blood is on your hands if there is a continuous choice to turn blind and deaf to the needs of us BlaQ folks. What would your God have to say about that? Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord…only those with clean hands and a pure heart.

(*Lights drop to highlight the cast across stage as they step back to the center of the stage from the front of the stage. The intro song "BlaQ Disciples" plays and the cast sings*)

Our skin is B. L.A.C.K (emphasis on "ck")
Our life has been tough
Our sexuality
Has not always been approved
Being ostracized changes my mood
Yet, we're still standing
What do they call us?
We are God's Chosen
We are God's Chosen, God's Chosen

Our skin is BLACK
Our hair is all different
But we are more than what meets the eye
Our lives really do matter
We're awfully confused these days
'Cause our BlaQ role models were erased
What do they call me?
Disgraced Human

What do they call me?

Bulldagger and Sweet Thing

What do they call me?
Who really cares??

What do we answer to?
Our name's BlaQ Disciples

(*I'm Coming Out by Diana Ross begins to play. The cast takes a collective bow, followed by each individual cast mate. The cast ends the scene with a soul train line on stage*)

Curtain Closes – End of BlaQ Disciple

Act III Analysis: Pose – Agency vs. Autonomy

In Act III, participants engaged in a reflection of how they can make HBCUs more inclusive through their personal agency and autonomy, directly naming who is responsible to enforce change, and providing advice to LGBTQ people who desire to work at an HBCU which answered the final research question which was "How do LGBQ faculty and staff at HBCUs influence cultural (relating to LGBQ inclusion) change at the organizational level?" In the ballroom culture and modeling, the pose is a stance of power and is the final visual depiction of the statement the person desired to make. As such, the *pose* at work encouraged individual and collective agency to impact systemic and structural change for marginalized communities. In this work, that community consisted of the LGBTQ+ community. Disciples named multiple things that they would do to encourage and promote inclusivity within their institutions and HBCUs in general. As narrated in the ethnodrama, those ways were:

- Making sensitivity training and professional development mandatory for all pertaining to LGBTQIA+ identity.

- Using their individual lives and experiences to publicly challenge heteronormativity.
- Changing the curriculum from the dominance of heteronormativity.
- Provide spaces to talk about trans* identities.
- Intentionally recruit, hire, promote, and retain queer people while ensuring that their voices are heard, followed by inclusive action. No tokenization.
- Develop LGBTQ centers and hire center staff at all HBCUs.
- Publishing and providing financial resources on the intersections of sexuality, race, religion, and HBCUs.
- Individual modeling of openness at the intersections of identity within the institution to impact systemic and structural change.
- Establishing a mentorship program for the LGBTQ+ faculty, staff, and administrators.
- Take notes about LGBTQ+ inclusion and belonging from PWIs.

While these recommendations were named, an interesting finding was that some most disciples felt disempowered to make more significant, systemic change based on their current role at the institution. For example, Auntie Star wants to evaluate all curriculum at her HBCU for equity, however, she is just a faculty who does not have the agency, autonomy, nor power to make that decision. All disciples however, named that it is the responsibility of the HBCUs presidents and board of trustees to set the tone for deliberate inclusion of the LGBTQIA+ community. The president does have power, agency, and autonomy within the HBCUs, however, none of them are members of the LGBTQIA+ community which ensures that the necessary transition of power to impact change for the community is not likely.

Uncle RayRay provided insight into board recruitment and how most boards recruit the same types of people. As a result, change is not likely to happen when boards recruit and only

hire heterosexual or "passable" heterosexual leadership. As long as this continues, the conservative nature of HBCUs that are rooted in the politics of respectability will continue to damage HBCUs. The president's cabinet members also have a significant opportunity to impact the culture, which is connected to some participant's desire to become an HBCU vice president. Understanding that the culture of HBCUs is very similar to the Black church, the hierarchal nature of these institutions does not empower the faculty and staff to utilize their agency without the potential repercussions of losing their job and being blacklisted. If LGBTQIA+ faculty and administrators were free to be themselves, they could use their agency, influence, and autonomy to help make HBCUs more culturally competent and responsive.

Advice given to other queer individuals who desired to work at HBCUs varied among participants. Two common sentiments were an emphasis on doing good work and set low expectations to avoid disappointment. Some of the participants suggested a person's queerness can be overlooked or accepted if they do their job well. The challenge with this advice is that it reinforces the politics of respectability. If their queerness is not too loud or too visible, and assimilation to the dominant culture happens, advancement and success is possible. This is the same mentality that certain Blacks adopt to advance in a predominantly white society. This advice was also contradictory in some respects because of what some participants shared in Act II. There is a call to authenticity and boldness by some participants while simultaneously calling for assimilation to obtain results. Who will the results of assimilation benefit and how? LGBTQIA+ faculty and staff should not have to play the politics in order to make minimum change. Just because low-hanging fruit is quickly accessible does not mean that the larger systemic work should not be addressed. The risk of not playing into the intra-racial politics of respectability provides BlaQ

people with the agency, autonomy, and zeal needed to impact systemic and structural change with sustainable impact.

The disciples took courage in their own agency and autonomy by establishing small communities of support outside of HBCUs and being the source of their own encouragement to maintain their jobs. The varied advice provided by the disciples allows HBCUs to wrestle with the fact that these institutions have a lot of additional work to do to truly become equitable and inclusive. Equity, inclusivity, cultural competency and responsiveness will happen by acknowledging and responding to the diversity that is currently on their campuses which includes the LGBTQIA+ community. HBCUs have the agency and autonomy to become what they desire if they truly desire it. Lack of action while holding the most power, privilege, agency, and autonomy is very telling to the LGBTQIA+ community and continues to reinforce the trauma of existence which they must battle every day. The participants acknowledged that there are not many efforts that make them feel as though they can be truly included in the fullness of their intersecting identities. While their Blackness makes them feel included and provides a sense of belonging, their sexual orientation is not affirmed nor acknowledged which does not truly affirm belonging. When a person feels affirmed in the fulness of their intersecting identities and are included in organizational structure, that is when belonging has manifested. For the participants in this study, being able to "fit in" within the institution was shown to be more important than feeling a true sense of inclusion and belonging that included a celebration of their sexuality as LGBQ persons. Fitting in meant that because they were Black in a Black institution and identified as cisgender, they met the requirements of the check box to fit in. The politics of respectability provided the framework of what it meant to be a respectable Black person which at HBCUs is most prevalent. Inclusion and belonging suggest a person in their varying intersections of

identity are affirmed, supported, and intentionally included into all aspects of the institution. Participants felt included and a sense of belonging because of their Blackness and not their queerness.

Summary

In this chapter, I have provided an ethnodrama which is an arts-based research methodology to lift the voices of queer Black faculty and administrators at HBCUs. Through the deliberate use of intersectionality, the arguments established in this chapter were rooted in the theoretical and methodological framework with an aims towards social justice of a historically marginalized and erased population that exists at HBCUs. It is my hope that, through these non-fiction accounts that were shared in BlaQ Disciples, HBCUs will continue to grapple with the intra-racial tensions that exist within our institutions pertaining to sexuality, religion, educational institutions, and race in efforts to move quickly towards a much more progressive, culturally competent and responsive institution that dismantles the politics of respectability that leads to the oppression of LGBTQIA+ people. I chose to do this as an ethnodrama because I did not want to twist the words of my participants. What they said in *BlaQ Disciples* were their exact stories as to how they have managed their careers at HBCUs and beyond. The traditional analysis provided additional connections so that readers can understand how I engaged in ethical, intersectional qualitative research.

In Act I, the cast were depicted at the back of the stage and spread apart at their own vanity mirrors. Act I showed that they did not have relationships with each other because of their physical distance from each other and them sharing their lived experiences. After each cast member shared their story, their engagement in Act II showed that they were no longer strangers

based on how they were sitting in the center of the stage intimately together, sharing even more personal stories. In Act III, the cast made their way to the very front of the stage as a unified family to share their calls to action for HBCUs and their advice to other BlaQ people that desired to work at HBCUs. The posture of power was in their pose, voice, and commitment to discipling change with HBCUs to become more inclusive of the LGBTQIA+ community, which ultimately included them.

In honor of the BlaQ television series *Pose* that ended in 2021 after three short seasons, the acts of the ethnodrama were named after the elements of ballroom culture *–Live -Work - Pose* which were depicted in the series. Ballroom was the place for BlaQ people to show their fashion, fierceness, and tenacity on the runway they made for themselves because the world did not allow them to publicly display of their lives. Ballroom culture is very familial in nature. Queer people who were abandoned by their biological families were often adopted into a house (also known as a family) where they learned how to survive in their truths. Thus, in the ethnodrama, HBCUs were renamed to reflect a house to protect their anonymity while maintaining the identity of being a familial institution. In addition, throughout the acts, the disciples became closer as they shared their stories which were depicted in the ethnodrama.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

This work demonstrates that there are nuances of lifting every voice to sing. Just as an intricate song is not prescriptive, lifting the voices of queer faculty and administrators at HBCUs will take much more equity, inclusion, and belonging so that the music is complementary to the common goal of empowering Black people to live in the intersections of their authenticity. As Juneteenth has been proclaimed a federal holiday in 2021, we must acknowledge that all Black people are not free to be themselves in a society that does not always support the intersections of being both Black and queer. One of the most challenging aspects of working at HBCUs as demonstrated by the participant stories has been navigating the intersectional politics of respectability within the intra-racial tensions of race, sexuality, and Black institutions, which consist of both HBCUs and the Black Church.

In Chapter 1, I thoroughly defined the problem, provided definitions to key terms, detailed the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality and the Politics of Respectability which situated the purpose of the groundbreaking study. In Chapter 2, I provided a very detailed literature review on HBCUs, sexuality, and race through historical as well as modern references that showed how the LGBTQ experience has been and continues to be challenging at HBCUs. In Chapter 3, I provided a detailed account of my methodology and data analysis which solidified that I have engaged in the depth of academic rigor to present integral findings. In Chapter 4, I thoroughly defined what an ethnodrama is, and how it can take multiple forms through my presentation of the "BlaQ Disciples" which are the stories of participants and myself as the researcher. Along with the presentation of the ethnodrama, I have also interspersed a traditional analysis between acts that helped readers to make sense and meaning of what they were reading. Finally in this chapter, I have brought this aspect of the work to a conclusion where the chapter

ends in a homily entitled “Lift Every Voice and Sing” which is the title of this dissertation in efforts to bring the work full circle. The overarching research questions for this study are:

- How have LGBQ faculty and staff negotiated/navigated their careers at HBCUs?
- How do LGBQ faculty and staff at HBCUs influence cultural (relating to LGBQ inclusion) change at the organizational level?

Based on the participants’ responses, they have navigated their careers primarily by leaving HBCUs, ensuring that their queerness is tolerable, remaining content in the roles they have, or aspiring to be an openly queer senior administrator. LGBQ faculty and administrators in this study influenced cultural change within their organizations through their advocacy and mentorship. As the impact of advocacy and mentorship varies, there is a need for greater advocacy to reach the HBCU presidents and Boards of Trustees. As noted earlier in this work, there is no true separation of church and state, regardless of public or private designation. The experiences of the participants have shown that religious doctrine and beliefs have caused the most trauma as related to the acceptance of queer living. As a result of the indoctrination that causes continual systemic and structural oppression within HBCUs, this study is very important as it will hopefully begin to shift the culture of HBCUs to be much more inclusive in their practices, policies, and procedures relating to the LGBTQ+ community within their institutions.

Limitations

There were two main limitations to this study that are important to name. The first limitation was the timing. IRB approval was received in May 2021. By that time, most institutions were preparing to close for the semester and engage with commencement activities during a global pandemic. Even though the interviews were virtual, navigating life during a pandemic has

been different than pre-pandemic in many ways. For example, some of the interviews took longer because some participants had families at home during the interviews. While they were focused on the interview, their other priorities could not be ignored because of this project. By engaging much earlier in the semester and with a quicker process for IRB approval, I could have had time to recruit more participants.

The major limitation of this study was not being able to engage with other LGBQ faculty and administrators. As mentioned in earlier in this work, I emailed about 350 people to recruit participants. I also posted on every social media page on LinkedIn and Facebook within groups that I am part of several times to potentially gain additional participants. If I had not worked for several HBCUs during my career, I would not have reached my sample size of 12 participants. Some of my participants recommended others to participate. I reached out to those that were recommended and received no responses. However, I was very thankful for the participants that I had. This population is already marginalized and at risk of discrimination because of their intersecting identities. It would be great if there were a public network, instead of hidden network of LGBQ faculty and administrators. As noted by the participants in this study, building community among other Black and queer LGBQ faculty and administrators within HBCUs is strongly lacking or non-existent because of the politics of respectability, and a lack of trust among the community which heightens intra-racial tensions. That also impacted my ability to recruit widely for this research.

Recommended Process, Policy, and Practice Changes at HBCUs

As my doctoral discipline is educational policy, there are some recommendations that emerged from the data for HBCUs if they truly desire to embrace their diversity, practice equity,

and sustain a culture of belonging that is inclusive. These recommendations are not exhaustive; however, some have already been named in Chapter 4. The list can and will continue as there is a lot of work to be done for our LGBTQ+ faculty, staff, and students at HBCUs.

- **Mandatory training** – All faculty, staff, and students should be mandated to take a series of diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings. These trainings would include but are not limited to Safe Zone, Unconscious Bias, Restorative Justice, and Microaggressions.
- **Assessments** – If there are questions about the cultural climate at HBCUs, it would be essential to engage in campus climate surveys that will show the current state of the institution as it relates to DEI. The main assessment from the Higher Education Resource Institute would be administered every 4-5 years with additional surveys between to ensure that the institution is making progress towards inclusive benchmarks.
- **Accountability in policy** – From the assessments and survey of the cultural landscape, policies must be implemented that will uphold a standard of inclusivity. For example, providing benefits for domestic partners and implementing anti-hate policies are essential to ensure that the standard that is set is adhered to.
- **Programming** – LGBTQ programming can occur on campuses through student organizations, employee resource groups (ERGs), and affinity groups. Externally, if there is an LGBTQ organization, HBCUs can create memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with said organizations who would be willing to provide additional programming.
- **Statement of affirmation** – Each HBCU should craft their own institutional DEI statements that exhibit their commitment to accepting and affirming intersectional identities. There should also be statements on all academic syllabi that provides guidelines for

classroom engagement that ensures that DEI will be exhibited within every course at the institution.

- **Chief Diversity/People Officer** – Engaging in the work of DEI is challenging. By hiring a dedicated cabinet member who is responsible for strategic and systemic cultural change, HBCUs can advance further than where they currently are. As other organizations have these roles, it is incumbent upon HBCUs to do the same and provide this person with the autonomy and power to hold others accountable to ensure equity. Under the direction of this senior leader, LGBTQ+ Centers can structurally report to this area as an example of a DEI initiative.

There is a connection between the results of this ethnodrama and existing research on conservatism and self-concept. For instance, the work of Commodore (2019) dives into the lives of Black women aspiring to a presidential position at an HBCU. Commodore's work highlighted the persistent and prominent difficulty that feminist and queer voices have endured at HBCUs. Commodore (2019) noted that these difficulties are a result of a projecting conservatism that leads to emerging feelings related to the need to feel "normal" and conform. The notion of "normal" in this context does not mean that heterosexuals are normal while queer people are abnormal. The troubling part of normalcy is that heterosexuality is provided a cover and privilege while queerness is continually marginalized. The author described how the politics of respectability produced by Black communities may serve to counter negative stereotyping of Black people. For instance, in Act 1, Cousin Locks described the process he went through when announcing his engagement to a man, and how it became a shock that permeated throughout the community. Many people had not realized he was not heterosexual, though at the same time, Cousin Locks had not realized others would be shocked by such a realization.

Further, Uncle Ned described how his fearlessness had been reigned in over time, which was a common theme for the participants working at HBCUs. Commodore (2019) spent a great deal of time exploring community expectations for respectability that rule over the behavior of staff and students at HBCUs. Conformity to these rules is central to success in many ways. Commodore (2019) says:

> Since HBCUs have often been viewed as an extension of the Black family, located at the center of the struggle for Black equality and dignity (Allen et al. 2007; Douglas 2012), it is understandable that a number of these institutions would view engaging in the politics of respectability as a vehicle by which to conquer this struggle. (p. 443)

These standards have deeply impacted BlaQ individuals in terms of their personal social patterns in a way that perhaps being queer could not. The challenge becomes rearranging one's respectability and queerness to allow their careers at HBCUs to flourish. Khalifa (2018) guides educational institutions in understanding how important social justice and culturally responsive leadership is for an institution to truly be equitable. The results and recommendations of my dissertation further affirms Khalifa's calling out educational leaders to become competent in what it means to lead in a diverse society. HBCUs should not solely focus on race/Blackness to the exclusion of all other identities. It is incumbent upon HBCU leadership to becoming culturally competent and responsive to the needs of Black AND queer individuals on their campuses. If these recommendations that I have shared are not taken into strong consideration, HBCUs will continue to lose students, faculty, and staff because of the refusal to understand and account for the diversity of Blackness that exists within their institutions.

As Commodore (2019) explored how gender discrimination results in challenges for Black women seeking presidential positions at HBCUs, this research sought to understand the

discrimination facing BlaQ employees and what kinds of strategies are used to connect with the community. Specifically, this study aimed to understand how engagement with personal respectability politics allows BlaQ employees to thrive on campus without sacrificing their queer identity. Women seeking presidential positions face similar issues in terms of ensuring their respectability is maintained (Commodore, 2019). The continued emergence of one's identity within the context of their respectable positions depends largely on whether HBCUs make room for BlaQness on campuses.

Implications and Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the data obtained from this study, there are implications and some suggestions for further research as there is still much work that needs to be done. One of the implications of this study is the lack of safety that still exists within the Black community for those who identify as LGBTQ+. The second implication is that the Board of Trustees and most HBCU Presidents are not setting an inclusive standard for the LGBTQ+ community. It would be ideal for further research to include the recruitment process, requirements, and culture of HBCU Boards of Trustees along with their views of the LGBTQ community within the organizations that they oversee because this was raised consistently by the participants of my study. In addition, assessing the knowledge of the Board of Trustees and Presidents pertaining to the LGBTQ community, intersectionality, and DEI would be necessary. If the Board of Trustees and university Presidents were aligned on the necessity to become more equitable and inclusive, that would greatly shift the culture of HBCUs in a positive direction. Finally, an implication for further research would be the trans*, non-binary/genderqueer/gender non-conforming community within HBCUs from the lens of faculty, staff, administrators, students, and alumni. One of the participants noted that

they did not believe trans*/non-binary people would be safe at their institution, which is problematic. It would be most interesting to know how many HBCUs have trans*/non-binary faculty and administrators at their institution while engaging in dialogue with previous employees who have transitioned from working at an HBCU potentially due to being made invisible.

My Truth

Merriam et al., (2001) spoke about researchers that are outsiders being more objective in some cases than insiders because of the emotional disconnect. To my benefit, I have the experience of both an insider and outsider. However, Chavez (2008) addressed how being an insider has many benefits from a qualitative research perspective because established rapport with shared community from a historical, political, and social context provides richer data. I was an insider because I have worked at several HBCUs during my career, however, during the time of my study, I had been removed from being an employee for 2yrs. I left the HBCU that I previously worked for because of a much better job opportunity per my career trajectory and because the Dean at that time was toxic in their leadership. As I engaged in this work, I was very nervous and emotionally distraught. I was not confident that I would have enough participants to engage in traditional qualitative research, which dampened my spirit to an extent as I was working through this process. I will name that in reflecting on my lived experiences, I am thankful that I have worked at several HBCUs because I was able to meet some of the people who were participants in my study. Had I finished this work when I initially started my doctoral degree in 2014, I would not have established as much of a community which could have caused me not to complete my doctoral work as initially planned. The completion of this study is right on time considering the events that have occurred between 2014-2021.

As I interviewed the participants, I did not know that their stories would emotionally impact me as they did. I found a part of me in each of the participants. After several of the interviews, I cried. I felt the pain, concern, and confusion from those who emoted that while also feeling as if I was on the right path from more activist-oriented perspective. Following the interviews, I thought about each person constantly. I thought about their words, lived experiences, passions, and aspirations. I prayed and continue to pray for them because their lives are so meaningful. There was not one participant that spoke to my soul more than another. They all spoke to me equally and as I further this work, I will continue to think about and work with them. I will carry the stories of my participants with me for the rest of my life and they will be forever documented through this dissertation.

This work, for me, has been a healing balm because I am called to assist HBCUs in the realm of diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice. It has been difficult to understand being called to a system and sometimes people that have caused me harm in the past because of the loudness of my queerness and other intersecting identities to be an agent of change. The work of the ministry of equity is challenging yet rewarding. In this process, I have truly found additional community within HBCUs, which has been refreshing. This is important to note because the emotionality connected to qualitative is both work and a source of data (Hochschild, 1983). As a mental health and spiritual care provider that is differently abled (diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression), when writing the ethnodrama, I ensured to capture my emotions through Ja'Dor and not use my emotions to tell the individual stories of the participants. Mental health and spiritual health are synonymous to holistic healing (Kollar, 2011; McMinn, 2011; Wilson, 2001). Without balancing the two when doing engaging with this population, further harm can be done which will result in jaded experiences that produce negative

outcomes. Childhood trauma manifests in adulthood drama because what is not confronted cannot be healed (Wesley, 2018). This is important to identify as reflexivity within this work must have a distinction between that of the researcher and that of the participant. I ensured that I met with my therapist more during the data collection and analysis phases because listening to the stories of my participants caused me to empathize more deeply due to my experiences as an insider.

I am committed to the work of social justice, which is what intersectionality and ethnodrama are rooted in. Thus, engaging in this work has truly helped me to understand that all my experiences have been meaningful and necessary so that I could write this groundbreaking dissertation. I did not know what to expect in this process, but I have been thankful that, with the support of my community and the leading of the divine, this portion of the work has been completed. My truth is I have a much deeper commitment to a research agenda than I did prior to engaging in this work. Also, I am an artist. While engaging in my academic work, in some respects, I lost my artistry because traditional academia does not always support the arts. I am not traditional. Engaging in this work caused me to find my inner artist again, which was the same joy that saved me from attempted suicide at 15. It was the arts that saved me and provided me the space to be my authentic self. I will never fit the mold of traditional paradigms and I am glad that I have been chosen to challenge the status quo. This dissertation is intersectional, interdisciplinary, and rooted in social change. It shows all aspects of who I am as a pracdivist (practitioner-academic-artist-activist).

Conclusion: Lift Every Voice and Sing

To give this work a proper benediction, I would like to take a religious text that is a call to action. The Black national anthem is a song of action. In the first line, it tells us to lift our voices to sing until there is an action in heaven and earth. Most songs just evoke emotions, while the Black national anthem evokes both emotion and action. The song does not suggest that the Black community should stray away from the dark past; instead, it promotes this continuance of social justice because there is an understanding that there will continue to be injustices through which the Black community must remain committed to singing the songs of liberation. Joshua 6:5 reads "When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in." In this text, the prophet Joshua was directly given a command to overtake the city of Jericho because it was guarded from a community that should have access to it. Joshua provided a command to an army as God instructed which was to march around the walls of the city for seven days. On the seventh day, the command was to march around the walls seven times. During the seventh time around the walls, the army was commanded by Joshua to play loud horns and shout as loud as they could so that the walls would fall flat so that they could enter Jericho without struggle. The army did as Joshua stated, and the wall fell flat for the army to enter and rededicate Jericho to God. In this text, Joshua had to gather the army and they all had to lift their voices and sing at the same time in order for the walls to fall flat as God had instructed.

In 2014 (7 years ago), I started my first doctoral program. I was at a religious institution that did not support my research topic which was along the same theme as this study. My mother took ill about a month into my program that started in June and died on September 10 which was two days before my birthday. Over the past seven years, my life has gone through a lot of meaningful changes. One of them being more of an organizer of marginalized communities to provoke

systemic change. To that point, in this text, I am Joshua. The participants and co-conspirators are the army and the walls (blockage) represent the politics of respectability that have some HBCUs and their communities that are committed to protecting their beliefs that have marginalized Black and sexual minorities. It is currently 2021 (seven years since I was first given this topic) which signifies to me that is time for us to shout loudly that we are more than Black. We are Queer, and we will regain what rightfully belongs to us. What belongs to us is equity. What belongs to us is justice. What belongs to us is the right to be as the divine has created us without believing that we must assimilate to cause change within HBCUs. The voices of the LGBTQ+ community are loud and will continue to become louder as society continues to evolve. This work is also part of the loud horn being blown to let HBCUs know that the days of silencing queer people are over. In lifting every voice to sing, the voices of the LGBTQ community are singing louder with more power so that we can be made visible and receive the equity that is due to us at the intersections of our identity.

Because we are singing a unified song with the same underlying meaning of liberation through the help of God, the walls of oppression must fall. This work can encapsulate the final lines of the first stanza of "Lift Every Voice and Sing", which reads, "Facing the rising sun of our new day begun, let us march til' victory is won". Today is a brand-new day as we face the warm rays of the sun which helps us to feel and see that brighter days are not just ahead--they are already here. As a people, we must march on until victory is won for all of us. This work is not centered on whiteness because whiteness is not doing internal damage to the Black community with respect to gender and sexual identities.

In this context, the intra-racial tensions of Blackness at the intersections of sexuality have caused a divide that prohibits us from singing the same song of liberation. If we understand that a

house divided against itself cannot stand, then why do we as a community divide the house (our race) by our sexuality? How is that equitable? How is the God of the religion that HBCUs were founded on be pleased by subtle or overt ways in which BlaQness is not accepted? The work of diversity, equity, and inclusion is not a matter of checking a box for representation. Instead, it is soul work. HBCUs must continue to wrestle as Jacob did with the angel in Genesis 3:22-31 and allow the collective response to be that we will not let up from wrestling until we are blessed. The blessing here is not one of finance. It is one of love, acceptance, affirmation, inclusion, and consistent engagement. Just as Jacob had evidence that he had an encounter with God, HBCUs can show that they have encountered the divine through their public affirmations, confirmations, and policy production that LGBTQ+ lives matter at all levels within our institutions.

Therefore beloved, there is enough room on the musical score for all of us to lift our voices and sing. We will not all sound the same. We will not all be singing from the same lived experience; however, the strength of us lifting our voices together at the intersections of who we are will allow the walls of respectability politics and the oppression that exists in our institutions to fall flat so that everyone can enter our institutions without being worried about if they will be accepted or not because of their sexuality. This is unfinished work. There will always be more to say as this work will outlive me and its readers. While we are living, we have a mandate that calls us to lift every voice and sing until our institutions change to become more culturally competent, responsive, equitable, just, and inclusive of our LGBTQ community.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Informed Consent

Georgia State University

Department of Educational Policy Studies

Informed Consent

Title: Lift **EVERY** Voice and Sing: An Intersectional Qualitative Study Examining the Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Faculty and Administrators at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jennifer Esposito-Norris

Co-Principal Investigator: Jonathan Wesley

I. Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to investigate the lived experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Queer identified faculty and administrators that previously or currently work at a historically black college and/or university (HBCU). You are invited to participate because you are self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer African American that has served at a historically black college and/or university. A total of 10-12 participants will be recruited for this study. Participation will require 1.5 to 2 hours (90-120 minutes) of your time over one day during the months of May or June.

II. Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide and audio recorded. The interviews will occur once for 1.5 to 2 hours between May, and June at a date and time of your choosing via Zoom. All participants will be recorded for this interview. While video recording will occur, participants are not required to share their video if

they choose not to. All participants will be audio and recorded for this interview. While video recording will occur, participants are not required to share their video if they choose not to. All participants must be current or former African American administrators or faculty members of an HBCU that self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer. The research interviews will be conducted via a personal, secured Zoom account owned by Jonathan Wesley. The data will be stored in a password and a firewalled computer device. Data will be destroyed after transcription and conferral of doctoral degree in December 2021.

III. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits:

Participation in this study may not benefit you personally. Overall, we hope to gain information about your lived experience as an African American, self-identified lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer person who has served or is currently serving at an HBCU.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled to your present/future career with a historically black college or university.

VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Dr. Jennifer Esposito Norris and Jonathan Wesley will have access to the information you provide. Information may

also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). We will use pseudonyms rather than your name on study records if you so choose. The information you provide will be stored under a password protected device that only Jonathan Wesley has access to. Video and audio recordings will be destroyed after the successful defense of the dissertation in Fall 2021. Transcriptions for your interview will be stored in a firewall protected computer owned by Jonathan Wesley. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. As a point of reference, what you share during this interview will be used for publication.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact Dr. Jennifer Esposito-Norris at jesposito@gsu.edu You can also contact Jonathan Wesley at 862-452-3556 or via email at jwesley4@student.gsu.edu

The IRB at Georgia State University reviews all research that involves human participants. You can contact the IRB if you would like to speak to someone who is not involved directly with the study. You can contact the IRB for questions, concerns, problems, information, input, or questions about your rights as a research participant. Contact the IRB at 404-413-3500 or irb@gsu.edu.

VII. Copy of Consent Form to Participant:

If you agree to participate in this study, please be prepared to provide a verbal consent required during the beginning of the interview process. Checking this box indicates your consent to participate in this research study. There is an electronic consent which is found on the

following link. Click or copy/paste this link: https://gsu.qual-trics.com/jfe/form/SV_ezjTXLPvECYrPmJ

Appendix B - Interview Protocol

Purpose: To examine the lived experiences of LGBQ faculty and administrators at HBCUs

Date:
Time:
Place: Zoom (Virtual)
Interviewer: Jonathan Wesley

These interviews will be conducted during the months of May, and June. We hope these interviews will better help us understand the lived experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer faculty and administrators at historically black colleges and universities. You have received a consent form to sign via the initial Qualtrics survey, which indicates your consent to the interview. The interview is being audio recorded. Participants, please do not say any names or reveal the identity of anyone else. This is solely about your lived experiences.

Questions and Probes

1) First, I am interested in knowing more about yourself.
   - What were your family dynamics? (Describe them)
   - Where did you attend school and what kinds of schools? (I.e., public, private, predominately white, etc.)

2) How have you experienced life as a person that identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer?
   - What did you struggle the most with and why?
   - How did you cope with the challenges of living as other than heterosexual?
   - Share your most meaningful moment that you can call recall. Why is this experience significant?

3) Were/Are you open about your sexuality at the HBCU? How have the politics of respectability influenced your decision to be out or not?

4) How have you experienced your career at an HBCU as a person that identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer?
   - Have you experienced discrimination because of your sexual orientation?
   - What did you struggle the most with and why?
   - How were you treated by your colleagues and the campus community?

5) Describe one challenge that you believe impacts you the most in comparison to your heterosexual colleagues in your role at the institution.

6) Do you feel as though you can advance within the HBCU sector as a person that identifies as LGBQ? If so, why? If not, why?

7) How have you mentored and advocated queer students during your time serving at an HBCU?
   - Share a specific example.
   - What made those experiences meaningful to you?

8) How have you established relationships with the LGBQ people at your institution?

9) If you could play a significant role in helping to make the HBCU community more inclusive of the LGBTQIA community, what would you do and how would you do it?

10) What three steps do you believe need to be taken and why to create a more inclusive environment for faculty and administrators that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer?
   - Who needs to enforce these steps?
   - Do you believe that your institution will be open to this change in environment? Why or why not?

11) If you could provide some advice to other lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer people desiring to work at an HBCU, what are two main points that you would like to share?

12) This project will be written in dramatic form. Can you share with me a song that speaks to your lived experience as a LGBQ faculty or administrator at an HBCU? Why did you choose the song?

13) Thank you so much for your time. You have been extremely helpful by sharing your lived experiences with me as faculty/staff member that self-identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer. I am very interested in any other feelings and thoughts you would like to share with us to help us understand your experiences.
   - Are there any questions that you think we should have asked?
   - Is there anything you would like to add to this interview that would be helpful to the researcher?

Appendix C - Email/Facebook/GroupMe Message/Poster for Recruitment

Greetings,

I hope that you are doing well. My name is Jonathan Wesley, and I am a Ph.D. candidate at Georgia State University in the Educational Policy Studies department in the College of Education and Human Development. I am conducting a study entitled "Lift EVERY Voice and Sing: An Intersectional Qualitative Study Examining the Lived Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Queer Faculty and Administrators at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)" and I would like to know if you are interested in participating in this groundbreaking research study.

The criteria for participation is as followed:

- Identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer
- Identify as Black/African American, Afro-Latinos/as/x , or person of African descent
- Identify as cisgender
- Currently or previously served as a full-time faculty member in the ranks of tenured and non-tenured **OR**
- Currently or previously served as a full-time administrator within student and/or academic affairs, or enrollment management at the levels of Assistant or Associate Department Chair, Assistant or Associate Director/Dean, Director/Dean/Department Chair, Assistant/Associate Vice President/Chancellor/Provost, Vice President/Chancellor/Provost, and/or university/college President.
- Worked full-time a minimum of one year at an HBCU (One year is a fiscal, academic year)

If you meet those criteria and are interested in being interviewed, please respond to the Qualtrics link at the bottom of this outreach. The study has been reviewed by the Georgia State IRB. Once you read the consent form and electronically sign, you will then be able to complete a Qualtrics demographic form. Upon the submission of the Qualtrics questionnaire, I will contact you via email to schedule an interview.

Qualtrics Link: https://gsu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_ezjTXLPvECYrPmJ

Thank you and I am looking forward to hearing from you soon.
Jonathan Wesley
Jwesley4@student.gsu.edu

Appendix D - Codes and Themes

Codes	***Subcodes***	***Relation to Theoretical Framework***	***Categories/Themes***
LGBQ Experiences	LGBQ Challenges	Intersections of worth as a human connected to religious beliefs have caused tensions for most participants	Acts of Survival
	Coping Strategies	To cope with not having a sense of belonging in some areas, participants found ways to handle life as black and queer	
Navigating Landscape	Engaging at work	As queer Black people, engaging with others at work was limited pertaining to personal dialogue about life outside of work.	Handling the Politics of Respectability
	Developing a Sense of Belonging	Some participants relied more on Blackness than queerness at HBCUs	
	Career Trajectory	The presidency is a goal for some, but there is uncertainty of career advancement based on sexuality	
	Encouraging Inclusivity	Some participants shared how they encourage a more inclusive environment for the queer community	
Power Dynamics	Agency and Accountability	Personal agency to impact change was only mentioned within their sphere of influence.	Agency vs. Autonomy
	Mentoring	Mentoring of students occurs, however, mentoring of other queer colleagues was not reported	