Black in the Rainbow: "Quaring" the Black Gay Male Student Experience at Historically Black Universities

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This qualitative study explores the collegiate experiences of four Black gay male students who attend historically Black universities. The study utilizes a quare theory framework, an alternative framework to queer theory. Quare theory calls our attention to the intersection of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation. Data were collected through a 1:1 interview with each participant and photovoice. This study reveals how the students navigate their collegiate experiences, internalize homophobia, begin to embrace their own sexual orientation identity, and find support (or lack of support) for their sexual orientation identities. Recommendations for practice and directions for future research are offered.

Keywords: Black gay males, quare theory, and historically Black colleges and universities

The term "queer" was historically used as a homophobic slur against lesbians and gay men (Jagose, 1996). During the U.S. gay liberation movement, the identity as a queer came to mean individuals who rejected assimilation as a way to reach gay liberation (Carlson, 1998; Jagose, 1996). Queer signifies an individual "that stands outside the dominant cultural codes; queer opposes sex-policing, gender policing, heteronormativity, and assimilationist politics" (Morris, 1998, p. 276). Queers challenge society to change as a way to reach "gay" liberation (Dilley, 2005; Jagose, 1996). As a theory, queer theory seeks to disrupt binarism and normalcy in social institutions and structures (Butler, 2004; Johnson, 2005; Johnson & Henderson, 2005; Luhmann, 1998; Meiners, 1998; Tierney & Dilley, 1998). Higher education scholars have utilized queer theory as a framework to understand the collegiate experiences of LGB[1] and queer students (Abes, 2008, 2009; Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Abes & Kasch, 2007; Patton, 2011).

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However, queer theory can make salient identities, such as race, gender, and class, invisible (Cohen, 2005; Johnson, 2005; Johnson & Henderson, 2005). Furthermore, the term "queer" is often associated with class, race, and gender privilege; privileges not often available to Black gay men and other LGB people of color who are marginalized in society (Cohen, 2005; Johnson, 2005). The purpose of this article is to explore how a quare theory framework, an alternative framework to queer theory, can be used to understand the collegiate experiences of students of color. Specifically, this article explores the collegiate experiences of four Black gay men at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

Review of the Literature

HBCUs were established to provide Black Americans access to higher education in the United States when other institutions denied their rights to a postsecondary education (Jackson & Nunn, 2003; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Sissoko & Shiau, 2005). Today, HBCUs no longer educate the majority of Black students; this function is now held by predominantly White institutions (PWIs) in the United States (Kim & Conrad, 2006; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Sissoko & Shiau, 2005). The increase of Black students at PWIs began when these institutions were forced to admit Black students after the landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*, the court decision that made segregation in education unconstitutional in the United States, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, legislation that restricted federal funding from institutions that practice racial discrimination (Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Sissoko & Shiau, 2005). Although HBCUs no longer hold the majority share in educating Black students in the higher education community, there is no doubt that HBCUs continue to hold a significant and powerful role in the higher education community (Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Scholars have discussed how HBCUs have supportive environments for Black students (Jackson & Nunn, 2003; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). These environments include opportunities for Black students to engage with faculty members; have access to positive, Black role models; and have a supportive peer group in place (Palmer & Gasman, 2008).

Harper and Gasman (2008) noted the conservatism that exists at HBCUs in their study. Their study addressed the experiences of Black male students at HBCUs, but none of the participants disclosed their sexual orientation. Harper and Gasman found that HBCUs tend to be conservative with regards to sexuality, sexual orientation, and self-presentation. They contribute this conservatism at HBCUs to the campus tradition, norms, and climate. Furthermore, Harper and Gasman (2008) found that Black students at HBCUs believe that there is not an acceptance of gay students at HBCUs. This may be due to the lack of visible support for LGB students at HBCUs, including student organizations and support services (Harper & Gasman, 2008; Patton & Simmons, 2008).

There are two primary studies that focus on LGB student experiences at HBCUs. First, Patton and Simmons (2008) found in their phenomenological study on identity development of first-year Black lesbian students who attend an HBCU that the student participants were aware of their oppressed identities (Black, female, and lesbian), but these three identities sometimes conflicted with each other. Second, Patton's (2011) phenomenological case study examined the college experiences of six African American students who identified as bisexual or gay and attended an HBCU. The study focused on how student participants viewed their sexual orientation identity and navigated their institutional environment. Patton used queer theory and dual-identity development (Black, gay) frameworks to analyze the data. The students in the

study described having a positive experience at their institution; however, they discussed the negative personal and psychological ramifications of being out at an HBCU—facing negative stereotypes, isolation, and limitations in terms of future career opportunities. The student participants described the importance of being "low key" with their sexual identity and how their sexual identity was a small part of their overall identity. These studies provide a foundation for understanding the experiences of LGB students who attend HBCUs. However, current studies have not used quare theory to understand experiences of LGB students who attend HBCUs.

"Quaring" the HBCU Experience

Quare theory (Johnson, 2005; Johnson & Henderson, 2005), Black queer studies (Johnson & Henderson, 2005), Queer of Color Critique (QCC) (Ferguson, 2004), and Black Lesbian Feminism (Lorde, 1984, 1988) all are related critical theories and offer a comprehensive framework for understanding the experiences of LGB individuals of color. The frameworks' ability to make race, gender, class, and sexual orientation identities visible is critical to understanding LGB students of color. However, we use Johnson's (2005) term "quare theory" in this research to encompass specifically QCC and Black queer studies. The term "quare" for Johnson has roots with his Black, southern grandmother who pronounced queer as "quare". Johnson (2005) uses the term quare to describe a LGB person of color and uses quare theory as a way to discuss theory that makes identity visible to interrogate issues of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation in society with a particular interest in Black LGB individuals.

Quare theory scholars recognize the importance of understanding how race, class, gender, and sexual orientation intersect to inform one's social location (Cohen, 2005; Eng, Halberstam, & Muñoz, 2005; Ferguson, 2004, 2005; Harper, 2005; Johnson, 2005; Johnson & Henderson, 2005; Misawa, 2010; Muñoz, 2010). Quare theory also recognizes the racism that exists in the LGB community and the importance of interrogating the privilege of Whiteness (Cohen, 2005; Ferguson, 2005; Harper, 2005; Johnson, 2005). For example, LGB individuals who do not adopt the White, western philosophy of liberation and come out of the closet are seen as paranoid, outdated, and culturally lagging (Ferguson, 2005; Ross, 2005). This philosophy of liberation does not recognize or understand the implications of the "closet" for individuals of color who have to navigate racism, individuals with limited income who may risk financial security for coming out, and individuals in parts of the world who could face death for claiming their LGB identities. Therefore, quare theory scholars recognize the importance of including the silenced or overlooked voices of LGB people of color (Harper, 2005; Muñoz, 2010; Ross, 2005).

An essential component of quare theory is its grounding in performance theory (Johnson, 2005). "Performance theory not only highlights the discursive effects of acts, it also points to how these acts are historically situated" (Johnson, 2005, p. 136). Furthermore, performance theory calls our attention to how individuals attempt to maintain control over their self-images and how this is at times extended to social identity groups that have been marginalized in society (Johnson, 2005). For example, Johnson (2005) uses José Esteban Muñoz's idea of disidentification to understand the performance of Black LGB individuals. Muñoz (1999) describes marginalized individuals, specifically LGB people of color, using disidentification as "a survival strategy that works within and outside the dominant sphere simultaneously" (p. 5). Muñoz (1999) explains further:

Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant identity (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this 'working on and against' is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance" (pp. 11-12).

This disidentification strategy has been used by African Americans and quares of color (Johnson, 2005). For instance, Johnson (2005) points to RuPaul's, a popular Black drag queen, ability to demonstrate "the resourcefulness of quares of color to reinvent themselves in ways that transform their material conditions" (p. 140). However, such performances go beyond the stage and into everyday spaces, including residence halls and college classrooms to resist assimilation, demonization, and oppression (Johnson, 2005). "Moreover, quare theory focuses attention on the social consequences of those performances" (Johnson, 2005, pp. 140-141). Thus, the research question guiding this study is this: What are the social implications/consequences for claiming one's blackness and quareness (publically or internally) at HBCUs?

Methodology

Role of the Researchers

The qualitative researcher serves as an instrument for data collection (Creswell, 2007; Mertens, 2010). We brought our individual social and cultural lens to this study. The principal investigator (PI) is a doctoral student and a full-time administrator. The author identities as Black, gay, and Christian, and was responsible for leading all aspects of this study. The second author served as a mentor and provided debriefing throughout this research process. She was able to support, question, and offer advice during this research process. She identifies as White, straight, and Christian and is a full-time faculty member. From distinct and unique positionalities, they worked together to draw conclusions from the narratives of the four student participants in this study.

Participant Selection

Participants were recruited through criterion sampling (Mertens, 2010), drawn from Black gay men who attend one of two public HBCUs[2], Southeast State University and Southwest State University, selected as research sites for this study. Both HBCUs had a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) student organization, and student participants perceived their campus administrators as being supportive and inclusive of LGBT students. Student participants had to meet the following criteria: (a) identify as African American or Black; (b) identify as gay and comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation identity in a research study; (c) biologically and socially identify as a male; and (d) currently pursuing a bachelor's degree at one of the research sites. Participants for the study were recruited in two ways. First, students were recruited through the LGBT student organization at the research sites. Student leaders and advisors of the student organizations collaborated with the researchers to recruit participants. They emailed their student organization listservs about the study on behalf of the researchers. One student organization allowed the principal investigator to attend a general body meeting to discuss the study with members of the organization. Second, the researchers recruited participants by hanging flyers around each campus. Four students chose to participate in this

study. Given the implications for sometimes identifying as gay, the researchers were pleased with four student participants. Student participants received a $50 gift card for participation in the study.

Procedures

Interested participants had a preliminary meeting with the principal investigator that lasted approximately 30 minutes. The PI discussed the goals of the study, reviewed the consent form, and addressed any questions or concerns during this preliminary meeting. The student participants chose a pseudonym to protect their identity. Data were collected through two methods—photovoice and semi-structured interviews. Photovoice is a qualitative method that provides research participants, who may often feel voiceless in society, the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and stories through photography (Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004; Wang & Pies, 2008). Each participant in this study was given a disposable camera and asked to spend two weeks taking 8-10 pictures that reflect their experiences, positive and/or negative, as Black gay men at an HBCU; the principal investigator then asked follow-up questions about each picture during the semi-structured interview. Participants were required to obtain signed photograph consent forms from any individual included in the pictures. Each student in the study also participated in a semi-structured, one-on-one interview on his respective campus. The interview explored students' life experiences prior to college (family, "coming out" experiences), their collegiate experiences, and reflection on photovoice. The interviews were audio recorded and lasted approximately one hour.

Data Analysis

Goode-Cross and Good (2009) used a thematic analysis method termed *meaning condensation* in their study of African American men who have sex with men at PWIs. We used meaning condensation to examine the participants' transcripts from a quare lens. The primary researcher began by examining each transcript for a sense of the overall experience of the participant. Next, "quare" codes within each transcript were identified. After all the transcripts were coded, the codes were categorized into themes, and then interpreted. The photographs were included in this analysis.

Trustworthiness

The PI utilized several of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) guidelines for establishing trustworthiness. The researchers utilized member checking to increase trustworthiness. The list of emergent themes was sent to the participants with a brief description requesting clarification and feedback. However, none of the participants responded to the request. Thus, the authors relied heavily on forms of triangulation to establish trustworthiness. First, the authors established trustworthiness through triangulation by using multiple investigators. Second, the authors used triangulation to establish trustworthiness by collecting two forms of data—interviews and photography. In addition to the above trustworthiness strategies, the researchers sought to understand the study's ability "to erode ignorance and misapprehension, and the extent to which it provides a stimulus to action, that is, to the transformation of the existing structure" (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 213). The LGBT student organization at Southeast State University

has requested a presentation of the study's findings. We hope this presentation will lead to thoughtful discussion among the student members and potentially lead them to action by addressing their concerns with their senior administration.

Limitations

This study has two major limitations. First, this qualitative research study aims to better understand the essence and meaning of human experience rather than to seek popular goals of quantitative studies, such as correlation and causation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995). Thus, this study cannot generalize the experiences of the four student participants to all Black gay men who attend HBCUs. Second, the student participants did not respond to member check request. Therefore, we must rely heavily on forms of triangulation to establish credibility. Nevertheless, we believe the data presented will provide a deeper understanding of the collegiate experiences of Black gay male students at HBCUs.

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Findings

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Analysis of the data revealed four overarching quare themes: (a) Finding a Home at an HBCU, (b) Quares' Successes and Challenges making Connections, (c) Quares Finding Support in a LGBT Student Organization?, and (d) Quaring the Closet. The findings below are shared in a mixture of paraphrase, direct quotation, and researcher analysis. We have edited direct quotes to remove information that risks the confidentiality of student participants as well as the filler language, which interfere with a reader's ability to follow the thoughts of the student participants. Whenever participants used profanity, the authors replaced their language and indicate this with quotation marks around phrases.

Finding a Home at an HBCU

The four participants described their choice to attend an HBCU as a family tradition. Participants discussed how parents, grandparents, and other relatives had attended HBCUs. For many participants, like Seymour (Senior, Southeast State University), it was their only college choice: "I never wanted to go anywhere else but here like…this was the only school that I applied to, it's the only school I cared to go to." The participants described feeling comfortable instantly at their respective institutions during their campus visits. Marcus (Junior, Southeast State University) visited during the spring semester of his senior year, and he instantly felt connected with the students and faculty in his prospective department. Stephen (Junior, Southwest State University) visited Southwest State University close to homecoming and instantly felt like he could receive support from fellow students if he ever needed anything. In fact, Stephen ended up being recruited to play collegiate sports at Southwest State University. One participant, David (Junior, Southeast State University), described his decision to attend an HBCU versus a predominantly White institution (PWI) as a way to decrease the number of barriers up against him:

> Going to an HBCU was probably a lot -- it probably would be a lot simpler. I'm not gonna say simpler, I'm just gonna say different. 'Cause I don't know the dynamics of any other kind of institution, but I know what it proved to be for like myself, if I'm a Black

kid going to class, there's gonna be other Black children. If I go to State University (a flagship PWI), there's gonna be Caucasian kids walking around, and Black kids walking around, so there's gonna be an automatic difference.

David considered attending an HBCU as a way to remove barriers and saw his attendance at an HBCU as an opportunity to feel comfortable. Seymour (Senior, Southeast State University) was not worried about his sexual orientation identity as he headed off to Southeast State, but was nervous about leaving home. Like all the participants, their ultimate decision to attend an HBCU was a choice of connection and feeling comfortable in an academic space.

Quares' Successes and Challenges making Connections

The four student participants described having some negative incidents, but generally expressed an overall positive experience. In fact, David (Junior, Southeast State University) took a picture of his school's sign during the photovoice experience and when asked about the picture stated, "I'm glad I came here; I didn't want to go anywhere else." Participants described feeling connected to faculty, staff, and students and all their identities being embraced by many people. For example, Marcus (Junior, Southeast State University) described his positive connection to a White male faculty member who served as his mentor:

A professor actually who is gay…we connected on a level of he could be a good mentor. You know? Sometimes he might give me a lot of advice and that was a good impact because he was older and he could give advice on what is good or bad. Or be yourself. You know? Open up and be yourself because you are like in a shell.

The students' positive connections to faculty, staff, and students helped with their adjustment to college and helped them feel like a part of their campus community. Stephen (Junior, Southwest State University) was a Resident Assistant of a residence hall with mostly male athletes. He described being nervous about the experience, but felt like he has been embraced by all of his residents. Overall, the participants felt that most fellow students accepted and sometimes embraced their sexual orientation. Students did, however, describe challenges at their respective institutions that made them feel disconnected. Participants described encountering students who had a lack of awareness about LGB people and who sometimes stereotyped all Black gay men as the same. David (Junior, Southeast State University) described being called homophobic slurs by peers on a few occasions. Marcus (Junior, Southeast State University) took a picture of a dark hallway and described feelings of loneliness:

Sometimes it's just like you are the only one that's gay or you are the only one going through a situation about your sexuality. Or what you should do? Feeling like you are the only one there. No one else is around; it's quiet and dark.

These feelings and experiences are of concern for students as they navigate their higher educational experiences. Although these students felt connected to their campus, they still experienced campus disconnection by being called homophobic slurs or feeling like they are the "only one." Interestingly, some student participants described opinions or underlying assumptions that contributed to quare disconnections on their campus, specifically around gender

expression. Student participants described internally conflicting opinions about men who wore women's clothing. On one hand, they discussed the importance of allowing people to be themselves. On the other hand, they discussed how men who wore women's clothing bothered them or described them as trying to fit in:

> It [men who wear women's clothing] kinda bothers me sometimes. It does, 'cause it makes it harder for me sometimes, and you know, but I don't knock 'em for it all the time because that's how they express themselves. So if that's what you wanna do then 'hey, go for it.' But it is maybe a little harder because of ignorant minds on campus but if that's how -- if that's the trail you wanna do to get to where you wanna go at then go for it. (David, Junior, Southeast State University)

> You see a group of gay men here that do drag or group of gay men here who carry on a lot of drama or the DL guys over there or the bisexual men just like 'Oh. Just don't dress in drag to fit in.' Or be who you are and I've always known that I'm not that type of person to go that far as to do drag; it's not my thing. You know or wear a purse. Or wear makeup or you know it's just not for me. I'm not going to say there is nothing wrong with what they decide to do but it is just not for me. (Marcus, Junior, Southeast State University)

One participant who used to wear women's clothing described it as a way to find himself:

> Of course, but that just wasn't me saying, 'Hey girl! and the bright, bright colors and the tight, tight clothing and just the big -- being very, very girly. It wasn't me, I mean, I'm not, not saying now I'm masculine but I'm more masculine than I was. Then I was very, very, very, very feminine, but it was just like I was trying to find myself.

Although he no longer wears women's clothing, the participant described this act as a phase towards self-discovery and even mentions how "he didn't have a care in the world." He goes on to describe a mentor who encouraged him to reconstruct his own identity. The participants described politics and misunderstanding around gender expression, and also described feeling that as gay men they were often lumped in with men who wore women's clothing.

One point of interest is surrounding fraternity life. Students had an interest in joining a National Pan-Hellenic Council, Incorporated (NPHC) fraternity (historically Black fraternities) on their campus, but believed their identities as Black gay men hindered them from even considering it. David (Junior, Southeast State University) discussed his inability to join a fraternity: "Nobody ultimately is gonna wanna accept homosexuals and on the grounds of because they [fraternities] don't think that it's like a good look for the organization, and that's only because of these stereotypes about a typical homosexual." Seymour (Senior, Southeast State University) described a similar experience: "I mean I definitely can't pledge anything, but that's about it…Because I'm openly gay, I mean it'd be fine if I was lying but I mean I just don't have it in me." Stephen (Junior, Southwest State University) did not openly state that he could not join a fraternity because of his sexual orientation. However, he did describe knowing students on the down low or "DL" within these organizations. These students' quareness was accepted and embraced in some spaces but not in others, such as fraternities, where they could

have benefitted from the lifelong brotherhood, while also contributing to the success of these organizations given their leadership experiences in campus organizations.

Quares Finding Support in a LGBT Student Organization?

The students found support for their identities through friends, staff, and faculty; however, the students had diverse views of the LGBT student organization on their campus. Marcus (Junior, Southeast State University) found the LGBT student organization to be a form of support for his identity: "Walking into the room [meeting room for the LGBT student organization] was a whole other level. You know? Going to something with other gay people, like myself, was different, and they embraced me." On the other hand, Stephen (Junior, Southwest State University), although a member of the LGBT student organization, felt that the organization was not very active or visible on campus. However, he felt that he was able to develop connections with fellow students in the LGBT student organization.

Interestingly, two students who were on the listserv for the LGBT student organization did not know much about the organization or were hesitant about being members. David (Junior, Southeast State University) expressed his lack of knowledge about the organization: "Some people think it's a beneficial group. I feel the group could be possibly beneficial if I knew more about it, 'cause I really don't see too much of it going on." Another student spoke about how he was hesitant to join the organization:

> I mean freshman and sophomore year I really didn't want to work with our LGBT group 'cause it was more of a support group type thing and they weren't really, they weren't geared towards policy or like politics or anything like that and I just didn't wanna sit around a circle and talk about how 'messed up' life is like I don't…so I can talk to my friends about how 'messed up' life is, but I wanna be a part of an LGBT organization I feel like it should have some teeth to it like try to change some things. But I mean since they were the only instrument I had to use I decided to join the organization, and like I had to sort of try to get some things done but yeah I was really hesitant to join them. (Seymour, Senior, Southeast State University)

Marcus and Stephen found the LGBT student organization to be supportive in some way, David did not know much about the organization, and Seymour decided that the organization could serve as a political avenue for him. The students' remarks indicate that Black gay men have varying identity development needs, as well as different or no uses for an LGBT organization.

Quaring the Closet

Participants described their process of coming out to family members and friends that challenged the idea that the only way to be liberated or to fully claim your identity is to announce your sexual orientation to everyone. The student participants challenged this "We're Here! We're Queer!" mentality. Some participants described coming out as just being comfortable in your own skin versus announcing your sexual orientation identity:

> To define 'out', it's kinda -- I wouldn't say 'out' 'cause people look at it differently. I look at it -- when somebody says they're out, it's like "Do you walk around campus and just say 'Oh, I'm gay?'" No, I don't. But my definition of 'out' is, I'm comfortable with myself…So if somebody were to ask me I could comfortably say yes. (David, Junior, Southeast State University)

Marcus (Junior, Southeast State University) described how it was easier for other "nationalities" to come out of the closet because of the family implications for being gay in the Black community:

> For me because (pause) I don't think my family is like you know "I'm gay" and they be ok with it. I know for other nationalities it depends on the person it can be that way for them too. As a black, gay man (pause) it might to be harder for society to accept and the people around you to accept that fact that you are another black gay male. You know?

Some of the participants described internalizing homophobia during their coming out process. Marcus (Junior, Southeast State University) described how he would change his behaviors to avoid any suspicion of being gay:

> How I acted, or if I was too feminine, or try to act like my other male friends. You know? What would they think? It was all about what would someone think of me. I will just be quiet. I won't say much or I just won't go to certain activities cause you know that group of people might not like me for who I am.

Seymour (Senior, Southeast State University) expressed anger throughout the interview because of the heterosexism that existed in society. He also spent time discussing how he believed that gays in the South experienced more depression than other people:

> They [researchers] said gays in the South suffer from depression more than any other region, and I was just like, 'Am I depressed because I'm like genetically predisposed to it or like is it because I'm gay?' I, I didn't know how to separate or decipher why do I feel this way.

The student participants experienced real struggles with claiming their quareness. The student participants discussed their journey in learning how to embrace themselves. Participants turned to friends, family members, student organizations, counseling, and themselves to resist internalized homophobia. One participant described his journey:

> Honestly, I got tired of covering up. I got tired of not being who I really was in my head. Because I had all these things that I wanted to do or put on or go buy or something like that and it was just like I can't buy this because what are people going to say. You know? I just had to let it go. It was stressful, extra weight. I had to let it go. And it started with steps. It started within looking at it. I did not know what was happening. With that, I thought I took certain steps at different times. Progress, it progressed with certain things that I did. Yeah. Or I stopped caring about how I spoke around someone and then I might have stopped going home and not wearing certain things or taking it off

when I get to the door. Or even in the car. I don't want to hold this like that or I don't want to carry a certain item a certain way because they might think it is not the way. Or I don't want to do this hand gesture. You know? It was just things that I had to stop doing. And be who I really was. And I'm happy. I'm me. (Marcus, Junior, Southeast State University)

Discussion

Research on the experiences of gay men in college has ignored the voices and experiences of Black gay men; many studies of LGB students were built on models and theories based on White students (Washington & Wall, 2010). This study along with others (i.e. Patton 2011) provides a venue for Black gay men to share their collegiate experiences. This study supports many findings in Patton's (2011) study, including having an overall positive experience at HBCUs, facing negative stereotypes, feeling isolated or lonely, and working through internalized homophobia. For example, several student participants had challenges with internalized homophobia. However, the participants discussed their journey to develop a consciousness or space where they would be able to embrace their quareness not only at their institution but also in society. In addition, their narratives challenged the White, western philosophy of liberation and coming out of the closet (Ferguson, 2005; Ross, 2005). The student participants' experiences of coming out of the closet were embedded within their familial and cultural context. One student saw coming out of the closet as being comfortable in his own body versus a proclamation to others about his sexual orientation identity. Thus, the student participants were not culturally lagging or less developed because they did not meet all the expectations of traditional theories and models.

The utilization of quare theory also provides additional considerations. First, participants discussed perceived struggles to join a fraternity because of their sexual orientation identity. The student participants discussed how they could potentially join a fraternity if they were willing to hide their quareness, but at least one participant felt like he did not have it in him to lie about his sexual orientation identity. Second, this study provides information on students' misunderstanding of gender expression not only from heterosexual students but also the four student participants. Student participants described internally conflicting opinions about men who wore women's clothing. On one hand, they discussed the importance of people being themselves. Yet, on the other hand, they discussed how men who wore women's clothing bothered them or described them as trying to fit in. Ultimately, these student participants were on their own journey to claim and embrace their Blackness, quareness, and other salient identities in higher education.

Recommendations for Practice

Three ideas for implications stem from this research. First, campus communities should provide more educational opportunities about sexual orientation and gender expression to assist in reducing the amount of myths and stereotypes about these two terms. Campus communities should also have more conversations about intersectionality and about how one's social location (i.e. Black, gay, and male) can shape experiences for students, staff, and faculty. Second, student affairs professionals at HBCUs (and PWIs) should go beyond LGBT student organizations as a way of offering support for students. Although LGBT student organizations can provide a

critical layer of support for students, some students may need support in the other forms including mentoring, opportunities to be engaged in political advocacy, or simply safe spaces, like LGBT Centers. Institutions should also investigate safe zone training for the campus community. A safe zone program provides faculty, staff, and students the opportunity to go through a short training and are then given a sticker or sign for their office or residence hall room door indicating that they are a safe person for an LGB individual to speak with on the respective campus. Safe zone programs are relatively inexpensive and provide students with visible spaces on campus where they know their quareness will be welcomed. The importance of visible space is reflected in the narratives from Seymour and David who do not feel connected to the LGBT organization on their campus but may still benefit from seeking support from faculty and staff who have gone through training. Finally, student affairs and fraternity/sorority life professionals should consider becoming safe zone trained, so prospective and current fraternity and sorority students are aware of professionals who can discuss any experiences related to their quareness. It is essential that student affairs professionals offer programs and support services that will provide space for quare students to openly and honestly discuss the challenges, opportunities, and strengths for claiming their Blackness and quareness at an HBCU.

Future Research

Cass (1984) presented one of the most influential theoretical models for understanding gay identity formation, but the model did not consider the unique experiences of Black gay men. Unfortunately, there remains a limited amount of research on Black gay men in higher education. We offer three suggestions for future research given our data. First, future research on LGB students of color should consider the use the quare theory framework to understand the collegiate experiences of students in academic spaces, student organizations, and other spaces and areas of interest in higher education. Quare theory intentionally calls our attention to how race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and other identities intersect to shape one's social location (Ferguson, 2004; Johnson, 2005). Second, the "T" (transgender) is often lumped with LGB. Future studies should explore the experiences of transgender students of color at HBCUs and PWIs. Third, future studies should include a larger sample in order to allow for more voices of Black gay male colleges students to be heard in higher education. We believe this study provides a better understanding of how Black gay male students navigate their quareness in their institutional contexts. This study also provides an example for how we can use quare theory in higher education to better understand the collegiate experiences of LGBT students of color.

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[1]The researchers of this study have decided to focus on lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals instead of transgender individuals. This division between LGB and T also demonstrates the importance of separating LGB as dealing with sexual orientation while transgender deals with gender identity (Renn, 2010).

[2]The names of the institutions have been changed to protect the confidentiality between the PI and student participants.

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