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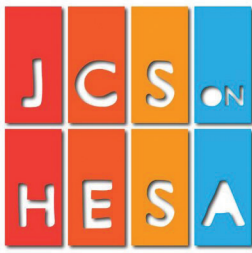
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# Envisioning the Future of Queer of Color Critique in Higher Education Mobilizing the Framework in Research

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## — Abstract —

As queer and trans studies in higher education continues to embrace its interdisciplinary nature, scholars should further interrogate how they utilize critical and poststructural frameworks in designing their studies. This manuscript details the considerations that postsecondary education researchers should be mindful of as they seek to actualize the potential of queer of color critique (QOCC) in their studies. Specifically, the authors describe how individuals using QOCC should actualize the framework in the following four areas: considering the scope of the study, reflections on the researcher and participant relationship, engaging in responsive and transformative data collection, and centering equity and liberation in research outcomes. This paper will be instrumental to higher education researchers hoping to leverage QOCC in their studies.

*Keywords:* Queer of color critique, interdisciplinarity, QTPOC

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Queer and trans studies in higher education have continued to shift how scholars and practitioners view LGBTQ+ issues and people in collegiate contexts. Although early scholarship on LGBTQ+ individuals in postsecondary education settings narrowly focused on particular groups, such as white gay and lesbian individuals (Rankin et al., 2019), researchers have expanded ideas of queer and trans communities on colleges and universities. In fact, recent studies have shed light on trans (e.g., Jourian & McCloud, 2020; Simms et al., 2021) and queer people of color (e.g., Duran, 2021; Hutchings, 2021; Patton et al., 2020). Not only has attention on who LGBTQ+ communities are on college campuses changed, but also the methods and frameworks that researchers utilize to understand their realities. Specifically, scholars interested in centering LGBTQ+ people now regularly mobilize critical and poststructural theories to shape their study designs, attempting to foreground the power structures and discourses influencing their lives (Duran et al., 2022; Lange et al., 2019). The critical and poststructural theories LGBTQ+ researchers use often emerge from other academic disciplines and challenge these individuals to consider how systems of marginalization affect queer and trans communities. And yet, there is still much more progress to be made when considering how to use interdisciplinary lenses to frame queer and trans research in higher education, as scholars wrestle with how to honor the roots of said theories in their study designs.

In their critical review of queer and trans postsecondary education scholarship, Duran et al. (2020) articulated, “the *how* of empirical studies related to queerness and trans\*ness in higher education is worth considering in relation to the current reflection on interdisciplinary return” (p. 40). Grappling with the idea of what it would look like to move queer and trans research from *intradisciplinary* to *interdisciplinary*, Duran et al. named the importance of interrogating the methods individuals use to study LGBTQ+ communities within educational settings. It

is at this critical juncture that we, as authors, came together to focus on a particular framework that has guided each of our work: queer of color critique (QOCC; Ferguson, 2004, 2018). As researchers, we are invested in analyzing the systems of power and oppression that create the conditions queer and trans people of color (QTPOC) navigate, as well as wanting to see QTPOC in their agentic ways of being. QOCC became one particular lens that gave us the tools to engage with these two ideas, as it “interrogates social formations as the intersections of racial, gender, class with particular interest in how those formations correspond with and diverge from nationalist ideals and practices” (Ferguson, 2004, p. 149). Nonetheless, we have struggled with what it looks like to actualize QOCC within our higher education research. Consequently, we saw a need to establish guidance for future generations of scholars to learn how to utilize QOCC as they seek to embrace interdisciplinarity and actualize QOCC’s benefits while considering areas that the framework can further engage.

Informed by this imperative, this manuscript outlines what we, as authors, see as the potential of QOCC in postsecondary education research. To do so, we begin with an overview of QOCC as an analytical tool and distinguish it as a theoretical tradition before detailing how scholars across K–12 and higher education have utilized QOCC in their research thus far. Following this examination, we detail how we, as a collective, came to be in relationship with QOCC. We then provide insights on how higher education scholars can employ QOCC in their research to move queer and trans studies forward, outlining its great potential for analysis and areas for further engagement as well. Finally, returning to our opening argument that queer and trans studies have fundamentally shifted how scholars and practitioners view LGBTQ+ issues and people in postsecondary education, we contend that honoring QOCC as a theory in research has consequences for how professionals challenge and resist intersecting systems of marginalization on college campuses.

**Operationalizing QOCC and Its Possibilities for Higher Education Research**

As an analytical tool, QOCC has been tied to the work of Ferguson (2004), who argued that interrogations of heterosexism, gendered norms, and historical materialism were missing from examinations of structural racism in fields such as sociology and American studies. Specifically, Ferguson’s (2004) formative scholarship examined how theorists failed to take into account queer Black individuals in studies of economic discrimination and race. Drawing upon women of color feminism, Ferguson and subsequent QOCC scholars have emphasized the need to understand interlocking systems of oppression and how they shape the realities of queers of color—though people have not largely taken up attention to trans oppression and settler colonialism, a point we expand upon in a future section. Moreover, QOCC highlights how queers of

color practice agency in the face of oppressive systems. Importantly, what makes QOCC distinct from other frameworks like quare theory and intersectionality is its interrogation of capitalism and attention to how queers of color are situated within politico-economic systems (for further comparison to intersectionality and queer theory, see Duran, 2019). In the sections that follow, we elaborate on hallmarks of QOCC: how it positions knowledge production for QTPOC in educational settings (Brockenbrough, 2015); how it interrogates structures, like policies and practices, that minoritize QTPOC; as well as how it centers the agency of QTPOC. These hallmarks underscore the possibilities QOCC offers higher education research. To assist readers who may be unfamiliar with particular concepts and ideas needed to understand QOCC, we provide ways we operationalize terms in Table 1, while acknowledging that these words elude static definitions.

— Table 1 —

*Authors’ Operationalization of Terms Used within Queer of Color Critique*

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Authors’ Operationalization of the Term</b>
Agency	How individuals demonstrate the ability to act upon their will in the face of social, historical, and political forces
Cultural Terrain	How cultural ideals and norms influence one’s environment, place, and location
Disidentifications	How QTPOC engage in subversive resistance of dominant hegemonic norms
Liberal Capitalism	An economic system in which the market thrives off of ideals of private property and ownership
Historical Materialism	A framework that examines how class and economic consumption shape social institutions and social formations
Materialism	How marginalization and disenfranchisement of particular populations are tied to economic and structural realities
State and Capital Formations	How capital and class manifests in social institutions to regulate the lives of individuals

### Knowledge Production

Knowledge production illuminates how QOCC can serve as a conduit to construct new ways of learning when individuals center how QTPOC create and cultivate knowledge. From its origins, QOCC critiques liberal capitalism within society, showcasing how the idealized subject and citizen within modern capitalist systems is the “rational, bourgeois, Western, patriarchal man” (Ferguson, 2018, para. 23). Thus, this idealized subject is the most deserving of rights, property, and equality (Ferguson, 2018). In challenging these issues, Ferguson (2004) named the importance of moving beyond this often-centered subject by attending to knowledge production within queer communities of color manifested through their politics, culture, and lived experiences. Thus, QOCC centers QTPOC and their epistemic advantages (Brokenbrough, 2015), recognizing these communities have long seen the manifestations of oppressive systems (e.g., racism, heterosexism, and capitalism). As QOCC acknowledges queer of color experiences within scholarship, it generates different perspectives on intellectual production. In higher education specifically, highlighting QOCC’s ideas of knowledge production allows researchers to imagine what it means to construct college campuses that center queers of color and their lived realities.

### Policies and Practices

QOCC analyzes systems of capitalism and materiality that disenfranchise those minoritized at the intersections of class, race, sexuality, and gender (Ferguson, 2004). For Ferguson (2004, 2018), queers of color are both negatively affected by, and are seen as, the result of capitalism, as they become the representation of social disorder. In seeking to dismantle liberal capitalism, QOCC produces ways to understand race, gender, and sexuality among QTPOC under the gaze of social and racial formations. Furthermore, QOCC ascertains how state, class, and cultural formations influence QTPOC’s experiences through harmful policies and practices that render them invis-

ible or target them (Ferguson, 2004). What higher education stands to gain from QOCC is a commitment to challenging systemic inequities, including those manifested through problematic policies and practices, which have material impacts on the lives of QTPOC. For example, QOCC can lend itself to evolving policy work on *My Brother’s Keeper* for Black boys and men in education (White House, 2014); those using QOCC would question who is implicated as needing mentorship when using the category of “men of color,” addressing the extent to which they are accounting for queer and trans men of color. Relatedly, QOCC can play a role in conversations about issues facing queer people of color, such as those pertaining to homelessness, local community partnerships, and school curricula (McCready, 2019).

### Agency of Queers of Color

QOCC also brings forth a focus on agency and worldmaking practices (Blockett, 2017). Namely, QOCC showcases the wide range of tactics QTPOC take up to resist marginalization. One central concept related to agency in QOCC is the theory of disidentifications. Muñoz (1999) stated, “disidentification is the hermeneutical performance of decoding mass, high, or any other cultural field from the perspective of a minority subject who is disempowered in such a representational hierarchy” (p. 25). Rather than completely counter-identifying with dominant culture or assimilating to these norms, queers of color find approaches to subversively resist systems and their positioning within society. Within postsecondary education, QOCC can reimagine QTPOC experiences and their agency.

### QOCC in K–12 and Higher Education

In laying out the characteristics of QOCC, we view it as necessary to pay reverence to the educational thought leaders who mobilized QOCC in their scholarship. This foundation sets the stage for our present task of showcasing how individuals can use QOCC to illustrate the experiences of QTPOC in



higher education. Given that K–12 scholars helped chart the use of QOCC in education, we commence our review of scholarship there before turning our attention to higher education research.

### QOCC in K–12 Research

Scholars in the K–12 disciplines have been at the forefront of conceptualizing what it means to use QOCC in education (e.g., Boatwright, 2019; Brockenbrough, 2013, 2015; Marquéz, 2019; McCready, 2013, 2019). For instance, Brockenbrough and McCready led the creation of a groundbreaking special issue in *Curriculum Inquiry* that presented nuanced perspectives on the possibilities that emerge when individuals center the knowledge production process of queers of color. The contributing authors of that special issue showcased the expansion of QOCC to investigate (a) issues of pedagogy beyond the global north (Coloma, 2013), (b) the implementation of video-making pedagogy for LGBTQ youth of color (Cruz, 2013), and (c) inattention to the intersections of racism and heterosexism in legal cases concerning queer youth of color (Marquéz & Brockenbrough, 2013). These articles highlighted the wide-reaching potential of QOCC as it pertains to queer youth of color, including in law, policy, and pedagogy. Namely, Marquéz and Brockenbrough's (2013) insights highlighted the necessity to interrogate how legal discourses about queer individuals must also be mindful of the racialized dynamics at play. Similarly, the work of Cruz (2013) demonstrated how methods such as video-making can be a powerful way for QTPOC to make meaning of themselves and the world around them.

Subsequent QOCC work built upon this foundation by further drawing theoretical connections between the framework and educational scholarship. One example of this was Brockenbrough's (2015) conceptual manuscript outlining how researchers can utilize QOCC to foreground the agency of queer youth of color. In it, he argued for the necessity of interrogating intersectional forms of oppression with

QOCC and for questioning the politics of queer visibility. Additionally, individuals like Marquéz (2019) have demonstrated how QOCC is beneficial in the case of a community-based education model for LGBTQ+ Latinx youth that integrates queer of color praxis; namely, Marquéz described developing a curriculum supporting youth in unpacking the ways they experienced interlocking systems of oppression. Furthermore, this framework has shed light on how Black queer youth practice their agency through a project known as Flux Zine (Boatwright, 2019). This K–12 scholarship constructed the basis for higher education researchers to take up QOCC in their work; however, both in K–12 and higher education contexts, there is more room to articulate what this process involves.

### QOCC in Higher Education Scholarship

Though limited when compared to K–12 research, higher education scholars have used QOCC in their research to illustrate the realities QTPOC encounter on college campuses (e.g., Blockett, 2018; Coleman et al., 2020; Duran & Garcia, 2021; Garcia & Duran, 2021; Hutchings, 2021; Johnson, 2021; Mahoney, 2019; Means & Jaeger, 2013). One of the first appearances of QOCC in postsecondary education literature was the work of Means and Jaeger (2013). In it, they mobilized the framework alongside other theories to bring to light how Black gay male students navigated historically Black universities; with these lenses as a guide, they illustrated how the experiences of Black gay males differed from normative ideas of finding support or coming out.

From there, a small area of scholarship has utilized QOCC to interrogate how heterosexism plays a role in the lives of queer people of color in culturally-based fraternities (Duran & Garcia, 2021; Garcia & Duran, 2021) and Black Greek-letter organizations specifically (Mahoney, 2019). These articles bring to light how queer people of color navigate heterosexism in these organizations and engage in active resistance to these climates. Additionally, Hutchings' (2021) study on Black gay, bisexual, and queer men's experi-

ences in men of color and Black male initiative mentorship programs showcased how leaders of these initiatives overlooked the needs of these individuals. The advantage of QOCC in these studies is that it allowed the researchers to indicate how queer people of color are regularly erased, even in spaces designed for minoritized communities. Other authors have employed QOCC to reimagine support structures available for queer and trans\* students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities by emphasizing the need to complicate conversations on blackness at these institutions (Johnson, 2021); moreover, they have provided perspectives on bolstering Black queer and trans students' retention by challenging the single-identity foci currently present in retention literature (Coleman et al., 2020). In these instances, QOCC shed light on policies and practices at institutions that marginalize queer and trans communities.

Relevant to our current investigation, the contributions of Blockett (2018) began an important conversation in higher education about how individuals can tangibly mobilize QOCC in qualitative data analysis. Different from other higher education scholarship that utilized QOCC, Blockett commented on how to actualize QOCC's focus on systemic forms of marginalization that QTPOC experience, giving recommendations on how to engage QOCC in one's research (e.g., considering the role of the researcher and wrestling with racialized heteronormativity in analysis). We, as authors, follow the tradition of Blockett's work while expanding his considerations to more broadly attend to QOCC throughout study design and not simply data analysis. In particular, we draw upon examples in K–12 and higher education to outline recommendations for scholars wanting to engage QOCC in their research.

### How We Came to Be in Relationship with QOCC

Before describing our considerations for actualizing QOCC in higher education research, we wish to offer insight into who we are as a collective of authors

and how we came to be in relationship with QOCC. As a team, we bring our backgrounds and identities as queer and trans scholars, three of which who identify as Black and one who is Latino. Our experiences as Black people and a non-Black individual of color have always been intertwined with our queerness, encapsulating our gender and sexual identities as well as our politics. We share sentiments of what it means to be excluded from racial, gendered, and sexual communities by virtue of our multiple minoritized identities while also feeling the radical potential of existing in community with other QTPOC. It is because of these realities that we have sought to see ourselves represented in academic literature. All four of us credit the work of women of color feminists and/or trans women of color for laying the foundation for our theorizing. Together, we have seriously considered what it means to pay respect to thinkers and activists that have centered QTPOC both in and outside of the academy.

### On Actualizing QOCC in Higher Education Research

To move queer and trans studies toward their interdisciplinary potential, scholars must wrestle with the challenges of engaging frameworks originating from other disciplines in doing higher education research. In this section, we outline what we, as authors, see as the questions that scholars must ask themselves when hoping to use QOCC in their scholarship. We summarize these quandaries in Table 2. Importantly, we do not believe this table presents an all-encompassing list but rather highlight these areas, given how they have played a role in our own scholarship. In exploring the following sections, we encourage readers to reflect on additional ways that utilizing QOCC shapes their work.

### Considering the Scope of the Study

In determining whether to utilize QOCC in a research study, scholars must reflect on how their guiding questions align with QOCC. In this section, we

— Table 2 —

*Questions to Reflect on When Actualizing QOCC in Higher Education Research*

Guiding Considerations for Using QOCC	Reflective Questions
Considering the Scope of the Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do scholars maintain attention to anti-blackness and racial specificity?</li> <li>• How do scholars attend to areas that need further engagement related to QOCC?</li> </ul>
Reflecting on the Resercher and Participant Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who can engage queer of color critique?</li> <li>• How does a researcher immerse themself and consider themself as a part of the study?</li> </ul>
Engaging in Responsive and Transformative Data Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which methodologies and methods align with QOCC?</li> <li>• How do scholars honor QTPOC experiences through their methods?</li> </ul>
Centering Equity and Liberation in Research Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do scholars wrestle with holding the stories of participants? How do researchers practice care with people’s narratives?</li> <li>• How do scholars reconcile the use of QOCC in an academic capitalist culture?</li> </ul>

articulate two points that individuals must attend to given QOCC’s scope: (a) How do I, as a researcher, maintain attention to QOCC’s roots in theorizing specific forms of racism, namely anti-blackness? (b) How do I address areas that need further engagement related to QOCC when developing my project?

***Maintaining Attention to Anti-Blackness and Racial Specificity***

To begin, we, as authors, argue that researchers must attend to racial specificity in their projects, drawing upon QOCC’s origins as being particularly mindful of anti-Black racism and how it intersects with liberal capitalism and heterosexism (Ferguson, 2004). As scholars of QOCC, including Ferguson (2004) and Johnson and Henderson (2005) have named, queer studies have often lacked a focus on racism and class dynamics. This limited framing then has rendered the realities of queers of color, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, invisible. QOCC thus op-

erated as a needed intervention, foregrounding how the nation-state and its institutions, including higher education, differentially affect queers of color. And, of note, the genesis of this theorizing stemmed from critical analyses of Black queer experiences (Ferguson, 2004; Johnson & Henderson, 2005). Importantly, the origins of QOCC are connected to interrogating anti-blackness or “the social, political, economic, and psychological dimensions of power that continue to make Black people the targets of myriad forms of violence throughout multiple temporalities” (Jackson, Brown, & Anderson Wadley, 2021, p. 34). Consequently, higher education researchers must acknowledge these genealogies when utilizing QOCC in their scholarship.

To maintain attention to anti-blackness and racial specificity means researchers must take several actions when designing a study. First, scholars should pay credence to the work of Black queer and trans scholars and activists as they set the foundation for their



work. Embracing a citational politic centering Black queer communities is vital when mobilizing QOCC. Second, researchers should wrestle with what QOCC signifies for different groups of people within queer communities of color. In higher education, researchers have largely employed QOCC when studying Black queer and trans individuals (e.g., Coleman et al., 2020; Hutchings, 2021; Johnson, 2021; Mahoney, 2019; Means & Jaeger, 2013). However, examples exist in and outside of higher education of those who have utilized QOCC to think more expansively about other racial groups under the queer of color umbrella (e.g., Coloma, 2013; Duran & Garcia, 2021; Garcia & Duran, 2021; Marquéz, 2019).

Following the lead of these scholars, future researchers must consider how they illustrate forms of marginalization connected yet distinct from anti-blackness that non-Black people of color face. The questions scholars ask should seek to comprehend the nuances of the racial and class projects that inform their lives. Furthermore, even in studies that do not explicitly center Black queer and trans people, individuals should hone in on how dynamics of anti-blackness are present, for anti-blackness is still intertwined in every fabric queers of color broadly encounter. Far too regularly, queer and trans scholarship in higher education has evaded analyses of anti-blackness (Jackson, Lange, & Duran, 2021), despite the fact that colleges and universities in the United States have always perpetuated anti-blackness. Therefore, deploying QOCC means confronting the ordinariness of anti-Black norms underlining the very epistemological and ontological foundations in research. As brought to light by Jackson, Lange, and Duran (2021), journal editorial boards, reviewers, and authors of LGBTQ+ scholarship are too often complicit in overlooking anti-blackness in queer and trans postsecondary education research. Hence, scholars of all races must be responsive to the concerns highlighted by QOCC theorists.

### *Addressing Areas of Further Engagement for QOCC Scholarship*

Apart from addressing anti-blackness and racial specificity in postsecondary education research, scholars must acknowledge areas QOCC can further engage as a framework. In particular, we contend this is a step researchers should consider when conceptualizing the study from the onset. When compared to white queer studies, QOCC provides a much-needed look at how racism and historical materialism are integral components of how institutions regulate sexual bodies (Ferguson, 2004, 2018). The interventions QOCC performed were critical because they illustrated how racism and classism have always led to queers of color's economic, political, and social conditions. And yet, researchers in higher education desiring to utilize QOCC must contend with potential oversights that those using QOCC frequently demonstrate. In particular, two areas of further engagement include attending to trans people of color and settler colonialism.

Trans people of color were not missing from queer of color theorizing, including from Ferguson's (2004, 2018) work itself. However, often in the foreground of analysis for QOCC is an interrogation of heteronormativity and heterosexism. As a result, higher education scholars must ask themselves: how do I utilize QOCC in ways that are attentive to issues of trans oppression specifically, especially as I construct my research questions and subsequent study design? To do so, one might look beyond the work of Ferguson (2004) to scholarly conversations with trans communities of color. For instance, one could examine the contributions of Snorton (2017), who has been integral in theorizing the intersections between blackness and transness in historical and contemporary times. Notably, higher education researchers Simms et al. (2021) acknowledged Snorton's (2017) work in their study on trans students of color and how they perform disidentificatory acts in virtual environments.

Relatedly, those invested in uplifting QTPOC's experiences through postsecondary education research

are faced with QOCC's initial lack of examination of settler colonialist logics. Driskill (2016) has long documented the "disappointment" (p. 21) resulting from the recognition that even the new wave of queer studies has not brought to the forefront Native voices and analyses of coloniality. Those in other educational disciplines have slowly started to bring these schools of thought (e.g., QOCC and decolonization) together, such as Salas-SantaCruz's (2021) examination of what trans\* justice can look like when utilizing these theories. Hence, there is a precedent for interweaving other frameworks to fill in the gaps that may exist with how people have mobilized QOCC as an area of study. The reasons why a higher education researcher may integrate attention to trans people of color's realities and logics of coloniality in a project may differ; yet, we argue they must be aware of these issues should they mobilize QOCC and reflect on them as they create their studies.

### Reflections on the Researcher and Participant Relationship

After deciding upon the scope of one's study, another crucial set of questions that higher education researchers should answer relates to their own positioning within a project. In this section, we present two quandaries one may encounter pertaining to the relationship between a researcher and participant in a study. We describe our ruminations on who can engage in QOCC as well as how a scholar should consider immersing themselves in the research.

#### *Reflecting on Who Can Engage QOCC*

In their examination of queer and trans scholarship in higher education, Duran et al. (2020) stated it has often been queer and trans researchers who have engaged this line of inquiry in the field, which itself can be both "liberating and constraining" (p. 30). On the one hand, having queer and trans individuals do the work can be empowering and aligns with the idea of these communities having an epistemic advantage. On the other hand, it creates the issue in which non-

queer-and-trans groups abdicate themselves of the responsibility to invest in queer and trans people as well as their knowledge and theories. We extend these ideas to provide guidance for researchers interested in QOCC particularly.

As a tradition, QOCC stems from women of color feminists (Ferguson, 2004, 2018), who sought to combat the erasure of difference that came about when utilizing categories of women or people of color. Similarly, QOCC challenged who people consider when they invoke the term *queer*. As traced in Ferguson's (2018) encyclopedia entry, the genealogies of queer of color activism gave rise to QOCC, meaning that researchers cannot underestimate what it means to have queer of color scholars drawing upon their own standpoints when conducting a study. And yet, we see it as important to acknowledge that queer of color researchers may themselves also replicate the very whiteness, heterosexist, and trans oppressive norms that QOCC tries to challenge. Therefore, just because one identifies under the umbrella of QTPOC does not mean they reflect the dynamic the framework hopes to push against. This reality becomes even more complicated when people think about the intra-group differences within QTPOC communities, considering the different races/ethnicities, sexualities, genders, and other identities people hold.

Similarly, this belief that QOCC is rooted in the epistemological views of queer of colors should not abdicate white researchers from responding to the concerns put forth by QOCC. In other words, to be *responsive* to QOCC is operationally different from centering one's own knowledge as a queer and trans person of color. Therefore, for postsecondary education researchers who are white, they can and should still engage in research that addresses QOCC's focus on racism and liberal capitalism. To not engage QOCC as a tradition for fear of getting it wrong or not having the right perspective only serves to keep in place histories of queer and trans scholars in higher education avoiding conversations of race in their work (Jackson, Lange, & Duran, 2021). White queer

and trans scholars should not purport to adopt queer of color standpoints but should be attentive to how racism, liberal capitalism, and other systems of oppression are present in their studies.

### *Immersing Oneself in a Study*

If queers of color are uniquely situated to mobilize QOCC due to their knowledge, then this, consequently, creates the question of what are the relational dynamics that manifest in a study. As we articulate in subsequent sections, we encourage researchers to push back against the socialization they may receive concerning calls to be objective or separate from the project for fear of bias. Given arguments that queer scholars of color like Muñoz (1999) have made about this community's propensity to create unique forms of kinship and engage in queer worldmaking, we ask that researchers conducting studies with QOCC also replicate this in their designs.

To use QOCC means that one acknowledges their positioning and viewpoints alongside the participants. In practice, this means that individuals must be in tune with the following questions: What are the presumptions that I am bringing with me into the study? What has led me to be involved in this work? How am I changing and shifting as I do this research? Drawing upon QOCC's attention to the agency of queers of color, researchers in postsecondary education must be cognizant of how producing this scholarship is a form of agency, especially in response to harmful dominant norms that exist regarding objectivity.

### **Engaging in Responsive and Transformative Data Collection**

We continue to grapple with an essential question for researchers: How do we engage queers of color in ways that honor their knowledge and experiences? There are various ways researchers can center the experiences of QTPOC through engaging in responsive and transformative data collection and methods. We advance that innovative approaches are essential to centering QTPOC within higher education research

by employing multiple methodologies and methods.

### *Implementing QOCC with Qualitative and Quantitative Methodologies*

As previously shared, researchers must introspectively reflect on how scholarship production about the experiences of QTPOC must be done with intentionality and care. In engaging with research and scholarship that aims to explore, investigate, and examine QTPOC, some methodologies can help researchers align with a QOCC lens. Though we do not believe the following to be expansive examples, these methodologies help showcase approaches that serve to bring researchers and participants together undergirded by community-oriented philosophies.

For instance, Hutchings's (2021) study integrated phenomenology and arts-based research from a QOCC theoretical framework to explore the essence of gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality within Black male initiatives and men of color mentorship programs. In this example, an arts-based research design allowed participants to display the creativity and knowledge production found in queer communities of color. Made evident by other studies, participatory action research (PAR) is another methodology that could position QTPOC community members as action researchers (e.g., Hillier & Kroehle, 2021). Researchers act as insiders among communities to explore power and change within various communities (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). For a transformative approach, people can employ PAR to actively reflect the researcher's role while collaborating with QTPOC to center the community's needs. Similarly, within QTPOC communities, collaborative autoethnographies can allow individuals to examine and analyze their memories and narratives from a collaborative approach (Bailey, 2013; Mobley et al., 2020). Such communal knowledge production honors QOCC's attention to QTPOC's knowledge production (Brockenbrough, 2015). However, queer of color scholars should not stop at qualitative methodologies when implementing the framework. In fact,

researchers should continue to grapple with how they mobilize QOCC in quantitative studies.

As more and more researchers in higher education have traced the rising utilization of critical theories in quantitative studies (Wells & Stage, 2015), it is time for QOCC scholars to consider what it means to employ this framework outside of qualitative methodologies. Namely, we, as authors, argue that QOCC is well-positioned to advance a queer quantitative agenda in higher education and student affairs. Because QOCC integrates the material realities that QTPOC face based on the state's regulation of sexuality, gender, race, and class, it accounts for the role of identity categories in maintaining power imbalances more so than mainstream white queer theory. Relatedly, QOCC centers a power analysis to understand how the state and various institutions act to disenfranchise groups. QOCC, thus, attends to the material conditions of queers of color—a failure of white queer studies.

Therefore, though QOCC may call into question identity categories, including race, gender, and sexual identity (like white queer theorists), it does not do so at the expense of understanding how categories create people as human (i.e., mostly whites), less than human (i.e., non-Black POC), and other than human (i.e., Black people). That is to say, in this sense, categories can help center the marginalization that QTPOC encounter while, at the same, attending to QTPOC's agency and empowerment. For this reason, we can foresee quantitative scholars using measures and items that inquire into students' experiences of marginalization and resilience while engaging sophisticated analyses that examine the realities that subgroups within queer and trans communities report. To utilize QOCC in quantitative research would mean using variables that get at issues of power and oppression and ensuring that studies on queer and trans people seriously engage categories of class and race. Importantly, employing QOCC in quantitative studies would also require researchers to seriously wrestle with the oppressive histories entangled with quantitative and post-positivist approaches; in doing

so, scholars would follow in the leads of others who have explored what it means to expand the epistemological boundaries of quantitative methods (Wells & Stage, 2015).

### *Mobilizing Methods that Honor QTPOC*

To employ methods grounded in QOCC, researchers must reflect on how the specific method(s) situate(s) the experiences of queer and trans people of color. Some noted studies have employed method(s) and analyses that draw attention to actualizing QOCC. For example, scholars have collected interviews, photovoice, personalized narratives, podcast-style focus groups, and art curations as methods (e.g., Duran & Garcia, 2021; Hutchings, 2021; Means & Jaeger, 2013; Mobley et al., 2020). This range of research approaches showcases tools to honor the knowledge production of QTPOC in ways that align with these groups' cultural and creative backgrounds; in fact, some of these methods have appeared in K–12 scholarship using QOCC (e.g., Boatwright, 2019; Cruz, 2013). Moreover, it is not enough to consider data collection methods and how they honor QOCC; rather, researchers must also take the lead of scholars who have highlighted how to employ QOCC in data analysis (e.g., Blockett, 2018; Brockenbrough, 2015; McCready, 2013). Importantly, these individuals have brought attention to the need to examine interlocking systems of marginalization that manifest in participants' experiences and within data.

Ultimately, to employ method(s) that center QTPOC means researchers must think critically and reflectively about how specific method(s) honor(s) these students' lives and experiences in higher education. Also, in analyzing data that utilizes QOCC, it is imperative that one continuously reflects on their method(s) and examine the work while addressing researchers' biases, assumptions, and judgment. As a researcher, one should think about the following questions: Which data collection strategies and method(s) honor(s) QTPOC experiences? Which data analysis processes allow you to depict these student experienc-



es with intentionality and care? These questions are vital to researching these students' experiences from a critical, reflective, and thoughtful approach.

### Centering Equity and Liberation in Research Outcomes

QOCC helps researchers inform a critical approach to the lives of queer and trans people of color. This analytical lens allows higher education researchers and scholars to introspectively reflect on how research outcomes are centered on equity and liberation. Thus, we offer some reflective questions for researchers to consider about equity and liberation in research: How do you wrestle with holding the stories of participants? How do you practice care with people's narratives? How do you reconcile the use of QOCC in an academic capitalist culture that prioritizes the production of knowledge in ways that are commodified within a global economy (see Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004 for a description of academic capitalism)?

As a researcher, the narratives of QTPOC must be held with adequate, critical, and essential care to ensure their stories do not uphold academic capitalism notions. The field of higher education must grapple with how researchers engage in academic capitalist culture by focusing on metrics such as publications or impact factors. In studies mobilizing QOCC, individuals should be cognizant that they do not play into these norms while ignoring the needs of QTPOC participants. This insight brings to light the question: Are research outcomes centering on the researcher's ideas/legitimacy or the participants' stories? Research can be outcome-driven without compromising the stories of queer and trans people of color and succumbing to larger capitalist systems. With this insight, we implore individuals to dismantle notions of researcher voyeurism in studying queer and trans people of color; to do so would require scholars to emphasize the needs and lenses of QTPOC rather than reproducing a system where participants' narratives only matter insofar that they are seen from a white, heteronor-

mative gaze. As QOCC centers the knowledge production of QTPOC and is founded on a critique of capitalism, attention to equity and liberation in one's research design is necessary. The pervasiveness of academic capitalist culture is omnipresent in academia. Thus, it is the researchers' role to take a critical and reflective approach to how, when, and why notions of academic capitalism can manifest within the research process, especially when leveraging QOCC in their scholarship.

### Concluding Thoughts

To be dedicated to queer and trans communities in higher education means committing to interrogating how one designs their research. Doing so furthers the goal of making queer and trans studies an interdisciplinary project (Duran et al., 2020), one that honors frameworks originating from other disciplines and attends to the knowledge of the communities existing on college campuses. As researchers continue to bring attention to the lives of trans (e.g., Jourian & McCloud, 2020; Simms et al., 2021) and queer people of color (e.g., Duran, 2021; Hutchings, 2021; Patton et al., 2020) in higher education, QOCC represents one such analytical tool that can further center these communities when applied with intentionality. This manuscript thus functions as a starting point for those wishing to undertake this task and responsibility in service of queer and trans people of color at colleges, universities, and beyond.



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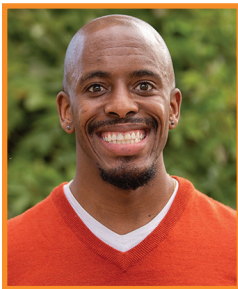
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Hailing from the southside of Chicago and the grandchild of Gracie Lee Fowler & Barbara Ann Woods, **Romeo Jackson (They/Them)** is a Queer, Non-Binary Femme, and a Black descended of the estimated

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