2021

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Quortne Reginald Hutchings

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

FROM THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN: BLACK GAY, BISEXUAL, AND QUEER MEN’S EXPERIENCES IN MEN OF COLOR AND BLACK MALE INITIATIVE MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

BY
QUORTNE REGINALD HUTCHINGS

CHICAGO, IL
MAY 2021
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To the eleven Black gay, bisexual, and queer men in my dissertation, this story would not be possible without your vulnerability, authenticity, and presence. It is my intention that I hold your stories and experiences with the highest regard of integrity and respect. Thank you for making me a better researcher, scholar, and practitioner.

To my mother, Lisa, brother, Quince, uncle, PJ, grandmother, Gail, and grandfather, Gerald Sr., you all have always said I’ve had a purpose in life. This purpose has been made possible by your unwavering love, support, and guidance. The fortitude of your presence has always encouraged me to do anything with passion. You all are my inspiration and foundation. I take this moment by dedicating this work to my family, whether physical or in the afterlife. I feel your love. To the love of my life and partner, Travis, your presence has changed my life forever. Your kindness, patience, and encouragement are things that I love so much about you. Every single day I am reminded that I love you deeper. Thank you for truly loving me unconditionally. I am genuinely grateful to you.

I would like to give thanks and appreciation to scholars that pushed me to think more in-depth and critical of my dissertation work. Dr. T.J. Jourian, Dr. Z. Nicolazzo, Dr. Steven Mobley Jr, Dr. Tunette Powell, Dr. Cameron Beatty, Dr. Antonio Duran, Dr. Federick Staidum, Dr. Julian Glover, soon to be Dr. Romeo Jackson, Dr. Badia Ahad, Dr. Chris Manning, Dr. Darris Means, and Dr. Jamila Lee-Johnson. Every conversation I had with you all, I am in deep gratitude. To my cohort, soon to be Dr.’s Ashley Brown, Lillianna Franco-Carrera, and Amy...
Wilkinson, you all have changed my life forever. I will always be reminded that a cohort can truly become a family. I love you so much for keeping me grounded. To my SDMA family, Joe Saucedo, Anthony Sis, and Grace Montero, Brothers for Excellence, Q-Initiatives, this work would not be possible without you all. Too soon to be Dr. Lynneah Brown, we have been connected to each other since our time at U of I, I love you and my Godson Ezra with all my heart. Thank you to soon-to-be Dr.’s Janese Nolan, Sydney Curtis, Tristen Hall, Walter Parrish, LaShaunda Reese, Naseeb Bhangal, and Kristen Surla. Thank you to Dr. Blanca Torres-Olave, Dr. John Dugan, Dr. Bridget Kelly, Dr. OiYan Poon, Dr. Mark Engberg for inspiring me to pursue my doctorate when I doubted myself. Sending so much love and gratitude my Loyola HESA family and staff, Wendy Threadgill and Valerie Collier. I appreciate you all immensely.

I want to share my most profound appreciation to my dissertation committee. To my dissertation, co-chairs. Dr. Demetri Morgan and Dra. Aurora Chang. Demetri, you have become more than a mentor and dissertation co-chair. I have admired your patience, guidance, persistence with me throughout all of the times I doubted myself. You have become a friend and a part of my family; I will forever cherish our relationships. Dra., you invested in my success before me starting this doctoral program. You truly saved my life, and for that, I am thankful for you. You are someone that exemplifies love and leads with love. I would like to give love to my dissertation committee members, Dr. Reggie Blockett and Dr. Lorenzo Baber. Reggie, you have taught me to center Blackness and queerness in my life and research. Your kindness and care mean the world to me. Lorenzo, your love and mentorship are what I hold near and dear to my heart. I promise to “pay it forward.” I admire and respect you all.

Thank you to my Chicago family, Rodney Matthews, Paige Gardner, James Thomas, Cobretti Williams, Allen Womble, Candice Hairston, and Corey Winchester. I am reminded that
a chosen family can be a force of light in ways you never imagine. Thank you all for always keeping Black queer joy in our hearts. To Darryl Rutledge, Robert Lloyd, Simone Cheatham, and Natasha Bhalma, I appreciate all of the love and support. Brandon Polk and William Anthony Sebastian Rose II, you guys have supported me since I started my masters at U of I; I love you both very much. To my Penn State McNair community, you took a chance on a 19-year-old first-generation student that had no clue what research was. I will be forever indebted to this program for this community of scholars and the influence on my personal and professional life. Dr. Kimberly Griffin, you introduced me to higher education research and scholarship, and your mentorship is one I will forever be appreciative of. To my fraternity, Delta Lambda Phi, and my Penn State crew, Michael Hong, Janine, Glaves, Ryan Leach, and Saeed Manley, you all have been here since my college years. Finally, thank you to my therapist and Howard Brown's group therapy. Asking for help and support when you need it the most truly transformed my life for the better. Lastly, I send love to all my friends, family, and community that have brought me to this point in my life. I hold you all near and dear to my heart.
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ABSTRACT

Men of color (MoC) and Black male initiative (BMI) mentorship programs create a complicated experience for men who identify as gay, bisexual, and queer. The purpose of this phenomenology and arts-based research study unearths the experiences of Black gay, bisexual, and queer men (BGBQM) within these programmatic contexts. This study sought to explore the essence of gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality utilizing interviews, podcast-style focus groups, and individual art projects. Findings unearthed a complex reality, Blackness preferred, queerness deferred, to exist in the intersections of their myriad identities. Consequently, these men experience a Masc-ing Phenomenon that limits how they express their gender and sexuality within MoC and BMI programs. This study offers critical insights for practitioners, educators, and researchers to center queerness and femininity within these programmatic interventions.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“It took many years of vomiting up all the filth I’d been taught about myself, and half-believed, before I was able to walk on the earth as though I had a right to be here.” – James Baldwin

As I share the experiences of Black gay, bisexual, and queer men (BGBQM) in higher education, it is important for me to share how my topic of study reflects my positionality. I identify as a cisgender, Black, queer man who is able-bodied and masculine presenting. My passion to conduct this research study stemmed from my own professional and personal experiences as a member of this population. Throughout my undergraduate, graduate, and professional years, I have often encountered both internal and external dissonance regarding my sexuality and gender expression, coupled with my racial identity. Growing up in a predominately urban, working-poor environment on the east coast, I was socialized to consider queerness, Blackness, and masculinity as separate entities which could not be embodied by one person. During my undergraduate years, I embraced my queer identity and was involved with various student organizations and a fraternity comprised of gay, bisexual, and trans mxn and womxn.

Amid my undergraduate tenure, I yearned to express myself in ways that affirmed me for being a gay (now I identify as queer), Black, masculine-presenting person. I often felt silenced within the broader Black community for being gay, while I was tokenized and endured racism within the LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual) community. During my graduate school journey, I discovered ways to cultivate relationships with other Black gay and queer men. Fortunately, I found two friends who shared similar identities with me, and
we created kinship and a bond which continues today. After I earned my master’s degree, I worked in the student affairs field at a predominately White flagship institution in the Midwest. I was often subjected to racism and tokenization, both within the institution and the city at large. I received comments, such as “Oh, you are gay; you don’t dress or act like it” or “Well, I’m talking about those kinds of people…you are different.” These statements often evoked questions of my queerness and masculine presentation in professional and personal spaces. These personal and professional challenges led me to perform my masculinity and queerness in rigid ways.

When I moved to Chicago to pursue a new professional opportunity, I finally shared my identity as a Black queer man. During my years as a professional, I worked in an academic advising department at a private, religious, mid-size institution. While in the role, I coordinated advocacy and support efforts for LGBTQIA students and programming initiatives for men of color. During this time, I was excited to engage with both first-generation students and students of color who shared similar narratives and experiences to my undergraduate journey. Working with the men of color mentorship program, I had a challenging time sharing my queer identity with my students. I worked many months in my program coordinator position before I shared my queer identity. I vividly remember the first meeting I had with the peer mentors in the program. I noticed my mannerisms and demeanor were not indicative of the everyday expression of my Blackness and queerness. I never spoke of my queer identity and was afraid of how the men in a mentorship program for men of color would perceive me for identifying as queer.

The graduate assistant, peer mentors, and I implemented programming initiatives and created retreat spaces to address hyper-masculinity, heteronormativity, and heteropatriarchy. While we did attempt to address ways to navigate the campus environment and world as men of
color at a predominately White institution (PWI), we often failed to discuss how men of color in this space managed issues regarding race, gender, and sexuality. This lack of attention was likely due to my discomfort with facilitating conversations around these topics. When I shared my queer identity, I was affirmed and supported by the men in the program. I often questioned if students, specifically Black queer college men in the space, felt similarly. Did Black queer students feel comfortable unpacking their masculinity and queerness in a space comprised of cisgender, heterosexual men? Did they feel safe to openly share their sexuality with other men whose orientation was different than their own? In what ways did they express their gender and sexuality within the men of color mentorship environment? Could these complex experiences have larger implications regarding navigating other institutional settings within higher education? These pertinent questions fueled my interest in this topic and study. Thus, this study illuminated how BGBQM navigate and experience higher education, specifically within the context of men of color mentorship programs. The next section offers a rationale for the study and provides some background literature regarding BGBQM in higher education.

**Rationale for the Study**

Scholars have researched the experiences of BGBQM by examining the complexities of their intersecting identities in the post-secondary institutional context for over 20 years. Martinez and Sullivan (1998) offered that for Black gay men, there is a duality in which they aspire to be a part of the LGBTQIA community and have internal tension with their sexuality. Coupled with enduring and varying levels of oppression, these men find alternate ways to integrate their identities (Martinez & Sullivan, 1998). Research has shown that Black LGBTQIA students experience marginalization within secondary and post-secondary education settings (Squire &
Mobley, 2015). In higher education contexts, many Black gay men live “invisible lives,” in which their voices and experience are often silenced or ignored (Squire & Mobley, 2015, p. 466). Goode-Cross and Tager (2011) highlighted that African American gay and bisexual men face varying degrees of psychosocial challenges while they also experience feelings of isolation and marginalization at PWIs.

Furthermore, these students who do not have a community of other LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) African American people at home may have difficulty connecting with the PWI campus community, given their race (Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011). Therefore, they sometimes struggle to find an environment where they feel both comfortable and safe (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008). As a result, these students often experience a lack of social support, which may threaten their ability to persist in higher education (Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011). Tinto (1993) shared that persistence occurs when a student is acclimated to academic and social environments within the collegiate atmosphere. While there have been critiques of Tinto’s model, highlighting the concerns does not address underrepresented students' needs (Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus & Quaye, 2009), as it is still a model used for retention and persistence efforts (Braxton et al., 2004). Understanding the importance of persistence is vital to note for BGBQM to integrate into academic and social environments on college campuses. Thus, this research study contributed to the expansive literature which highlights BGBQM’s experiences in higher education. Consequently, I hoped to further explore higher education’s understanding of the complexities and challenges BGBQM endure on college campuses due to their intersecting, marginalized identities. It is important to understand the unique positionality of BGBQM and how they navigate collegiate environments. The next section articulates why it is important to
address how BGBQM experience higher education, specifically within the context of programmatic interventions on college campuses.

**Statement of the Problem**

This study addressed the issue of BGBQM who navigate hostile higher education environments given the intersection of their oppressed identities. BGBQM often conceal and suppress their sexual identities and gender expressions to assimilate to the hyper-masculine, cis-heteronormative, and heteropatriarchal systems at PWIs and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Blockett, 2017; Ford, 2015; Means & Jaeger, 2013; Mobley & Johnson, 2019; Patton, 2011; Patton & Simmons, 2008; Squire & Mobley, 2015). There is a vast body of literature which targets the experiences of BGBQM in social spaces on campus, but there is limited literature regarding their academic experiences on college campuses. As aforementioned, BGBQM experience challenges when persisting in college, and it is important to explore how they navigate collegiate environments. Men of color mentorship programs can potentially serve as additional research conduits to reveal how BGBQM navigate collegiate settings more broadly.

Men of color mentorship programs are a relevant context within which to study BGBQM, given previous literature highlighted their interpersonal tensions around Blackness and masculinity in higher education social spaces (Strayhorn & Tillman-Kelly, 2013). One space in which BGBQM often experience Blackness and masculinity ideals and norms are within mentorship programs contexts. Strayhorn and Terrell (2007) described mentoring as “the process by which a student or protégé is positively socialized by a faculty member or mentor into the institution and/or profession” (p. 70). Mentoring is one way to support collegiate men using
identity development, campus engagement, and educational opportunities (Smith et al., 2019). While mentoring can assist collegiate men in their college development, it is important to target Black students’ experiences, specifically BGBQM. Davis (2007) shared that Black students benefit from mentoring by building strong faculty relationships, having career aspirations, and expanding professional networks. Mentorship has proven to be an influential factor in helping Black men persist to graduation in college (LaVant et al., 1997).

Previous scholars (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Brooms, 2018, 2019; Carter, 1994; Curtis & Hansen-Schwoebel, 1999; Cuyjet, 2006; Fowler & Muckert, 2004; Hoffman & Wallach, 2005; Patitu & Terrell, 1997; Pfleeger & Mertz, 1995; Salinitri, 2005; Santos & Reigadas, 2000; Whitfield & Edwards, 2011) have found that mentoring programs often assist students with college adjustment, academic success, and improving self-efficacy (Smith et al., 2019; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). Mentoring programs are comprised of both formal and informal mentoring structures as well as institution specific and national programs (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). Most of the research regarding mentorship programs has focused on Black and Latinx men in higher education (Gardenhire et al., 2016; LaVant et al., 1997; Saenz et al., 2015; Sutton, 2006; Torrens et al., 2017). While these programmatic interventions help students navigate challenging campus settings, they lack an intersectional approach (e.g., race, gender, sexuality) to addressing the complexities of BGBQM’s unique experiences (Smith et al., 2019). Furthermore, while this study aimed to address how BGBQM experience men of color mentorship programs on college campuses, this study also alluded to a larger context of how they navigate and make meaning of their lived experiences in higher education.
Smith et al. (2019) proposed that mentorship programs need to recognize multiple men’s social identities, in addition to cisgender heterosexual men. Targeting other populations will help to not perpetuate heteropatriarchy and hegemonic masculinity ideals and norms on college campuses. BGBQM literature has demonstrated that BGBQM often experience hostile campus environments, given their intersecting identities, which impede their persistence in college (Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011). Bronfenbrenner (1977) explained that humans have developed through changing environments and social contexts (formal or informal) throughout their lifetimes. Mentorship programs are an environment which can help with men's identity development and meaning making structures in higher education. BGBQM continually change, compartmentalize, and renegotiate their identities and environments as a means of survival. There is an assumptive archetype of men students involved with men of color mentorship programs (e.g., heterosexual, cisgender, masculine-presenting). This assumptive archetype can lead to having gay, bisexual, and queer men on college campuses who are unwilling or want to conform to heteronormative ideals and practices within men of color mentorship program contexts. While these programs may not intend to promote a specific archetype within their demographic, I question whether these programs serve as a larger microcosm of how BGBQM experience and navigate higher education settings, as a whole. Thus, there needs to be more research regarding men of color students who identify as gay, bisexual, and queer which explores their experiences within these men of color mentorship programs. These programmatic interventions could be representative of their experiences in other collegiate spaces in higher education as well.
Research Questions

The purpose of my study was to explore how BGBQM make meaning of their intersecting identities in men of color mentorship programs in higher education. BGBQM have unique experiences and challenges when negotiating their race, gender, and sexuality on college campuses, specifically in mentorship programs which focus on working with cisgender heterosexual men. By highlighting how BGBQM navigate this programmatic intervention context, this further situates how BGBQM navigate higher education environments more broadly. Thus, the research questions which guide this study include: (1) How do BGBQM make meaning of their intersecting identities in men of color mentorship programs in higher education? (2) How do BGBQM define “masculinity” and “queerness” during their involvement in men of color mentorship programs in higher education? (3) How do BGBQM negotiate their intersecting identities during their involvement in men of color mentorship programs in higher education?

Study Significance

As aforementioned, previous research has shown that BGBQM face marginalization in higher education given their oppressed intersecting identities (Blockett, 2017; Ford 2015; Means & Jaeger 2013; Mobley & Johnson, 2019; Patton, 2011; Patton & Simmons, 2008; Squire & Mobley, 2015). Collins and Bilge (2016) shared that colleges and universities experience challenges when creating more inclusive campus environments. Students’ sense of connectedness to campus culture and community is linked with a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). More importantly, the campus racial and LGBT climate are factors in how marginalized students experience collegiate settings (Brown et al., 2005; Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Hurtado &
All students need a space to belong in higher education. Students with marginalized intersecting identities need spaces to cultivate support and build community. It is vital to explore concerns regarding retention and persistence, specifically for BGBQM. Research suggests that gay men of color experience a lack of sense of belonging on college campuses due to their sexual identity (Strayhorn, 2012). Institutional types can create additional barriers for BGBQM to find and cultivate senses of belonging, while they often face racism at PWIs and homophobia at HBCUs.

Strayhorn’s (2012) study found that gay men of color often find a sense of belonging in other social and informal spaces on college campuses. It is important to note that these students often encounter hostile campus climate experiences which impede their sense of belonging and ability to persist in college. Institutions have found that programmatic interventions can aid Black and LGBTQIA students in finding a space to belong (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018; Brooms, 2018; Strayhorn, 2012, 2013). Black Male Initiative (BMI) programming is vital for Black men-identified students to find space on a college campus to understand how race, gender, and sexuality influence their campus experience (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018; Brooms, 2018). BMI programming can help Black men students find academic resources and strong men peer-to-peer relationships, as well as educate them on how to unpack toxic and hegemonic masculinity in higher education and society.

Recent scholarship has illuminated how Latino queer men often find counterspaces and kinship relationships on college campuses (Camacho, 2016; Duran & Perez, 2017; Lange & Moore, 2017; Tillapaugh, 2015). Blockett (2017) further explored how BGBQM forge community through peer support at a PWI. While queer men of color have found counterspaces
and kinship relationships on college campuses, limited research addresses how BGBQM navigate men of color mentorship programs to illuminate how these students cultivate counterspaces and relationships which are vital, to aid them in being successful, both academically and socially in college. Mentorship programs have been found to help Black men find a sense of belonging and connection in the campus community but fail to support different social identities other than heterosexual college men (Smith et al., 2019). While race is an important factor in Black identity development, using intersectionality as a framework can help students make meaning of their race, gender, and sexual identity in these programmatic interventions. Collins and Bilge (2016) denoted that “people generally use intersectionality as an analytic tool to solve problems that they or others around them face” (p. 11). Intersectionality (as defined later in the core concepts section) “references the critical insight that race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities” (Collins, 2015, p. 2). This intersectional lens can help men of color mentorship programs recognize and understand students’ converging identities, holistically, for BGBQM to succeed in college.

While men of color mentorship programs serve as spaces where men, specifically heterosexual men, explore their identity, is there space left for queer men of color to explore their identities? I believe men of color mentorship programs can be a space where queer-identified men can make meaning of their lived experience in collegiate environments. Therefore, this study addressed this research gap. This study explored BGBQM who navigate their intersecting identities through their involvement in men of color mentorship programs. Thus, this research
illuminated how BGBQM’s converging identities are complex to understand and navigate within these programmatic environments.

**Study Overview**

This dissertation shares the experiences of BGBQM in higher education, by targeting their involvement in men of color mentorship programs. Chapter Two provides the theoretical framework and review of relevant literature. The literature review chapter provides a comprehensive review of literature regarding topics such as: campus racial climate, sense of belonging, and programmatic interventions for BGBQM experiences in higher education. Additionally, I share Queer of Color Critique, Connell’s Notion of Multiple Masculinities, and Intersectionality as my theoretical framework. Chapter three provides my methodology, including research design and rationale, research questions, reflexivity, co-researchers’ demographics for the study, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter Three discusses qualitative methodology, using phenomenology and arts-based research as a research design approach, to explore these students’ experiences in higher education. In Chapters Four and Five, I present the findings of my data sources in a podcast script, threading my data sources (interviews, podcast-style focus groups, and individual art curations). Lastly, in Chapter Six, I share my discussions, implications for the BGBQM community, practitioners, and researchers, and finish with my dissertation concluding thoughts.

**Core Concepts**

To gain a better foundation and understanding of my dissertation study, I provided the following keywords and definitions of specific language for contextual purposes:
**Black; African American.** There has been debate regarding an individual’s identification as either Black or African American. African American is defined as an American of African, and especially of Black African descent (Merriam Webster, 2019). Black is defined as “of or relating to any various population groups having dark pigmentation of the skin” or “of or relating to African American people or their culture” (Merriam Webster, 2019). These terms are utilized interchangeably to reflect the current literature on students, staff, and faculty, while having the men within mentorship programs identify their racial identity.

**Masculinity.** Connell (2005) defined masculinity as “simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality, and culture” (p. 7). Masculinity can be performed and understood by different cultures, norms, and traditions (Connell, 2005). Masculinity refers to how men define the word and how they experience performing this identity and expression within mentorship programs.

**Queer.** Chase and Ressler (2009) defined queer as “a person who has a nonnormative sex/gender identity, but does not consider himself to be straight or gay… a perspective that challenges normative ideas, particularly but not exclusively about sex and gender (as in “queer theory”)” (p. 24). Queer refers to how men define the word while experience performing their sexuality within mentorship spaces.

**Gay.** Chase and Ressler (2009) defined gay as “a man who is sexually attracted to other men” (p. 23). Gay refers to how men define the word while they experience performing their sexuality within mentorship spaces.
**Bisexual.** Chase and Ressler (2009) defined bisexual as “a person for whom gender is not the first criterion for sexual attraction, and who may be attracted to women and/or men and/or transgender people” (p. 23). Bisexual refers to how men define the word while they experience performing their sexuality within mentorship spaces.

**Butch queen.** Klein (1999) defined butch queen as someone who “occasionally cross-dress, no strong desire to live as opposite gender, mannerisms tend to be ‘effeminate’ but most often are hypermasculine” (p. 103). Butch queen refers to how men define the word while they experience performing their sexuality within mentorship spaces.

**Intersectionality.** Crenshaw (1989) defined intersectionality as “the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women’s employment experiences” (p. 1244). Crenshaw (1991) further shared that intersectionality, in acknowledging how multiple social structures and systems intersect, shapes how individuals experience marginalization and oppression. As this term has evolved in its meaning and application, it also recognizes how “actors of different genders, ethnicities, and sexual orientations have moved intersectionality to engage an ever-widening range of experiences and structures of power” (Carbado et al., 2013, p. 3). Museus and Griffin (2011) posited that “the promise of intersectionality research has yet to be realized in higher education” (p. 11). Lastly, Harris and Patton (2019) suggested that higher education researchers often misuse the term due to not understanding its complexity and applicability within the higher education context. For the context of this dissertation, I use intersectionality to signify how these men experience race, gender, and sexuality within a programmatic context.
Black gay men vs. BQM. There have been historical references of literature considering Black gay men in earlier higher education studies, while BQM literature has examined their experiences in literature over the past fifteen years. For this dissertation, I interchangeably use Black gay men and BQM.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

The purpose of a literature review in phenomenological studies is to aid the researcher in their pursuit to clearly understand the “phenomenon of interest” (Vagle, 2018, p. 79), which is essential to conduct a rigorous study. This section reveals Black gay, bisexual, and queer men’s (BGBQM) experiences in the higher education context and highlights areas in which BGBQM wrestle with their intersecting identities in various collegiate settings. I begin by discussing campus racial climate and LGBT campus climate, to situate how the literature mentions their experiences separately, when considering race and sexuality. I then discuss sense of belonging and programmatic interventions, which reveal how BGBQM find connections on college campuses. Finally, the literature review discusses BGBQM’s higher education experiences and focuses on the challenging ways higher education creates hostile environments, given BGBQM’s myriad oppressed identities. Overall, the literature review facilitated the need to establish a theoretical framework which, holistically, grasped how this study contributed to the ways BGBQM are depicted in higher education literature. The literature review was built on integrating theories of Queer of Color Critique, Connell’s (1995) notions of multiple masculinities, and intersectionality which illuminated varied facets of how BGBQM might navigate environments which have not been inclusive, given BGBQM’s complex intersecting
identities. Using my theoretical framework as a foundation best captured empirical research regarding this area of study.

**Campus Racial Climate**

When considering factors which can influence BGBQM’s hostile experiences on college campuses, it is essential to understand research regarding campus racial and LGBT climates. Thus, this first section explores the history of campus racial and LGBT campus climate as well as campus climate experiences for Black and LGBT students. Hurtado et al. (1998) explained campus racial climate as community members’ attitudes and perceptions regarding race and diversity issues, particularly their perceived levels of racism and discrimination within the campus environment. Racial issues on college campuses have posed challenges for higher education institutions in policies and programs such as college admissions, financial aid, affirmative action, discrimination and harassment, and desegregation (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005).

Previously, institutions did not have a traditional framework to understand how campus racial climate influences the development of policies and practices which further address campus climate issues (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). The researchers denoted four possible explanations for why institutions do not address campus racial climate concerns. First, higher education leaders and institutions believe individuals organically solve issues, and it is not the institution's role to intervene with students' concerns regarding racial differences (Horowitz, 1987). Secondly, institutions are uncertain of their roles when acting as agents of socialization (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). While administrators and faculty can play pivotal roles in student development (identity, social, academic, etc.), institutions are
challenged by how these individuals shape students’ understanding of race on college campuses (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). Thirdly, while faculty can act as agents of socialization for students, institutional policies and initiatives have recently begun to address the discriminatory actions of faculty against students (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Kezar & Eckel, 2002). Lastly, institutions have historically neglected to address campus racial climate issues that have made students feel unwelcome and unsafe on college campuses (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005). These four explanations urged attorneys, policymakers, and institutional leaders to research inequities in higher education as well as how diversity efforts can enhance the institutional change efforts of college campuses (Hurtado et al., 1998; 1999). These four explanations for understanding campus racial climate are essential to understand why institutions do not address the pertinent issues of marginalized students, specifically for BQM.

Scholars (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005) found that students who engage in diverse educational settings contribute to how campus racial climate can influence student learning and development in higher education. When considering diversity on campus, most institutions typically focus on increasing numbers of students from varying racial and ethnic backgrounds (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). While growing the numbers of students from marginalized backgrounds and communities is essential, this framework aids institutions in understanding why increasing diversity is vital for racially and ethnically diverse student representation. Thus, previous research created a framework for understanding four dimensions of campus climate to comprehend the complexities of the collegiate environment for marginalized students. Campus racial climate framework was first
implemented for learning about campus climate for Latinx students (Hurtado, 1994) and was then used for practitioners to enact this framework on college campuses (Hurtado et al., 1998). These study findings helped institutions conceptualize the importance and impact of campus racial climate on collegiate infrastructures and operations. These studies described how campus racial climate could influence students from different racial and ethnic groups, various dimensions of the collegiate environment, and “capture the experiences or unique perspectives of racial/ethnic groups that have historically been underrepresented in higher education” (Hurtado et al., 1998, p. 281).

Students in institutional environments are educated in distinct racial contexts, which are central to the conceptualization of a campus climate for diversity (Hurtado et al. 1998, 1999). These racial contexts shape how external (government policies) and internal (institutional) forces in higher education educate students (Hurtado et al. 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005). There are two domains of external forces which shape campus racial climate: (1) the impact of governmental policy, programs, and initiatives and (2) the impact of socio-historical forces on campus racial climate (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005). Examples of these external forces include federal policies on sexual misconduct, gender-based discrimination, and social movements, which influence students’ experiences outside the institutional context while shaping their experiences on college campuses (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005). Campus racial climate is comprised of four dimensions derived from educational programs and practices: historical legacy, compositional diversity, behavioral climate, and psychological climate (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005). A fifth dimension, organizational/structural diversity, was implemented to further
how institutions’ constituents (i.e., students, faculty, staff, community members) shape the campus climate (Milem et al., 2005). The next sub-section explores how these dimensions help us understand how BQM often experience institutional settings.

**Historical Legacy**

The legacy of inclusion or exclusion is the dimension which highlights the historical vestiges of segregated schools and colleges, which continue to affect the climate for racial and ethnic diversity on college campuses (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). The historical evidence of segregated schools and colleges continues to influence the campus racial climate of collegiate environments (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). The change in institutional environments was implemented using desegregation policies in schools and colleges designed to enhance educational opportunities and increase racial and ethnic representation (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). Thelin (1985) offered that founding institutions have admitted and graduated underrepresented students since its inception, but most PWIs historically excluded these students from educational opportunities. The institutional history of exclusion informed how climate and practices are implemented on a college campus (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). There are some institutional types other than PWIs committed to the advancement of and educational access for underrepresented students. HBCUs, Hispanic-serving Institutions (HSIs), and American Indian colleges (AICs) create welcoming environments to serve students who have often been omitted from higher education contexts (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). Carter and Wilson (1993) shared that PWIs educate most racially and ethnically diverse students, and “PWIs responses to desegregation are key in defining campus racial climate” (Hurtado et al., 1998, p. 284). Administrators and campus
leaders must address how historically White institutions created a culture of inclusion or exclusion of students on campus.

**Compositional Diversity**

Compositional diversity is the numerical and proportional representation of various racial and ethnic groups on campus (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005). When addressing plans for desegregation and affirmative action, most institutions' methods focus on the numerical representation of various groups to achieve equity (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). Improving diversity efforts on college campuses can be the initial step for increasing an institution's structural diversity (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005). When institutions lack diverse student representation, this can highlight how students from marginalized backgrounds can face tokenization on college campuses. When institutions prioritize increasing representation of underrepresented students on college campuses, it conveys a strong message that institutions commit to maintaining a multicultural environment (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). Having a diverse body of students, faculty, and administrators can create welcoming environments for students from marginalized communities and backgrounds. Thus, creating more opportunities for institutions to learn about students' diversity as well as faculty and administrators’ experiences is key (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999).

**Psychological Climate**

The dimension psychological climate encompasses views held by individuals regarding intergroup relations and institutional responses to diversity, perceptions of discrimination or racial conflict, and attitudes held toward individuals from different racial
and ethnic backgrounds (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005). Collins (1986) found that an individual’s position and power within the organization, as well as one’s view as an “insider” or “outsider,” contribute to their different perspectives (p. 514). Studies have shown differences between perceptions of prejudice and discrimination and university support for White students and students of color (Allen, 1988, 1992; Astin, 1968; Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Tierney, 1987). Some empirical studies have addressed the impact of poor racial climate on students’ development and experiences on college campuses (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005). Scholars have found that African American students experience discrimination and challenges when performing, academically (Allen, 1988, 1992; Nettles, 1988; Prillerman et al., 1989; Smedley et al., 1993). Further, first-year students, who reported feeling isolated and treated negatively in academic spaces, were likely to have a higher sense of alienation at the end of their freshman year (Cabrera & Nora, 1994). As institutions reflect their constituents' diversity, our social identities can influence how individuals engage with one another, positively or negatively.

**Behavioral Climate**

The behavioral climate includes social interaction status on the campus, the nature of interactions between and among individuals from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and the quality of intergroup relations (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005). College campuses are often concerned with reports of differences among various racial and ethnic groups in racialized incidents and numerous social interaction levels (Farrell & Jones, 1988; Loo & Rolison, 1986). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) denoted that student involvement on college campuses (with peers, faculty, and administrators) can aid in their
educational success. When students connect to the campus community by participating in student organizations and activities, develop strong peer and faculty relationships, and have a sense of connectedness on campus, they are likely to persist and graduate from college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Some studies have connected links between campus involvement and race dialogue (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999).

**Organizational/Structural Diversity**

Organizational/structural diversity addresses how certain aspects of college benefit some groups, through organizational and structural processes (Milem et al., 2005). Examples of this include course curriculum offerings, campus decision-making practices related to budget allocations, hiring practices, and admissions practices (Milem et al., 2005). Harper and Hurtado (2007) contended that institutions need to value and prioritize dialogue and discussion strategies, to improve their commitment to sustaining constituencies of diverse backgrounds and representations. From this literature, we can consider how these factors can influence the way institutions promote either environments that value diversity and inclusion or places that students may experience hostile environments. Research has suggested that academic and social interactions between different racial and ethnic groups can help students gain a greater understanding of students with racial and ethnic backgrounds other than their own (Milem et al., 2005). Various scholars (Astin, 1993; Chang, 1999, 2001; Chang et al., 2004; Gurin et al., 2002; Hu & Kuh, 2003; Milem, 2003; Nelson Laird, 2005; Pascarella et al., 1996; Villalpando, 2002) have shared valuable insights regarding trends, barriers, and outcomes associated with the interaction between different groups of college students (Harper & Nichols, 2008). This increased interaction can improve the campus climate.
environment for students from diverse backgrounds, such as students of color (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). The behavioral climate can be one reason why students of color at PWIs may create counterspaces when they do not feel visible on their campuses. Solórzano et al. (2000) defined counterspaces “as sites where deficit notions of people of color can be challenged and where a positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained” (p. 70). For instance, counterspaces such as students of color fraternity and sorority organizations and identity-based cultural centers can serve as environments in which these students feel connected to campus. While these interactions can help the overall student experience on college campuses, there are differences in student experiences based on race and ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. These racialized experiences for BQM are relevant to understand how they endure hostile campus environments. The next section situates how campus racial climate formation pontificates aggressive environments for underrepresented students, specifically for BGBQM.

**Campus Racial Climate Experiences for Black Students**

Over the past 50 years, numerous scholars (Allen, 1992; Feagin et al., 1996; Fleming, 1984; Love, 1993; Nettles, 1987; Sedlacek, 1987; Thompson & Fretz, 1991) have researched the experiences of Black students in higher education (Harper & Nichols, 2008). There has been a demographic trend in increasing the representation of Black, Asian-American, and Latinx students on college campuses (Appel et al., 1996; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996). As colleges and universities continue to enroll students from diverse backgrounds, research suggests that these students may experience the college environment differently (Ancis et al., 2000). Students from marginalized identities and backgrounds may have different
experiences in college compared to their White counterparts. Research has shown that hostile
campus climates and experiences with marginalization, isolation, and racism have adverse
effects on a student’s sense of belonging, adjustment, achievement, and retention (Brown et
al., 2005; Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Johnson et al., 2007).
Furthermore, Griffin et al. (2015) suggested that students' identities shape their perception of
campus racial climate.

Harper and Hurtado (2007) argued that racial and ethnic minority students and their
White peers, who attend the same institution, view campus racial climate differently. The
lack of representation of Black students on most college campuses makes them feel less
connected to the campus climate and culture, and they face tokenization (Harper, 2012;
Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Other studies have shown that Black and Latinx students
disproportionately have lower socioeconomic backgrounds when entering college (Baker &
Robnett, 2012). Nettles (1991) shared that Black students often seek outside employment
while attending college, for financial support. The complexities of social identities and
socioeconomic status can play a significant role in Black students feeling challenged when
navigating campus racial climate on college campuses. Bowen and Bok (1998) found that
Black students were more likely than their peers to report having friends from other racial
and ethnic groups. Research has shown that African American students who attend PWIs
have lower rates of persistence, academic achievement, postgraduate study, and overall
psychosocial adjustments (Allen, 1988, 1992). Some researchers have also found that
African American students are expected to “mask” their cultural differences and assimilate
into the mainstream culture (Holmes et al., 2001, p. 45). As a result, Black students often
have negative campus life experiences including perceptions of prejudice, discrimination, racial conflict, and marginalization (Edman & Brazil, 2009). Institutions that are serious about enhancing their Black students' social and academic integration must understand that creating cultural spaces for these students can play a significant role in their development (Guiffrida, 2003). Solórzano et al. (2000) found that when Black students experience racial microaggressions (subtle verbal, nonverbal, or visual insult), they feel academically and socially alienated in spaces where such oppression occurs, and as a defense mechanism, they create their own academic and social counterspaces (ethnic enclaves that offer shelter from the psycho-emotional harms of racial microaggressions). Thus, recent empirical studies have shown that counterspaces, such as cultural centers and identity-based organizations, may provide Black students’ spaces on college campuses to combat racial microaggressions (Guiffrida, 2003; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Patton, 2006; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998). “A reality is that they often limit interactions between White students and racial/ethnic minorities” (Harper & Hurtado, 2007, p. 14).

Lastly, students of color who attend PWIs experience challenges to successfully transition into college (Carter et al., 2006; Kalsner & Pistole, 2003). Students’ perceptions of the college environment also influence their college persistence, which is especially essential for students of color (Gloria et al., 2005). When these students of color are on campus, they are often scrutinized (Jones, 2001; Solórzano et al., 2000), and their talents and abilities are questioned (Davis et al., 2004; Steele, 1997, 2004). Additionally, teaching pedagogy practices, student support services, and overall campus environments have not evolved with the student demographic changes (Taylor, 1989). Research suggests that the perceptions of
students of color regarding campus climate can also impact retention efforts (Rodgers & Summers, 2008). Fischer (2007) explained that minority students who have a negative impression of the campus racial climate are usually less content with their college experience and are more likely to leave. Institutions must ensure that students from diverse backgrounds are recruited and retained on college campuses. While campus racial climate literature addresses racialized experiences for students of color, it is also essential to discuss how LGBTQ students experience campus climate. The next section examines this distinction in the LGBT campus climate literature. Due to BGBQM’s intersecting identities, they endure both aggressive racialized and hostile homophobic climate settings.

**LGBT Campus Climate**

Research has examined LGBT campus climate environments and issues for LGBT students, faculty, and staff across the literature. One of the leading experts on LGBTQ campus climate research is Susan R. Rankin (Hartman, 2014). Milem et al. (2005) suggested that compositional diversity, the historical legacy, the psychological climate, the behavioral climate, and organizational/structural diversity can create negative experiences for students on college campuses. Rankin (2005) shared that these campus climate factors need to explore campus quality perceptions from the positionality of LGBT students, faculty, and staff. LGBT students endure isolation, harassment, and various forms of violence and suffering on college campuses (Rankin, 2005). Climate studies reported that perceptions of LGBT students regarding campus climate were ranked lower than their heterosexual counterparts (Rankin, 2005). Given these hostile and unwelcoming environments, these studies initiated dialogues regarding ways institutions can create more LGBT-friendly environments (Rankin, 2005). As a result, this
prompted more training for individuals who have more direct contact with LGBT students, such as resident assistants and other student affairs professionals (Rankin, 2005). Reason and Rankin (2006) specified that students require a non-discriminatory environment to be successful in their collegiate experiences. Rankin et al. (2010) contended that college campuses are generally unwelcoming to LGBT students and less accepting of LGBT people than any other marginalized group. Ten institutions surveyed more than 7,000 students and found that 42% described their campuses as heterosexist, which is nearly twice as many occurrences of those reporting their campuses to be racist (Reason & Rankin, 2006). These experiences of discrimination and harassment were most frequently exacerbated when they identified as LGBT and another marginalized group, based on race (Baez et al., 2007; Clark, 2005; Negrete & Purcell, 2011; Poynter & Washington, 2005; Rankin et al., 2010).

Rankin (2003, 2005) conducted a study with nearly 1,700 self-identified LGBT students, faculty, staff, and administrators on 14 college campuses and found 36% of the undergraduate students reported they had experienced harassment within the past year. Additionally, 20% reported feelings of fear for their safety due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, and more than half indicated they hide their identity to avoid the fear of harassment (Rankin, 2003, 2005). These findings also revealed that the college campuses involved were strongly homophobic, with 73% of faculty, 74% of students, 81% of administrators, and 73% of staff stating this concern (Rankin, 2003, 2005). Rankin’s studies found that college campuses often ignore the needs of LGBT students, faculty, and staff on their campuses (Rankin, 2003, 2005; Rankin & Reason, 2008; Reason & Rankin, 2006). The needs of LGBT individuals extend beyond programming and services; their voices are often silenced and they remain an invisible
minority (Rankin, 2005; Zemsky & Sanlo, 2005). As a leading researcher and scholar, Rankin has advocated for efforts to increase visibility and to develop a voice on the part of LGBT students, faculty, and staff, to help promote changes in institutional cultures (Rankin, 2005). Although this report was completed in 2003, unfortunately, the environments for LGBT individuals on college campuses have not improved much since then.

Rankin et al.’s (2010) study provided details about the type of harassment LGBT individuals experience on college campuses. They are twice as likely to experience derogatory language (61%), to be stared at (37%), to be pointed out (36%), and asked to speak as the voice of the LGBT community (Rankin et al., 2010). Transgender identified individuals were four times more likely to be harassed than their gender-conforming peers (Rankin et al., 2010). Also, LGBT students experienced harassment at a higher occurrence than LGBT faculty and staff (Rankin et al., 2010). Lastly, LGBTQ faculty indicated a more negative perception of the campus climate than LGBTQ students and staff (Rankin et al., 2010). Fine (2012) and Rankin (2003, 2005) found that very few colleges and universities have dedicated resources and personnel for LGBT resource centers. Some institutions rationalize the absence of LGBT centers by stating their campuses do not have LGBT people, which further perpetuates the silence and invisibility of LGBT people for fear of safety and rejection (Sanlo, 2000). Sanlo stated, “this argument must not be allowed to be used as a smokescreen to justify the failure to provide services and safety to LGBT students” (p. 492). These studies revealed that institutions perpetuate a hostile and homophobic environment for LGBT individuals and need to create physical spaces (i.e., LGBTQ campus centers and support programs) to feel a sense of belonging in higher education. Renn (2010) reported that colleges and universities need to conduct “follow-up studies” to ensure
LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff are supported and advocated for by institutional leadership (p. 138). It is essential to learn how LGBTQ campus climate can influence LGBTQ students’ experiences on college campuses. The next section further situates how BGBQM may experience and navigate postsecondary education, given their intersecting identities.

**LGBTQ Campus Climate Experiences for LGBTQ students**

Unfortunately, for LGBTQ students who endure hostile environments in high school, this experience often continues in college (Yost & Gilmore, 2011). Waldo (1998) denoted that college is often a space where students “come out” when acknowledging their sexual identity as same-sex, queer, or transgender; however these spaces often function as a “chilly” climate for LGBTQ students (Rankin, 2003; Rankin et al., 2010, p. 9). Rankin’s (2004) national quantitative study of LGBTQ climate found that 34% of the students felt the need to cover their sexual orientation or gender identity on campus, and 19% were concerned for their psychical safety. Also, 28% of LGBT individuals reported being harassed during the year preceding their participation in the survey, while transgender participants reported the same, at 41% (Rankin, 2004). In Rankin’s study, 32% of LGBT people of color reported experiencing harassment compared to the 28% of White LGBT people. This study indicated that LGBT students endure heterosexism, transphobia, and racism on college campuses that can negatively affect their college experiences.

Rankin et al.’s (2010) study indicated that LGBTQ students experienced various forms of harassment, from a lack of social inclusion to name-calling, graffiti, and physical abuse. Participants who identified as transmasculine, transfeminine, and gender non-conforming reported higher rates of harassment based on gender identity than those who identified as cis-
gender women and men (Rankin et al., 2010). LGBTQ people of color were more likely to report race as a reason for experiencing harassment than White LGBTQ participants in the study (Rankin et al., 2010). While LGBTQ faculty attribute their harassment to their gender identity, LGBTQ students reported experiencing higher rates of harassment due to their sexual identity (Rankin et al., 2010). Brown et al.’s (2002) study reported LGBTQ individuals hide sexual orientation or gender identity from other students (66%), faculty (57%), university staff members (40%), health care providers (23%), and roommates (22%). Gortmaker and Brown (2006) found that “out” students may have a higher risk of victimization due to increased visibility of their sexual identity (p. 616).

Tetrault et al.’s (2013) study further showed that 64% of students hid their identity from other students and 41% from faculty. Most of the students (60%) reported that they had not attended an LGBT event on campus for fear of being labeled (Tetreault et al., 2013). The study also indicated LGBTQ students experienced social exclusion, name-calling by peers and faculty, seeing offensive graffiti, and physical abuse (Tetreault et al., 2013). These students perceived the residence halls as a hostile environment due to an unfriendly campus climate when their peers were indifferent to the needs or concerns of LGBTQ students (Tetreault et al., 2013). Evans et al. (2017) reported similar experiences from previous studies regarding LGBTQ students enduring forms of social and emotional isolation which impact their cognitive ability to engage in the college experience. One significant finding from the study indicated students were often discriminated against and faced rejection within the LGBTQ community (Evans et al., 2017). Students who were rejected from within the LGBTQ community experienced a more significant impact on feeling less connected to the campus community, and their educational experiences
suffered immensely (Evans et al., 2017). Hostile campus climate experiences for LGBTQ students remain relevant issues in higher education. Institutions need to further address these issues to create safe and welcoming environments for LGBTQ individuals on college campuses.

The next section provides a literature review regarding sense of belonging in collegiate settings. This section discusses how sense of belonging can help BGBQM feel connected to collegiate environments and persist in higher education.

Institutional Inclusion and Sense of Belonging

Sense of belonging is a term and definition which has historically evolved in the field of higher education (Strayhorn, 2012). McMillan and Chavis (1986) referred to “sense of community” as “a feeling that members have belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (p. 9). Furthermore, Goodenow (1993) defined sense of belonging as “students' sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by often (teachers and peers) in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class” (p. 25). As this term and meaning have evolved, institutions still aim for students to find an environment with which to connect to the campus culture and community. Strayhorn (2012) referred to a sense of belonging as “students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensations of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers)” (p. 17). In the campus climate literature, “sense of belonging” has been demonstrated as a critical outcome of college students’ experiences with academic and social integration on campus.
Thus, the second section explores core elements of a sense of belonging, the experiences of gay men of color related to a sense of belonging, and programmatic interventions critical to their success. There are seven core elements in which students feel connectedness to college campuses. It is essential to recognize how these core elements are vital to cultivate a welcoming space for marginalized students, specifically for BGBQM.

**Seven Core Elements of Sense of Belonging**

The first core element of a sense of belonging is basic human needs (Strayhorn, 2012). Maslow’s (1962) hierarchy of needs suggested that satisfying the need for belonging is a necessary precondition for the higher-order needs, such as the desire for knowledge, understanding, and self-actualization. Maslow shared that for motivation hierarchy to emerge, we must first meet basic needs such as the needs for food, sleep, and safety. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs can be applied to a sense of belonging for college students in higher education (Strayhorn, 2012). If a sense of belonging is a basic human need, it is also a basic need for college students (Strayhorn, 2012). The second core element of a sense of belonging is a fundamental motive sufficient to drive human behavior (Strayhorn, 2012). Belonging can aid individuals to find an interest in something and inspire them to act on this interest. The need to belong can motivate students’ behaviors for or against norms of academic achievements (Strayhorn, 2012). When students feel unsupported by faculty and administrators, they can become disengaged from college academics. This disengagement can result in a lack of connectedness with the academic campus culture and a lack of academic achievement. The third core element is
a sense of belonging takes on heightened importance (a) in certain contexts, such as being a newcomer to an otherwise established group, (b) at certain times, such as (late) adolescence when individuals begin to consider who they are (or wish to be), with whom they belong, and where they intend to invest their time and energies (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Sandford, 1962), as well as (c) among certain populations, especially those who are marginalized or inclined to feel that way in said context. (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 20)

Belonging can provide a sense of security or relatedness that offers a shared understanding of socially constructed meaning (Strayhorn, 2012). Experiencing belonging can be context-dependent, in which a particular context (i.e., department, classroom) can have an enormous influence on outcomes (i.e., adjustment, achievement) for college students (Strayhorn, 2012). Some scholars suggest that until students find belonging on college campuses, they will continue to struggle academically and socially (Goodenow, 1993; Strayhorn, 2012). The fourth element of a sense of belonging is related to, and seemingly a consequence of, mattering (Strayhorn, 2012). Schlossberg (1985) referred to mattering as a feeling, rightly or wrongly, that one matters and is respected or valued by others. Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) identified five dimensions of mattering: (a) attention (i.e., noticed in positive ways, commands, interests), (b) importance (i.e., cared about, special, object of another’s concern), (c) dependence (i.e., feeling needed, reciprocity), (d) appreciated (i.e., feeling respected), and (e) ego extension (i.e., believing others share in our success). Mattering has a relational aspect of a sense of belonging, and to satisfy a need for belonging, the individual must think one cares about them (Strayhorn, 2012).

The fifth element declares that social identities intersect and affect college students’ sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). Social identities (i.e., race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexual identity, religion, etc.) are interwoven in ways that often influence one’s sense of
belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). Many individuals negotiate multiple intersecting identities throughout their lifetime (Jones & McEwen, 2000). By understanding students’ sense of belonging, it is important to note that the complexities of intersecting salient identities can influence these students’ experiences. The sixth element of a sense of belonging engenders other positive outcomes (Strayhorn, 2012). Meeting the need to belong leads to positive outcomes such as achievement, wellbeing, and optimal functioning (Strayhorn, 2012). Therefore, “the goal is to develop campus environments that foster sense of belonging, so students feel ‘stuck to’ others on campus, to such a degree that severance of those bonds no only seems difficult and unpopular, but impossible” (p. 22). The seventh core element of a sense of belonging must be satisfied continually and likely changes as circumstances, conditions, and contexts change (Strayhorn, 2012). Students can gain self-acceptance, over time, through various experiences which can help influence their commitments and behaviors in their desire to belong (Strayhorn, 2012). These seven core elements are essential for students to have a sense of belonging and be successful on college campuses. While these core elements can help students find an environment where they feel supported and affirmed, it is essential to highlight individual students who experience senses of belonging in higher education, specifically Black and LGBTQIA students. BGBQM often experience hostile environments on college campuses and a sense of belonging is one factor needed for them to feel safe and welcomed in higher education. The next section further explores how gay men of color experience sense of belonging in college.
Sense of Belonging for Gay Men of Color Students

As aforementioned, the need for belonging is essential for every human to survive. This need is also related to how marginalized students also need spaces to which to belong in higher education. Strayhorn (2012) conducted a national study of sense of belonging experiences of gay men of color at PWIs and HBCUs. The study found that gay men of color often felt a lack of sense of belonging, or that their identities did not matter to others on campus (Strayhorn, 2012). The study participants expressed challenges with the notion of “coming out,” in which some of them resisted the term, culturally (Strayhorn, 2012). Having the internalized challenge of “coming out” caused them to have complicated negotiating processes or conceal their sexual identities from family, peers, and friends (Strayhorn, 2012). This need to belong in the process of coming out prompted participants to negotiate new peer relationship with gay friends, renegotiate prior relationships (who accepted their sexuality), and resolve conflicts by ending meaningful relationships (i.e., parents, siblings, religious officials) who rejected their sexuality (Strayhorn, 2012). These participants also shared how the campus community (peers and faculty members) expressed negative beliefs and perceptions about the LGBTQIA community (Strayhorn, 2012). These negative beliefs made these students feel unsafe in many spaces on college campuses (residence halls, academic areas, restrooms, office hours, etc.), which created an unwelcoming and unsupportive collegiate environment (Strayhorn, 2012). These challenging environments resulted in students feeling threatened and unsafe, which correlates to the safety aspect of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Strayhorn, 2012). While these students experience hostile campus environments due to their sexual identity, they could engage in various areas of the campus
community, such as involvement in LGBT communities, spirituality and religion, and relationship building (Strayhorn, 2012). By being socially engaged, they found senses of belonging when other parts of the campus community did not accept their sexuality.

Gay men of color devote time and energy to specific groups and experiences (e.g., ethnic student organizations, Gay nightclubs, and Gay pride events) to find a sense of belonging in college (Strayhorn, 2012). Astin (1999) suggested that college students devote an amount of physical and psychological energy to their academic experiences, whether on or off-campus. While these students often reported engaging in spiritual and other religious activities to establish a sense of belonging in college, they also recalled having negative perceptions and feelings about religious practices, given their sexual identity (Strayhorn, 2012). Lastly, relationships played a pivotal role with gay men of color and satisfied their need to belong. These men reported establishing supportive community relationships with specific individuals (same-sex partners, gay faculty members of color, older gay students, straight women, etc.) who they relied on for support (Strayhorn, 2012). Establishing these meaningful relationships provided them with social, spiritual, financial, and psychological support, which are essential core elements to have a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012).

While gay men of color expressed having positive experiences in their pursuits for belonging, it led to some negative experiences. Some negative experiences ranged from anti-social to unhealthy behaviors such as binge drinking, unsafe, unprotected sex with multiple same-sex partners, and drug use (Strayhorn, 2012). These negative experiences often led to gay men of color showing signs of sadness, depression, and suicidal ideation (Strayhorn, 2013). These psychological distress signals can stem from striving to find a healthy sense of
self and efficacy. Gay men of color expressed that once they found a sense of pride in their sexual identities, they felt a sense of mattering or belonging with others in college (Strayhorn, 2012). These experiences are essential to note because they indicate the varying experiences of gay men of color on college campuses. These findings demonstrated that many institutions have historical cultures of not creating inclusive environments for marginalized populations. When college campuses make more intentional efforts to foster and cultivate programmatic interventions and spaces for Black and LGBTQ students (i.e., Black male initiative mentorship programs and men of color mentorship programs), Black collegiate men experience a better transition to college and integrate into the campus community. Institutional settings often have spaces where BQM encounter challenges to cultivate community with peers, faculty, and staff. Therefore, it is important to learn how programmatic interventions can be welcoming environments for BGBQM.

**Mentoring and Mentorship Literature**

The literature regarding mentoring and mentorship has offered various definitions, interpretations, and mentorship applications in different academic disciplines. The concept of mentoring (e.g., role model and mentor) research stems from the psychology field (Johnson et al., 2019). These mentoring concepts date back to “ancient Greece, Judeo-Christian, and traditional African culture” (p. 4). Jacobi (1991) explained that “whereas mentoring has been long associated with an apprentice model of graduate education, it is increasingly looked upon as a retention and enrichment strategy for undergraduate education” (p. 505). Bandura (1994) shared that people seek role models who uphold aspiring traits and skills. Furthermore, these modeling influences can help people understand different perspectives and teach practical skills...
and strategies to cultivate a better sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). Shandley (1989) described mentoring as “a nurturing process that fosters the growth and development of the protégé” (p. 59). In addition to various definitions for mentoring, there are two types of mentoring, formal and informal, used in higher education. Formal mentorship programs are intended to enhance a student’s academic experience and aspire to increase enrollment and retention of underrepresented students (James, 1989; Johnson et al., 2019; O’Brien, 1988; Paratore, 1984). Informal mentoring is an “ad hoc, spontaneous relationship, established by two or more individuals for the benefit of those involved” (Johnson et al., 2019, p. 45). The literature regarding mentoring has illuminated the pivotal role mentoring plays in college students' retention and matriculation through college. This concept of mentoring is vital for the success of underrepresented students, particularly Black men. Chetty et al. (2018) suggested that regardless of socioeconomic status, young Black men need mentoring programs to succeed. Lastly, LaVant et al. (1997) shared that when Black men enter higher education, they are disadvantaged socially, economically, and educationally; however, integration into a support system (e.g., mentorship programs) can improve their persistence and enrollment rates.

Astin (1984) and Tinto (1993) explained that student involvement and academic and social integration are critical factors which influence students’ retention and persistence in college. As previous literature shared, this is a crucial component of a student’s sense of belonging and connectedness to campus. One programmatic intervention which can help facilitate this development is mentoring programs. Phillips-Jones (1983) posited that mentoring programs can provide mentees with personal, professional, and career opportunities. She further suggested that mentoring programs need certain organizational functions to be successful, such
as orientation for mentor/mentee participants, mentor/mentee flexibility in their relationship building, foreseeing formidable challenges, and creating a monitor system for mentor/mentee participants. This formalized programmatic infrastructure has been implemented for various university mentoring programs for Black students (LaVant et al., 1997). This formal mentoring program can help Black men have a sense of belonging and connectedness to their campus environment. Most of the literature regarding the success of mentoring programs focuses on Black men’s involvement with this process. The next section focuses on the programmatic interventions attributed to their academic, social, and career attainment and success. This section situates how BGBQM can experience Black Male Initiative programs within higher education.

**Black Male Initiative Programming**

The U.S. Department of Education (2011) shared that 34% of Black men graduate from four-year higher education institutions over a six-year period, which is the lowest degree attainment rate for all race and gender groups. This statistic lags behind the 55% national rate for all college men (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018). Further, this data is consistent across four-year institutional types (public, private, and for-profit) and two-year and four-year colleges and universities (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018). African American men in education are an at-risk population (Bailey & Moore, 2004; Davis, 2003; Moore, 2000). Jackson and Moore (2006) illustrated that African American men are stereotyped as endangered, uneducated, dysfunctional, and dangerous. These terms often breed unsettling emotions and perpetuate negative stereotypes for these individuals (Jackson & Moore, 2006). Based on the dismal national statistics regarding unemployment, education, incarceration, and mental and physical health, African American men face numerous challenges in American society (Hoffman et al., 2003). Boyd and Mitchell (2018)
suggested, “Black males are often negatively stereotyped in college settings, this threatening environment created by stereotypes can affect Black males’ academic success while they are enrolled at a college or university” (p. 893). These stereotypes can often lead to lower academic success rates and performance for Black men enrolled in college (Steele, 2010). Finding supportive educational and social programs on college campuses for these students to be successful can mitigate this stereotype. Tinto's (1993) theory on student departure positioned the relationship between co-curricular involvement and student persistence. This model helps students retain and find a sense of belonging on campus through support systems. Tinto’s model has been critiqued for not addressing the needs of underrepresented students (Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus & Quaye, 2009). Support systems are essential for Black men to persist in the college environment (Harper, 2007). Furthermore, retention and attrition are critical points of concern for Black men in higher education (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018). One critical juncture to combat this is through Black Male Initiative (BMI) programs on college campuses.

While there is extensive research regarding the success of BMI programs on college campuses in the U.S., there is only some information on specific retention and mentoring programs for Black men students. Programs such as Brother2Brother and Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) aim to increase Black male student retention and success, especially for those at PWIs (Brooms, 2018). For example, the establishment of SAAB began at a single institution in 1990, and its programmatic structures have spread to over 100 colleges and universities (Brooms, 2018). The SAAB model has six foundational components: personal development, service, academics, financial affairs, spiritual-enrichment/social, and membership/public relations (Bledsoe & Rome, 2006). Cuyjet (2006) suggested that across the
range of various BMI-type programs, they are specific core elements intended to support the needs of Black men students attending any institution. These programmatic structures include faculty-student mentoring sessions and opportunities, academic assistance, and peer group relationships (Brooms, 2018). While most of the literature on BMI programs focus on their infrastructure, there is little to no research regarding its impact on Black male students on college campuses.

Brooms’ (2018) study addressed the impact that BMI programs have had on Black men college students. The findings of the study suggested that Black men and their engagement in BMI programs found: a sense of belonging, increased access to sociocultural capital, academic motivation, a heightened sense of self, and feeling connected to a collective identity and consciousness (Brooms, 2018). While these findings are relevant to Black men’s student success as they engage in BMI programs, there are some critiques of the study. One finding in the study was shared by a participant who discussed their experience in the BMI Mighty Men program:

In places where we’re weak, Mighty Men helps strengthen that…We had one meeting where we went around the room and guys shared things that would be considered ‘feminine stuff.’ One guy said, ‘I have this Katie Perry album.’ It helps you not be so insecure and not be so closed-minded; it builds you up where you’re weak. (Brooms, 2018, p. 151)

This finding helped students reflect on toxic masculinity and heteronormative experiences which occur within the Black community. These programs must redefine how femininity can be healthy for Black men to express their gender. Creating a space where Black male students feel vulnerable to engage in topics about Black masculinity is needed. Dancy (2012) shared that this vulnerability as a masculine construct pushes back against hegemonic masculinity, which informs and encourages men to be tough and emotionless. As stated in the
literature, BMI programs have historically been created to focus on academics (tutoring, faculty mentorship relationships, career development, etc.) and forge interpersonal relationships that aid Black men students to be successful on college campuses. While these components are important to their retention, other critical approaches address pertinent issues that impact their campus experiences. This opportunity is moving BMI programs in a critical juncture to focus not only on academics but also on the importance of educating students about masculinity on college campuses. BGBQM are often treated as invisible in BMI programs due to their sexuality, and it is vital to note how these programs fail to recognize students who do not adhere to heteronormative practices. The next section provides an overview of men color mentorship programs which help us learn about intersectional approaches to programmatic intervention for men on college campuses. This section is relevant to contextualize how BGBQM can experience this programmatic intervention.

**Men of Color Mentorship Programs**

The current literature regarding men of color mentorship programs suggests three factors that impede the success of men of color: low level of college preparation and academic achievement before and during college; barriers to persistence such as a lack of financial support or working full time while enrolled; and inadequate social, emotional, or academic support (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014; Center Collaboration, 2014; Gardenhire et al., 2016; Harper, 2012; LaVant et al., 1997; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2011; Wood, 2014). Most of these programs aim to address college men’s educational outcomes at the community college and 4-year college and university levels. While most of these programs have an academic component to their interventions, there has been a shift to address cultural support
for these students (Gardenhire et al., 2016). Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) has provided some quantitative research on the success of these programs but have only focused on results according to race, gender, and ethnicity to determine program effectiveness within these particular samples (Wimer & Bloom, 2014). One major critique of this research is the lack of disaggregating their sampling-based on sexual identity. Scholars (Garvey & Drezner, 2013) found that LGBTQ students are often not considered in recording institutional reporting of their sexual identity. This record keeping erasure of LGBTQ students impedes their success within mentorship programs and with the university at-large. There needs to be both institutional and societal shifts in addressing students who identify within the LGBTQIA community, regarding demographic information to increase programmatic intervention and success. The next section provides an overview of the current literature regarding BGBQM’s experiences in higher education, to help reveal how they endure unfriendly collegiate environments.

**Black Queer Men’s Experiences in Higher Education**

While there are limited national statistics available, Evans and Wall (1991) suggested that approximately 10 to 20% of today’s college students identify as LGB (lesbian, gay, or bisexual). Garvey and Drezner (2013) suggested that rarely do institutions “maintain information on student or alumni self-reported sexual identity” (p. 203). Recent scholarship has examined two areas for Black men in higher education, issues of gender identity, and masculinity or identity development of Black men and Black gay men college students (Strayhorn & Tilman-Kelly, 2013). Strayhorn’s (2011) survey data study found that Black college men students reported that “real” Black men have sex with multiple women partners, desire success, power, and competition, and display confidence even when they’re not confident. Hunter and Davis’s (1992)
study found that Black men define manhood with three emerging themes: self-expectations, relationships, responsibility to family, and worldview or life philosophies. These societal norms of how Black men perform Black masculinity can create rigid unrealistic expectations and consequences. There is a current shift in higher education, in which scholars (Blockett, 2017; Goode-Cross & Good, 2008; Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011; Henry et al., 2011; Holloman & Strayhorn, 2010; Means & Jaeger, 2013; Means & Jaeger, 2016; Mobley, 2000; Mobley & Johnson, 2015; Patton, 2011; Squire & Mobley, 2015; Strayhorn, 2013; Strayhorn et al., 2010) have researched Black gay and queer students’ experiences on college campuses. Some scholars (Harris, 2010; hooks, 2004; Strayhorn et al., 2010) have examined Black gay men students' understanding of Black masculinity and their experiences in higher education. While most previous literature highlights heteronormative and heteropatriarchal experiences for Black men, it is essential to learn how Black queer men college students experience gender identity and expression in higher education. The next sections posit how BGBQM experience PWIs and HBCUs to help understand how they navigate these institutional types.

**Experiences at PWIs**

Carter (2013) suggested that PWIs are where most research is conducted regarding the experiences of gay students and Black students. Also, many Black students endure racism and prejudice, while gay students face heterosexism and homophobia at PWIs (Carter, 2013). Strayhorn and Mullins’ (2012) study on Black gay male undergraduate students’ (BGMUs) experiences in residence halls at PWIs found that these men face racism from White peers, verbal harassment and physical altercations with same-sex and race peers, policies and procedures that were inherently heterosexist and homophobic, and social isolation among
residents (Strayhorn & Mullins, 2012). Many participants in the study indicated that due to frequent encounters with homophobia and gay oppression, while living with other Black heterosexual men peers, prevented them from connecting with these men (Strayhorn & Mullins, 2012). Harper's (2004) study of 32 high-achieving Black men’s conceptualizations of masculinity found that one bisexual man participant concealed his sexual identity from his peers. hooks (1989) concluded, “Often Black gay folks feel extremely isolated because there are tensions in their relationship with the larger, predominately White gay community created by racism and tensions within Black communities around issues of homophobia” (p. 125).

Additionally, Strayhorn and Tillman-Kelly's (2013) study aimed to understand BGMUs’ construction and negotiation of Black masculinity and manhood. The researchers interviewed 29 Black gay or bisexual college men at six major PWIs. Three themes which emerged from this qualitative study were: BGMUs performing traditionally masculine norms, challenging hegemonic masculinity through behaviors and beliefs, and Black masculinity and manhood affected by social factors. In performing traditionally masculine norms, participants described Black masculinity as “tough,” “economic provider,” and “(HNIC) defined as Head-Negro-In-Charge” (p. 96). The participants shared words that are often associated with heteropatriarchy and heteronormative gender roles. Some participants in the study shared how campus community engagement within the Black men community caused them to conceal their sexuality and assert more hyper-sexualized and hyper-masculine norms to “prove themselves as men to other (Black) men on campus” (p. 97). Additionally, participants expressed the need to compensate for failing to adhere to Black masculinity's traditional standards. Participants would enhance their bodies by exercising or used their athletic abilities to appear more masculine or “pass as straight” to their
peers (p. 97). The second theme, challenging hegemonic masculinity through behaviors and beliefs, aided participants to redefine or disrupt hegemonic masculinity through academic majors (i.e., music, nursing, and theater) and co-curricular engagement (i.e., cheerleading) on campus. The participants shared how they limited their interactions with other Black (heterosexual) men because they were “more different than similar” (Strayhorn & Tillman-Kelly, 2013, p. 99).

Lastly, the third theme, Black masculinity and manhood, affected by social factors, referred to how social factors and social identities influenced participants' ideas about Black masculinity and manhood (Strayhorn & Tillman-Kelly, 2013). Participants shared how their social identities (race, gender, and sexuality) made them feel excluded from other Black men on campus. Some of them expressed a lack of sense of belonging in predominately Black spaces due to their sexuality and racist undertones within the LGBTQ community due to their race. Religion was also a determinant of participants' masculine beliefs given many participants' religious upbringings in churches (Strayhorn & Tillman-Kelly, 2013). These internalized self-beliefs about masculinity and manhood can negatively affect Black men (Steele, 2000). This study is essential to note in learning how Black masculinity and manhood's social construction creates an internal and external constraint on BGMUs. While many of the participants found ways to disrupt traditional notions of hegemonic masculinity, it presents the complex ways in which BGMUs experience the collegiate environment, given their multiple intersecting identities. While this study focuses on BGMUs’ experiences at PWIs, it is vital to learn about Black gay or queer men's experiences at HBCUs. While PWIs are different from HBCUs due to their missions and institutional cultures, BGBQM often encounter similar hostile experiences because of their intersecting identities.
Experiences at HBCUs

HBCUs were established to provide Black Americans access to higher education in the United States when other institutions denied them rights and opportunities to pursue a postsecondary education (Jackson & Nunn, 2003; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Sissoko, & Shiau, 2005). Currently, HBCUs no longer educate the majority of Black students in education; now, PWIs teach most Black students in the U.S. (Means & Jaeger, 2013). While HBCUs are not the primary source of educational access and opportunity for Black students, HBCUs continue to hold a significant role in the higher education community (Palmer & Gasman, 2008). These environments provide opportunities for Black students to engage with faculty members, have access to positive, Black mentors, and supportive peer relationships (Palmer & Gasman, 2008).

Many scholars have found that LGBTQ students endure unique challenges related to HBCU culture and campus climate in which they struggle to find environments that affirm their sexual and gender identities (Ford 2015; Means & Jaeger 2013; Patton 2011; Patton & Simmons 2008). Patton's (2011) study of six gay or bisexual African Americans at HBCUs found that, while these students had positive experiences at their institutions, they revealed having negative personal and psychological trauma as they faced negative stereotypes, isolations, and limitations on future career aspirations by being out at an HBCU. These students often described the importance of being “low key” with their sexual identity and viewed sexual identity as a small part of their overall identity (Means & Jaeger, 2013, p. 48).

Carter's (2013) study of four Black gay band students attending HBCUs examined how they navigate their intersecting identities within the HBCU and participate in the marching band. Carter found that these gay Black men faced a complex duality with being gay while they
experienced anxiety during their time in the HBCU marching band. Themes that emerged from the study were negotiating the “strong” Black man complex, passing (assumption of being heterosexual), and the role of church and family (p. 32). Many participants expressed a sense of belonging and community within the marching band with those who knew about their sexuality. Most participants contended that being in the arts community, they found solace from a society that often pressures them, given their intersecting oppressive identities (Carter, 2013). Mobley and Johnson’s (2019) critical discourse analysis explored the Morehouse College “Appropriate Attire Policy” and how the institutions' lack of inclusiveness influences gender expression for Black gay, queer, and gender non-conforming students. Mobley and Johnson argued that Morehouse is an institution founded by prominent Black, heterosexual, cisgender men alumni coupled with “traditional” masculine expectations (p. 872). This analysis proposed that homophobia within the Black community continues to be prevalent at HBCUs like Morehouse, in which alumni made harmful comments about students who identify as gay or gender non-conforming. This policy perpetuates hyper-masculinity and gender expression such that anything perceived as “feminine” is abnormal (p. 872). HBCUs have been incredibly slow to respond to the needs of LGBTQ students, unlike their PWI counterparts (Gasman, 2013).

Gasman (2013) concluded that the first HBCU institution (Bowie State University) which created a center to service LGBTQ students did so in 2012, and only 21 HBCUs have LGBTQ student organizations. Only three have formal offices dedicated to these student populations. Furthermore, Harper and Gasman (2008) concluded that Black students at HBCUs believe that there is no acceptance of gay students at these institutions. HBCUs perpetuate their conservatism through their campus traditions, norms, and climate (Means & Jaeger, 2013). For instance, some
HBCUs have formally labeled homosexuality as a form of “sexual misconduct” (Harper & Gasman, 2008, p. 343). Scholars Mobley and Johnson (2015) argued that “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). Also, Black gays face hidden and overt forms of homophobia or negative beliefs about homosexuality within the Black community, which continues to uphold conservative views about gender expression, religion, and sexuality (Greene, 1994; Herek & Capitanio, 1995). This literature indicates that various institutional types can have a negative influence on Black gay, queer, and gender non-conforming students’ experiences on college campuses. This research is necessary to note why BGBQM often have limited spaces in higher education to feel affirmed and supported. Thus, this study is vital to learning how they navigate higher education environments.

Summary

The current literature on BGBQM in higher education informs researchers that the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality create additional barriers for these students to persist through higher education experiences. Campus racial climate and LGBT campus climate illuminates how institutions neglect to implement policies and initiatives for marginalized students to find a sense of belonging and community on college campuses. Scholars and practitioners also need to investigate BGBQM’s sense of belonging in academic spaces given the current literature highlights their collegiate social experiences. The mentoring literature is a positive factor in helping Black men persist and matriculate through higher education. However, recent research fails to highlight how BGBQM experience
mentorship programs in higher education. Researchers and practitioners must proactively examine campus climate efforts to effectively and efficiently decolonize institutional toxic cultures and environments.

Furthermore, researchers and practitioners must create programmatic interventions which can support BGBQM on college campuses. Lastly, researchers and practitioners must examine how their institutions perpetuate heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy in their programmatic interventions and initiatives in higher education. Historically, individuals who identify as cisgender and straight have shaped higher education settings (Preston & Hoffman, 2015). Furthermore, Preston and Hoffman denoted that institutions “operate in a way that continues to sustain and reaffirm traditional hierarchies of gendered and sexual oppression, regardless of the various policies, regulations, and diversity programs in place to support LGBTQ students, faculty and staff” (p. 56). This form of institutional structure can prevent BQM from being authentic in their intersecting identities on college campuses. The literature has revealed the complex and challenging environments that BQM endure in higher education (Blockett, 2017; Ford, 2015; Means & Jaeger, 2013; Mobley & Johnson, 2019; Patton, 2011; Patton & Simmons, 2008; Squire & Mobley, 2015). There needs to be more research conducted to further understand and learn how to help BGBQM navigate these higher education settings. The next section extends how the current research on these topics are incorporated into the theoretical framework. This theoretical framework is situated to understand how the literature has segmented BGBQM’s identities based on race, gender, and sexuality.
Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework (see Figure 1) was purposefully positioned after the literature review to illuminate the complex experiences that BGBQM endure in higher education given their intersecting identities. This theoretical framework helped inform the research questions for my study. This framework helped bridge the intersecting identities of BQM to understand better how the current literature needs to merge these three concepts: (1) Queer of Color Critique; (2) Connell’s Notions of Multiple Masculinities; and (3) Intersectionality.

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

Queer of Color Critique

Understanding how BGBQM’s sexuality is important to their development in higher education, it is essential to explore how Queer of Color Critique operates. BGBQM experience collegiate environments that often are oppressive due to their race, gender, and sexuality. Scholar
Roderick Ferguson coined the term Queer of Color Critique (QoCC) in 2004. QoCC illustrates the microcosm of Black cultural engagement narratives with economic and social normative formations promoted by state and capital (Ferguson, 2004). QoCC derives from queer of color analysis, which “extends women of color feminism by investigating how intersecting racial, gender, and sexual practices antagonize and/or conspire with the normative investments of nation-states and capital” (p. 4). This form of analysis uses historical materialism and canonical sociology. Historical materialism happens when social relations are taken over by the traditionally privileged class. Canonical sociology argues that the social relations and views of hegemonic Whiteness are normative approaches in heterosexual patriarchy (Ferguson, 2004). This claim shares that African culture has historically been viewed through heteronormativity and hegemonic discourse. This discursive rhetoric has given us a lens to identify Black culture through racialized, gendered, and sexualized Black individuals' experiences in the U.S. context from heteronormative production and formation (Ferguson, 2004).

QoCC uses a subversive approach to recognize Black culture's other realities from the dominant narrative while acknowledging the contexts of the intersection of multiple identities. QoCC uses intersectionality of Black culture within race, gender, sexuality, and class (Ferguson, 2004). QoCC acknowledges the realities of Black culture within gender, race, and sexual diversity which do not abide by heteropatriarchy and heteronormative formations and provide this community with an agency of their bodies and identities. BGBQM often are immersed in mentorship programs that center on heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity. Thus, these program spaces become harmful to BGBQM. QoCC situates the importance of examining these men’s experiences within the realm of sexuality and conforming to hetero gender norms in MoC and
BMI programs. While BGBQM exist and navigate heteronormative spaces in MoC and BMI programs, it is vital we learn more about how masculinity operates within these mentorship program spaces.

**Connell’s Notions of Multiple Masculinities**

QoCC acknowledges that intersecting identities are important for BGBQM as they experience and explore gender identity and expression within mentorship programs. In learning how BGBQM assert their gender identity and expression, it is essential to investigate how hegemonic masculinity operates. Masculinity can be performed and understood by different cultures, norms, and traditions (Connell, 2005). Connell proposed four main strategies to characterize the type of person who is masculine: (a) essentialist (the essence of masculinity is antiquated with risk-taking, responsibility, and aggression); (b) positivist (logical basis of masculinity/femininity and indicating how men and women experience discrimination between groups); (c) normative (standard to how men act through social norms and practices); and (d) semiotic (ways in which masculine and feminine places are fundamentally differentiated). These four main strategies shape how masculinity is understood and, subsequently, performed. Often, masculinity is interchangeably used with gender (i.e., men). However, to examine masculinity, it is vital to understand its relationship interwoven with gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and other social structures. Hegemony is defined as “the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life” (Connell, 2005, p. 9).

Additionally, hegemonic masculinity is defined as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and subordination of
women” (Connell, 2005, p. 10). Hegemonic underpinnings are derived from cultural dominance in society by using subordination, complicity, and marginalization (Connell, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity operates under patriarchy/patriarchal oppression systems that include behaviors of superiority and authority (Bryan, 2018). Through these behaviors, men, specifically Black men, are socially influenced to preserve power and privilege. While the literature has noted the rigid expressions of masculinity and hegemonic masculinity performed by men, Connell (1995) suggested that there are notions of multiple masculinities. This notion of multiple masculinities involves ending heteropatriarchy ideals, postmodernism, and pursuing equality (Connell, 1995). This pursuit shifted equality to end gender division of economic labor, provide access to education and training, and end stigma within non-heterosexual practices and reconstructing heterosexuality not as hierarchical, but as reciprocity. In contemporary literature on masculinities, Connell argued that these notions of multiple masculinities inform societal normativity outside of binary masculinity and femininity realities and practices. It is crucial to understand and reconstruct how masculinity is performed and expressed within the gender, social, and sexual contexts. In MoC and BMI programs, they often subscribe to masculinity and traditional gender norms. Utilizing Connell’s notions of multiple masculinities helps individuals broaden how they portray their gender identities and expressions within mentorship spaces. BGBQM often perform and express their gender outside of heteronormative and heteropatriarchal practices. This distinction is essential to learn how BGBQM conform to normative practices in higher education environments. Using intersectionality can build on QoCC and Connell’s notions of multiple masculinities that acknowledge the multifaceted identities BGBQM hold as they navigate and experience these MoC and BMI programs.
**Intersectionality**

When conceptualizing the importance of BQMs’ intersecting identities, it is essential to examine how the theory of intersectionality operates. The term "intersectionality" has been used by scholars, researchers, and practitioners in various contexts (Collins & Bilge, 2016). The definition of intersectionality is:

A way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people’s lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves. (p. 11)

The term, derived from scholar Kimberle Crenshaw (1991), centers on how, socially and systemically, African Americans, people of color, and gays and lesbians have been subjected to various forms of oppression and dominance in society. Crenshaw shared that women of color face “intersecting patterns of racism and sexism” and how this marginalization impacts their lived experiences (p. 1243). She further posited that political and social structures often shape how women of color experience the world through the intersections of race and gender (Crenshaw, 1991). The term intersectionality has been used in various contextual spaces in education, politics, and corporations. Collins and Bilge (2016) denoted that students need higher education to address their constituents’ needs which derive from underrepresented backgrounds. As colleges and universities work to meet their constituents’ needs, they often face challenges when addressing these pertinent issues. Pertinent issues such as enrollment, programmatic interventions for underrepresented students, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ students are essential for institutions to address. Institutions must recognize that students are not monolithic
in their identities. There are first-generation college students who can encompass “womxn, returning veterans, grandparents, and transgender” identities (p. 12). Colleges and universities often fail to meet the needs of students who hold multiple marginalized identities. Harris and Patton (2019) stated that “given the analytical strength of intersectionality, it is a powerful framework to guide transformative higher education research, but it must be used thoughtfully and with great caution to ensure it does not become further diminished throughout the research process” (p. 366). Utilizing intersectionality for the theoretical framework helped me understand how BGBQM navigate and make meaning of their intersecting identities through the lens of race, gender, and sexuality. By integrating QoCC, Connell’s Notions of Multiple Masculinities, and Intersectionality, I explored race, sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression with an intersectional framework. Thus, this research is vital to understand the importance intersectionality plays in cultivating an environment where BGBQM can exist and feel supported for their intersecting identities.

**Connections to Methodology**

The theoretical framework directly aligns with phenomenology and arts-based research methodology as it informs the essence of gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality. Phenomenology seeks to examine the essence of one’s lived experience (Dahlberg et al., 2008). QoCC explores how these men assert their sexuality, gender identity, and expression within the context of men of color mentorship programs. Connell’s (1995) notions of multiple masculinities complicate the current body of literature on its rigid notions of masculinity and how it is performed by men, specifically Black gay, bisexual, and queer men. Intersectionality informs how these men grapple with power and dominance structures regarding their involvement and
engagement within these programmatic contexts. As I explored the essence of gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality, it helped inform my research questions. Due to their intersecting identities, BGBQM grapple with these key essences as they are immersed in heteronormative and heteropatriarchy environments. These men are constantly in a state of understanding and shaping their own lived experience, coupled with negotiating how their identities are presented in these men of color mentorship program spaces. Thus, my research questions aimed to explore the evolving notions of intersecting identities and their key role in these men’s experiences within this context.

Summary

The current literature on BGBQM has illustrated their experience through the lens of race, gender, and sexuality. The theoretical framework highlights these salient identities from this theoretical lens. QoCC acknowledges how BGBQM’s experiences are bound through heteropatriarchal and heteronormative practices within Black culture. QoCC depicts how these men often endure hostile collegiate environments due to their myriad identities. QoCC furthers the notion that our identities are non-monolithic. Instead, it acknowledges that our converging identities aid us in understanding one’s identity formation. Connell’s notions of multiple masculinities disrupt hegemonic underpinnings of masculinity in which masculinity is operationalized and performed. This theory can expand social and cultural implications and masculinity performance for ways that BGBQM can express their gender. As masculinity is performed by individuals of varying genders, sexualities, and races/ethnicities, it is vital to disrupt forms of hegemonic masculinity traits that thread our social fabric in education and society. Intersectionality seeks to acknowledge how one’s intersecting identities are experienced
through micro and macro levels when navigating systems of power and oppression. Lastly, Intersectionality recognizes the importance of how power, oppression, and dominance relate to individuals who hold multiple marginalized social identities. Intersectionality helps to situate how BGBQM often navigate through different systems and structures within higher education. As the current literature has illuminated, there has been a lack of acknowledging intersectionality in BGBQMs’ experiences in higher education.

These three concepts help to best capture BQM’s complexities and navigations within the current literature in higher education. BQM must often compartmentalize their intersecting identities in higher education. These men often experience hostile environments in various academic and social spaces in college. This theoretical framework sets the foundation for the imperative work which needs to be addressed within higher education environments to meet the unique needs of BQM. Thus, this study is vital to understand how BQM navigate collegiate environments, specifically in the context of men of color mentorship programs.

The current literature situates how these programmatic interventions do not center intersections of queerness and gender norms outside of heteronormative performativity (Smith et al., 2019). This research study explored how BGBQM grapple with their intersecting identities within these programmatic interventions. Aligned with my theoretical framework, I developed my research questions to explore how BGBQM negotiate their intersectional identity experiences, focus on queer world-making, and disrupt normative performances of masculinity. Thus, I explored how their lived experiences can illuminate how they experience gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality within MoC and BMI programs. As these programs highlight heteronormative masculinity norms, I examined the ways queerness can be explored from a
subversive approach. Intersecting identities should not be examined in monolithic ways, and the research questions merged their experiences from an intersectional lens. The research questions were designed to further explore the complexities of BGBQM’s intersecting identities when navigating higher education environments (e.g., academic spaces). To learn and understand the experiences of BGBQM within MoC and BMI programs, my research questions were:

**Main question:** How do BGBQM make meaning of their intersecting identities in MoC and BMI programs in higher education?

**Subset questions:**

- How do BGBQM define “masculinity” and “queerness” during their involvement in MoC and BMI programs in higher education?
- How do BGBQM negotiate their intersecting identities during their involvement in MoC and BMI programs in higher education?

**Conclusion**

This chapter provided an overview of my literature review and theoretical framework. By researching campus climate, sense of belonging, and BGBQM’s experiences in higher education, I explored the relevant literature in this research area. Thus, creating my theoretical framework informed how I constructed my research questions. The next chapter will outline my methodology and study, utilizing two methodological approaches (i.e., phenomenology and arts-based research).
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter illustrates an overview of my qualitative methodology study using phenomenology and arts-based research (ABR). This study investigated Black gay, bisexual, and queer men’s (BGBQM’s) experiences with negotiating and making meaning of their intersecting identities within men of color (MoC) and Black male initiative (BMI) programs. This chapter provides details regarding the research design and epistemology as a researcher, data collection and analysis, and the design’s strengths and limitations.

Research Design and Epistemology

As stated in Chapter Two, there is limited research regarding BGBQM’s experiences in MoC and BMI mentorship programs in higher education institutions. While exploring my research questions, I utilized phenomenology and ABR approaches within qualitative research. Qualitative research examines how individuals interpret, make meaning of, and construct their lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Merriam and Tisdale shared that qualitative research derives from the idea that individuals create knowledge as they interact and make meaning of a particular moment, experience, or phenomenon. Crotty (1998) stated that “meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (p. 43). As individuals construct, interpret, and making meaning of their lived experiences, qualitative research aims to understand this process. Thus, this study combined two qualitative
approaches (phenomenology and ABR) to best capture how BGBQM make meaning of their lived experiences in higher education, specifically in MoC and BMI programs.

van Manen (2014) stated that “phenomenology is the way of accessing to the world as we experience it pre-reflectively” (p. 28). Similarly, “pre-reflective experience is the ordinary experience that we live and that we live through for most, if not all, of our day-to-day existence” (p. 28). Phenomenology aims to understand the essence of an experience (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). In addition to examining the reflective essence of an experience through phenomenology, arts-based research encompasses the importance of expressing one’s lived experience through art. Merriam and Tisdale stated that “the point of incorporating art into research is partly in recognition of the fact that people make meaning and express it in different ways” (p. 65). Bailey and Van Harken (2014) shared that through photography, music, metaphor, poetry, and other creative expression forms, people make meaning of their lived experience in new and even more profound ways. In addition to gaining qualitative data from semi-structured interviews, creating a podcast style focus group provided BGBQM the opportunity to construct their narratives collectively. The next section provides my epistemological grounding of the study.

**Epistemology**

Using epistemological constructivism helps a researcher construct the world through their perspective and the assumptions that shaped the participants’ (i.e., co-researchers) lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). I referred to my participants as co-researchers to humanize their experiences, rather than signify them as study subjects (Lebolt, 1999). Epistemology seeks to answer questions about knowledge, and phenomenology aims to find the essence of one’s lived experiences (Charles, 2013). As a researcher, I sought to understand how
individuals disrupt “traditional” norms of gender, race, and sexuality. It was essential to co-construct the co-researchers’ lived experiences from their narratives, which shaped knowledge creation and enriched understanding about the phenomenon. I sought to understand how BGBQM experience heteronormative MoC and BMI environments. My theoretical framework was situated to explore sexuality (i.e., QoCC), gender identity, and expression (i.e., Connell’s notions of multiple masculinities) with an intersectional approach (i.e., Intersectionality) to better explore the essence of BGBQM’s programmatic experiences. These various frameworks created a theoretical bridge to address how my knowledge as a researcher was co-constructed using an intersectional lens. Vagle (2018) stated that “phenomenologists use the word “intentionality” to mean the inseparable connectedness between subjects (i.e., human beings) and objects (i.e., all other things, animate and inanimate, and ideas) in the world” (p. 28). Intentional interpretation can create a sense of interconnectedness and seek a phenomenon's essence. Intentionality has allowed researchers to discover how we find meaning in connecting with the world (Vagle, 2018). Given I was working with a student demographic whose intersecting identities are salient to my own, intentionality informed my epistemology as a researcher. Heidegger in the 1900s argued that researchers can never disassociate themselves from the research, which is referred to as dasein (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). Dasein refers to one’s own existence (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). Consequently, a researcher has to have prior knowledge about a phenomenon, which is considered foresight. Due to my prior professional and personal knowledge of the co-researchers' experiences, I used Heidegger’s hermeneutic circle to seek a deeper understanding of my epistemological approach.
Hermeneutic circle refers to a revisionary process in which the researcher seeks to interpret and understand one’s lived experiences (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). This intentionality informed how I repeatedly revisited my own biases and assumptions of my research and epistemology. This proceeded in how I centered these men's intersectional identities through my theoretical framework (i.e., sexuality, gender identity, and gender performance). Thus, this helped me explore the core of how these men experience, navigate and negotiate these programmatic environments. Throughout this dissertation, every decision made considered how this research connects with the co-researchers and the researcher. Through intentionality, I found complex ways of meaning and understanding throughout the research process. This mode of thinking illustrated a complex reality that BGBQM navigate throughout their higher education experiences, as stated in Chapter Two. Thus, this research approach bridged the use of transcripts (e.g., qualitative interviews) with artistic expression (e.g., podcast-style focus group and art project) to understand how BGBQM express their intersecting identities in qualitative research. The next sections provide an overview of phenomenology and ABR and how I bridged these two approaches within my study.

**Phenomenology**

This section highlights the research history of phenomenology while providing critiques to indicate why ABR was vital for this study. BGBQM experience a world that is often challenging and complicated, given their intersecting identities. In researching their lived experiences, this qualitative approach captured the unique ways BGBQM navigate various environments, specifically in higher education.
The philosophy of phenomenology derives from “a focus on the experience itself and how experiencing something is transformed into consciousness” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). Edmund Husserl developed a school of thought in philosophy which bridges the “realms of philosophy and science” immersed in radical approaches and subjectivity (p. 25). This school of thought is the foundation of phenomenology using knowledge discovery to apply human science theories to develop transcendental phenomenology (Dreyfus, 1991; McConnell-Henry et al., 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Husserl’s idea argued that researchers’ initial assumptions must be reserved before starting the research process (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). Husserl’s belief, that phenomenology was descriptive, questions “what do we know as persons?” (Reiners, 2012, p. 1). Husserl believed that descriptive phenomenology explores an individual’s daily descriptions of their conscious experiences while assumptive opinions were bracketed or set aside (Dahlberg et al., 2008; Reiners, 2012). Husserl called this bracketing or phenomenological reduction (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2004; Dreyfus, 1991), which data resulted in knowledge raised awareness of a proposed phenomenon (Husserl, 1931; McConnell-Henry et al., 2009).

Martin Heidegger, Husserl’s student, adopted an ontology belief of being that disputed Husserl’s descriptive phenomenology. Heidegger believed in interpretive phenomenology, which expanded hermeneutics by exploring the notion of being in the world as opposed to knowing the world (Reiners, 2012). Heidegger argued that researchers could not avoid judgment to interpret data (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). He suggested that the researcher’s role is as crucial as the co-researcher’s role, and previous knowledge helps researchers interpret the data (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). Consequently, “personal awareness is intrinsic to phenomenological research” (Reiners, 2012, p. 2). He believed that researchers are “being-in-the-world of the
participant and research questions,” and openness is critical to how one constructs their reality (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009, p. 4). This notion of meaning, to understand or interpret, derives from the Greek word hermeneusin (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009; Palmer, 1969). The origin of this method derives from studying theological scriptures (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009), and hermeneutics is defined as a “way of studying all human activities” (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 2). This foundation for interpreting data allows “the text to speak for itself” (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009, p. 3). Ultimately, hermeneutic research helps to enter a person’s world and interpret the meaning of their experience (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009; Polit & Beck, 2006).

Phenomenology targets our “lived experience” (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016; van Manen, 2014, p. 26). Moustakas (1994) shared that phenomenology’s principles are grounded in examining various forms of a phenomenon or experience, focusing on the appearance of things, seeking meanings, and committing to “descriptions of experiences, not explanations or analyses” (p. 58). Phenomenology demonstrates how to deconstruct one’s lived experience by examining “the essence or underlying structure of the meaning of an experience” (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016, p. 27). The next sections provide the strengths and limitations of phenomenology.

**Strengths and Limitations of Phenomenology**

At its basic level, phenomenology research involves investigating the study of phenomena (Vagle, 2018). One advantage of using phenomenology is that it acknowledges one’s lived experience. Scholars (Baber, 2012; Jourian, 2016; Stewart, 2002, 2009) explored phenomenology by capturing the experiences of students from marginalized backgrounds in higher education. These studies highlight the importance of understanding how students navigate and experience higher education through the lens of phenomenology. A critique of
phenomenology in its inception is its ideological framing from a western man philosopher’s perspective. Sheets-Johnstone (2000) critiqued phenomenology given its use of binary approaches in its thinking and practices from western cultural ideals. Critiques of phenomenology share that it solely acknowledges that individuals construct their meaning (Sheets-Johnstone, 2000). Ahmed (2006) further critiqued phenomenology by extending phenomenology through a queer lens and acknowledging that sexualities and orientations can create new ways of understanding people’s lived experiences. This study continues Ahmed’s argument. As BGBQM exist in higher education spaces, it is vital for research to capture how they experience various contextual environments (i.e., MoC and BMI programs). While phenomenology aims to understand how an individual makes meaning and understands other individuals, this limits how different social constructions, relationships with others, and collective experiences can influence an individual’s meaning. Thus, using ABR research helped me understand how individuals consider how social constructions shaped our worldviews, it raised critical consciousness, and recognized various cultural ideals and norms outside the western context. Ultimately, this research approach helped me understand the ways in which BGBQM express their intersecting identities in higher education.

**Arts-Based Research**

Phenomenologists have often used artistic sources (e.g., paintings, novels, plays, photo-elicitation) to depict lived experiences, and these creative forms used to describe a lived experience (Hetland et al., 2007; Marquez-Zenkov, 2007; Raggl & Schratz, 2004) incorporate visual and narrative approaches. By using ABR, I used more than just visual artistic expression within the realm of phenomenology. Marlon Riggs’s film, Tongues United, documents the
experiences of Black gay men living in the U.S. and uses creative expression to highlight how these men present their perspectives and cultures (Tongues United, 2019). There have been other films and art which illuminate BQM’s experiences. ABR creates new approaches in qualitative research. These approaches gave BGBQM the space to share their narratives through art within the qualitative research design. This connects with my theoretical framework, which situates how these men expressed the complexities of navigating and negotiating their identities through artistic expression. ABR allows these men to trouble heteronormative structures, problematize masculinity norms, and allows their lived experience to be acknowledged through their art.

Words have been one of the primary sources used by qualitative researchers to analyze data (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). However, people often express themselves and make meaning through art, photography, music, story, or poetry. ABR connects creative expression within qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). It utilizes the therapeutic, restorative, and empowering qualities of the arts within psychology, health care, and specialized research (Leavy, 2015). Barone and Eisner (2012) posited that using words alone limits how individuals engage with one another, and using arts-based research creates new ways to express meaning. Leavy (2015) shared that “ABR practices are a set of methodological tools used by qualitative researchers across the disciplines during all phases of social research, including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation” (pp. 2-3).

Additionally, ABR addresses holistic and engaging ways in social research questions which integrate theory and practice (Leavy, 2015). Incorporating art into research honors the fact that individuals make meaning and express themselves in various ways, beyond the written word (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Using ABR in methodology creates “new theoretical and
epistemological groundings that are expanding the qualitative paradigm” (p. 3). By utilizing ABR, one can learn and cultivate critical awareness and raise consciousness in identity development (Leavy, 2015). Using this type of social justice approach in research, ABR aims to disrupt dominant ideologies, build solidarity across social identities, and raise consciousness within gender and critical race scholarship (Leavy, 2015). This form of research is pertinent to uplift voices that are often silenced or erased given their marginalized identities. Further, ABR practices can help facilitate critical conversations to promote dialogue regarding relevant issues to evoke social change (Leavy, 2015). Barone and Eisner (2012) shared that ABR uses various concepts and approaches to understand how to express the arts through research (e.g., genres of narrative construction and storytelling, educational connoisseurship and criticism, and nonliterary forms of arts-based inquiry). Narrative construction and storytelling were essential to this study given BGBQM shared their lived experiences through ABR.

**Narrative Construction and Storytelling**

Narrative construction is when “researchers collect descriptions of events and happenings and synthesize or configure them by means of a plot into a story or stories” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 12). While storytelling, in its inception, began outside the field of education, it is often used to understand how individuals can document and share their narratives, orally (Barone & Eisner, 2012). This form of narrative construction has been used in poetry, novels, ethnodramas, readers’ theatres, and short stories (Barone & Eisner, 2012). This form of construction helped individuals determine their meaning of the world through these expressive artistic conventions. The current dissertation used this form of narrative construction by podcasting. Historically, podcasting has incorporated teaching and pedagogical practices into higher education, student learning, and
development (Bryans-Bongey et al., 2006; Hew, 2008; Lonn & Teasley, 2009). Lastly, scholars found people often listen to podcasts to learn about their own lived experiences, specifically those who identify as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) (Heshmat et al., 2018; King, 2008).

I used ABR in narrative construction to have BGBQM share their experiences within MoC and BMI programs through podcasting. Podcasting is a brave space where individuals create dialogue regarding critical topics, to build solidarity and disrupt dominant narratives within a particular subgroup. Thus, using this ABR approach helped explore how BGBQM made meaning of gender identity and expression, race, and sexuality during their involvement with the program. They described the complicated relationship between masculinity and queerness within the context of men of color mentorship programs. Lastly, this approach provided a new perspective on how the role of MoC and BMI programs can provide a space for BGBQM to explore their identity development.

**Strengths of Arts-Based Research**

As aforementioned, ABR is a concept within which people can find unconventional approaches in qualitative research to convey meanings and more profound ways to express themselves. While ABR provides a way for individuals to assert meanings through art, phenomenology examines the core of one’s lived experiences through research. I used both qualitative approaches to further explore how BGBQM in higher education make meaning of their experiences in men of color mentorship programs. Using phenomenology, I explored how these men negotiate, make-meaning of, and express their intersecting identities by conducting interviews and constructing their lived experiences through storytelling, specifically podcasts.
The podcasts helped BGBQM share and build their narratives in an alternative environment, to better understand their lived experiences. These research approaches were intentional to acknowledge these students’ intersecting identities while also giving them space to share their narratives with myself and the podcast co-researchers, collectively. This collective storytelling approach was intended to empower and cultivate an interconnectedness between the researcher and co-researchers in this study, using these two research approaches. The next section highlights my reflexivity and shares how I examined my biases and assumptions regarding the study.

**Reflexivity**

When engaging with phenomenological research and before conducting a study, researchers must examine their own biases and assumptions about the phenomena (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Given my salient identities and previous professional work, I have similar lived experiences to those of the co-researchers. While our upbringings, connections to higher education, and salient identities varied, there was a shared experience that we co-created and co-constructed throughout the data collection phase. While being the principal investigator in this study, I differentiated myself from the co-researchers by: sharing with them the purpose of the study, facilitating community agreements during the podcast style focus group with the co-researchers, and holding space to share their narratives within this dissertation study. The relationship I cultivated with the co-researchers in the study was vital to how my researcher’s positionality and assumptions paired with methods and critical design decisions (Maxwell, 2013).
In phenomenology, the researcher’s understanding of the topic and problem determines how the data is collected (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, by understanding the study's personal significance, I engaged in “reflexivity” to address my researcher’s lens of the study (Maxwell, 2013, p. 43; Moustakas, 1994). A researcher is pivotal to the research design and approach. In phenomenology, the researcher must have prior knowledge of the study phenomenon (Alase, 2017). Having shared knowledge and experience on this topic helped me cultivate interconnectedness and dialogue. My lived experience as a cisgender BQM, who previously served in a programming role in men of color mentorship programs, was critical to share within this study. The next section provides the methods I employed for the research study.

**Research Method**

The purpose of this phenomenological and ABR study was to explore BGBQM’s experiences in MoC and BMI programs in higher education. In phenomenology, the researcher seeks “to conduct a rich and ‘thick descriptive’ research study” (Alase, 2017, p. 13). Information-rich cases contribute to the learning of central issues, important to research (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Information-rich cases helped me, as a researcher, learn about the important issues for BGBQM in MoC and BMI programs (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Understanding and learning about the phenomena of how they make meaning of their experiences was essential to study.

**Recruitment and Selection**

By centering sexuality, gender identity and expression, and intersectionality, my initial unit of analysis for this research required co-researchers to:

- Identify as Black
• Identify as gay or queer
• Be enrolled as an undergraduate student at a 4-year institution within the city of Chicago, Illinois
• Have current or past involvement and participation in a men of color mentorship program

I used purposeful sampling to discover and learn about my research populations (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Purposeful sampling is used when the researcher seeks to identify and understand a specific study sample (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Given the population of these students who hold multiple marginalized identities, finding co-researchers for this study was challenging. Previous research has indicated that MoC and BMI programs have challenges supporting men who identifies as non-heterosexual (Smith et al., 2019). Given my previous professional experience in men of color mentorship programs, I used network sampling to contact professionals who currently work with men of color mentorship programs to help identify co-researchers who were eligible to participate in the study (see Appendix B), in addition to contacting potential co-researchers using email, separately (see Appendix A).

COVID-19

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I made some decisions to shift the direction of my study. Before COVID-19, I sent recruitment materials to MoC and BMI program offices and my current professional networks. Consequently, I received some interest, but no students emailed me due to COVID-19 and institutional transitions to residence halls and campus operations closures. While my initial plan was to conduct face-to-face individual interviews and podcast-style focus groups with co-researchers in Chicago, Illinois, this posed a challenge. Many students were unable to leave their residences due to quarantine and COVID-19 restrictions. Thus, to
create safety precaution measures for my potential co-researchers and myself, I changed how I recruited and collected data for my study. Given this was a new research study, I expanded the recruitment efforts for co-researchers to span across the United States since physical location was no longer a factor in their participation. This change created an opportunity to broaden my co-researchers’ participation criteria. I changed my initial unit of analysis (i.e., two and four year-institutional types, adding co-researchers who identify as bisexual, involvement in BMI programs, and current student or alumnus of these programmatic interventions) to increase the number of potential co-researchers who qualified for my study. Thus, my qualifications changed for co-researchers to:

- Must be 18 years of age or older
- Currently an undergraduate, graduate student, or an alumnus of a 2- or 4-year institution
- Self-identify as a Black queer, bisexual, or gay man
- Currently involved or an alumnus of a men of color or Black male initiative mentorship program

Recruitment strategies consisted of submitting targeted recruitment posts to various social media sites (i.e., Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram). Due to recruiting for co-researchers using multiple media sites, utilizing snowball sampling allowed for my use of networking connections with professional colleagues and friends to post about my dissertation study. Changing my participant qualifications yielded professional, graduate, and undergraduate students interested in my dissertation study. Thus, my study consisted of men interested in sharing their lived experiences with me, as the researcher. The next section provides my data collection process for the study.
Data Collection

This section details how I collected data for my dissertation study. In phenomenological research, the researcher must center the lived experiences of their co-researchers, to guide the research study’s story (Alase, 2017). The data collection process was conducted using a profile sheet, semi-structured interviews, a podcast-style focus group, and an art project as sources to gain information from co-researchers for this study. The profile sheet helped obtain some demographic information from each participant in the study. The semi-structured interviews helped investigate BGBQM’s individual experiences through the lens of phenomenology. The podcast style focus group gave BGBQM a constructive narrative space to share their stories through an ABR lens. The art project involved co-researchers selecting a piece of art (i.e., drawing, photo image, poem, etc.) to represent their experience in MoC and BMI programs. These data sources provided meaning and understanding of the phenomena (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Each method of data collection provided a more in-depth understanding of these participants' experiences within MoC and BMI mentorship programs.

Creswell (2013) described the importance of unfolding the meaning of a phenomenon. A study can have as many as 10 co-researchers, and my study consisted of 11 co-researchers. The demographic information of my co-researchers is listed (see Table 1). I conducted 11 interviews and three podcast style focus groups. The co-researchers' identities comprised gay, queer, and bisexual cisgender men who attended PWIs, except for one co-researcher who attended an HBCU. Eight co-researchers were involved with a BMI program, and three co-researchers were involved with a MoC mentorship program. Grounded in my research questions and coupled with phenomenological and arts-based research methodological approaches, the data collected sought
to construct this phenomenon and capture the essence of gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality within MoC and BMI programs.

Table 1. Co-Researchers’ Overview of Race, Sexual Identity, Gender Identity, Institutional Type, Classification, and Program Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSEUDONYM</th>
<th>RACE</th>
<th>SEXUAL IDENTITY</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>INSTITUTION</th>
<th>CLASSIFICATION</th>
<th>PROGRAM TYPE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wayne</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>Cisgender Man</td>
<td>Private, PWI</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>BMI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamal</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>Cisgender Man</td>
<td>Public, PWI</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>BMI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>Cisgender Man</td>
<td>Private, PWI</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>MOC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shawn</td>
<td>Biracial/Black</td>
<td>Pan/Bisexual</td>
<td>Cisgender Man</td>
<td>Private, PWI</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>MOC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kai</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>Cisgender Man</td>
<td>Public, PWI</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>BMI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brendan</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Cisgender Man</td>
<td>Private, PWI</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>MOC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriel</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Cisgender Man</td>
<td>Private, PWI</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>BMI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tre</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Cisgender Man</td>
<td>Public, PWI</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>BMI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Gay/Same Gender Loving</td>
<td>Cisgender Man</td>
<td>Public, HBCU</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>BMI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Cisgender Man</td>
<td>Private, PWI</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>BMI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germain</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Queer/Gay</td>
<td>Cisgender Man</td>
<td>Private, PWI</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>BMI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Co-Researchers Fact Sheet Form

This co-researcher fact sheet form provided pertinent information regarding each participant, which captured their experiences in MoC and BMI programs. Before the interview, co-researchers completed a profile sheet (see Appendix C) which inquired about some
foundational data. By understanding this study's phenomena, I gathered multiple data sources (i.e., profile sheet, semi-structured interviews, podcast-style focus group, and art project) to ensure triangulation and allow the findings to emerge (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). The information included each co-researcher's preferred pseudonym name, institution, race, gender identity, sexual identity, classification, and program type (i.e., MoC or BMI program). This form was distributed to each participant using the Qualtrics survey platform. This information was not used for quantitative purposes but rather to enrich the phenomenological study. To explore the phenomena of BGBQM’s experiences in men of color mentorship programs, I used the following data sources: interviews, podcast-style focus groups, and an art project.

**Interviews**

Interviews are often used to gather data in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). The primary purpose of interviewing is to learn “a special kind of information” from an individual or group (p. 108). Vagle (2018) explained that “all interviews are treated as exciting opportunities to potentially learn about something important about the phenomenon” (p. 87). Individual interviews can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). This study used semi-structured interviews, which consisted of question topics and a fixed section of questions (Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 2013). The interviews helped me learn more about the complex realities of queerness, gender identity and expression, and intersectionality in these programmatic interventions. I met with each participant using the Zoom video communication platform. Using online data collection methods can provide a brave space environment for co-researchers to share sensitive information about their lived experiences (Alase, 2017; Nicholas et al., 2010). Each co-researcher scheduled an individual Zoom interview appointment time. In
using semi-structured interviews (see Appendix D), I asked the co-researchers various listed and open-ended questions, as well as probes for additional information to which they responded (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016).

The length of each interview ranged between approximately 30 to 90 minutes. Each participant expressed unique and critical openness when discussing their experiences in MoC and BMI programs. Co-researchers were asked questions regarding their understanding of gender identity, gender expression, sexuality, and mentorship program experience. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, with audio transcriptions kept in a password-protected file on my computer. Each co-researcher was given access to audio transcriptions for feedback. Once the interviews were completed, I wrote detailed notes and reflections of my own interpretation and feelings provided in my researcher’s journal. After I conducted the co-researchers interviews, they participated in podcast style focus groups.

**Podcast Style Focus Group**

A focus group gathers a collective of individuals to be interviewed about a knowledge topic (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Stewart and Shamdasani (2015) shared that “a primary difference between focus group research and other types of research, such as surveys, individual interviews, and laboratory experiments is that data collection occurs in, and is facilitated by, a group setting” (p. 17). This group setting allowed the co-researchers to learn more about each other’s’ lived experiences within the realms of queerness, gender identity and expression, and intersectionality. Focus group discussions guide a specific topic, and “during the group discussion co-researchers share their views, hear the views of others, and perhaps refine their own views in light of what they have heard” (Hennink, 2014, pp. 2-3; Merriam & Tisdale, 2016).
Co-researchers were asked, on the formal sheet, if they were willing to participate in a focus group (e.g., podcast).

Each podcast style focus group was conducted using the Zoom video communication platform. These podcast style focus groups consisted of three classifications, including undergraduate, graduate, and professional. I had one co-researcher for the undergraduate podcast, two graduates for the graduate podcast, and three professionals for the professional podcast. The podcast-style focus groups paid homage to a current podcast called The Read. The Read is a podcast which integrates popular cultural topics, and the hosts listen to letters from listeners of the show, and gives ‘the read’, which allows the co-hosts to share a flaw regarding a particular topic of interest (The Read, 2019). The Read podcast is facilitated by two Black queer individuals, Kid Fury and Crissle West, who are unapologetically Black and queer. They speak about topics which involve Black queer individuals in society. The Read podcast framework was the inspiration for my podcast-style focus group.

Prior to conducting the podcast, co-researchers completed a survey (via Qualtrics) to garner their input regarding topics they were interested in exploring. After listening to each interview, I gathered some contextual information which guided the facilitated topics and questions I wanted to explore further in the podcast style focus groups. As a co-constructivist researcher, it is vital to co-construct your study with co-researchers’ input in mind (Alase, 2017). The podcast style focus group questions (see Appendix D) consisted of topics regarding BGBQM identity (i.e., Blackness, queerness, masculinity, femininity, etc.). Co-researchers were emailed a short one-minute video to start a discussion in the podcast style focus group regarding the complexities about conversations of Blackness, queerness, and masculinity. This one-minute
YouTube clip discussed a recent dialogue between Lil Nas X and Kevin Hart on the HBO series called The Shop. This one-minute clip incited discussions around engaging in Blackness, masculinity, and queerness, specifically with other cisgender heterosexual Black men. The length of each podcast was approximately 30 to 120 minutes. All podcast style focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed, with audio transcriptions located in a password-protected file on my computer. Each co-researcher within each podcast was given access to audio transcriptions for feedback. Once each podcast was completed, I wrote detailed notes and reflections of my interpretations and feelings provided in my researcher’s journal. This podcast space provided the co-researchers with a brave space environment to engage in critical dialogue and reflect on their experiences in MoC and BMI mentorship programs.

Art Project

ABR allows individuals to connect artistic expression to their lived experiences in research (Barone & Eisner, 2012). The art project was designed to have co-researchers create art to make meaning of their lived experiences. Expressing one’s lived experience through art helps them understand how gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality manifest in their mentorship experiences. Co-researchers were given an opportunity to create a piece of art (e.g., drawing, photo images, etc.) to represent their experience in their MoC or BMI program. Co-researchers were also provided reflection questions regarding their art selection. During the podcast style focus group, some co-researchers shared their art piece. The co-researchers created various art pieces, such as photo images, poems, and musical lyrics. Some co-researchers did not have their art piece to share with the group. I followed up with co-researchers via email for them to submit their art projects and complete their study participation.
Data Analysis

This section outlines how the data was analyzed for my study. The data analysis process occurred through the lens of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA aims to understand lived experiences and investigate how individuals make meaning of their experiences using social norms (Noon, 2018; Smith & Osborn, 2003). Noon (2018) posited that in “two commitments of IPA- ‘giving voice’ and ‘making sense,’” researchers seek to attain an ‘insider perspective’ of lived experiences (p. 75). My theoretical framework focused on exploring how my co-researchers experience sexuality, gender identity, expression, and intersectionality within MoC and BMI programs. My data set consisted of the participant's profile sheet, interview transcriptions, podcast-style focus group transcripts, and individual art projects. The data analysis phase was completed by coding each interview and podcast-style focus group. As an inductive process, qualitative data analysis allows data to develop from common themes, patterns, and categories (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). The coding process was completed using a qualitative research software called Dedoose. The interview and podcast-style focus group transcripts were read to identify common themes from co-researchers’ responses to find the essence of the study’s phenomenon (Alase, 2017).

In addition to following IPA commitments, there is a seven-step protocol to ensure data analysis: (1) reading and note-taking; (2) taking notes for emergent themes; (3) connecting to emergent themes; (4) producing a table of themes; (5) continuing to the next case; (6) creating a final table; and (7) writing up the research (Noon, 2018). IPA allowed my co-researchers to seek the essence of queerness, gender identity and expression, and intersectionality within these programmatic interventions. This initial stage was done by listening to audio and written
transcripts to take annotative notes to gather my thoughts, observations, and reflections of each co-researcher’s interview and podcast-style focus group narratives. The second stage was completed by reviewing my annotative notes to connect to specific excerpts that aligned with the essence of gender identity, sexuality, and gender expression (Noon, 2018). Smith and Osborn (2003) advised searching for connections between emergent themes, in chronological order. As I found emergent themes, I created clusters to connect the sub-themes from the interview and podcast-style focus group transcripts (Noon, 2018). As sub-themes were collected into a single document, I created a table of themes. This table of themes consisted of interview and podcast-style focus group excerpts connected to the essence of my co-researchers’ narratives (Noon, 2018). The fifth stage consisted of continuing to the next stage and repeating each interview and podcast-style focus group transcript. As I analyzed each transcript, I created a final table of themes. This was completed by reviewing the table of themes per co-researcher and podcast-style focus group transcripts. The final stage sought to distinguish between the co-researchers' narratives and my interpretations of the data to best capture the essence of gender identity, sexuality, and gender expression within MoC and BMI programs (Noon, 2018). This section is further explained in Chapter Four by discussing my co-researchers’ experiences using a podcast script artistic narrative.

Data analysis was employed by reading each interview and podcast-style focus group transcription and keeping a journal for research notes throughout the data collection and analysis process. Using reflexivity tools (positionality) in this process helped me achieve this. Please see my researcher’s reflexivity section in this chapter, which details how I connected my personal
and researcher positionality for my study. The next section provides the strengths and limitations of IPA.

**Strengths and Limitations of IPA**

IPA acknowledges the subjective experience as scientific data (Bush et al., 2016; Noon, 2018). IPA’s inductive process can aid co-researchers to share unexpected responses from open questions (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Noon, 2018). IPA is accessible and flexible given its comprehensive language in educational research (Noon, 2018). Because IPA researchers employ a dualistic reality between co-researchers’ responses on opposite ends of a single theme, tensions can emerge with presented data. IPA is very cautious about generalizability claims. Due to sensitivity and exploration of personal experiences, co-researchers may feel an array of emotions, “which can present researchers with a range of ethical dilemmas” (Noon, 2018, p. 82).

**Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research is constructed based on assumptions or inferences. Therefore, validity and reliability must be achieved in an ethical process (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Ratcliffe (1983) explained that "one cannot observe or measure a phenomenon/event without changing it, even in physics where reality is no longer considered to be single-faceted" (p. 150). This citation determines that our underlying assumptions in qualitative research are multiple forms of truths and realities to be explored and investigated. In phenomenology, validity is ensured by the researcher's constant engagement with the phenomenon and the co-researchers' experiences with the phenomenon (Dahlberg et al., 2001, 2008; Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2001). To ensure qualitative credibility, the researcher must engage in thick description, triangulation or crystallization, and multivocality and partiality (Tracy, 2010). This was achieved by using
multiple data sources, member checking, researcher's reflexivity, and a peer debriefer (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Peer debriefers were chosen by researchers with phenomenological expertise to ensure I analyzed my data correctly (Rolfe, 2006; Sandelowski, 1993). The multiple data sources consisted of interviews, podcast-style focus groups, and individual art projects to ensure credibility (Tracy, 2010). These data sources created a thick description of the essence of queerness, gender identity and expression, and intersectional frameworks of BGBQM experiences within MoC and BMI programs. Changing my unit of analysis (i.e., professionals, graduate, and undergraduate students) yielded an increase in the study’s credibility. Member checking was utilized by sending the interview and podcast-style focus group transcriptions to the co-researchers for feedback (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). To address any inconsistencies with multiple data sources, I engaged in multivocality by contacting co-researchers for feedback regarding the individual and podcast-style focus group transcripts (Tracy, 2010). Lastly, reliability was ensured by using an audit trail, research journals, and memos to track and reflect my researcher’s experience with multiple data sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Engaging in crystallization, I gathered multiple data sources aligned with my theoretical framework to seek a richer and more complex understanding of the study’s phenomena (Tracy, 2010). Thus, these various strategies used helped to analyze and interpret the data in a detailed and accurate process for the dissertation study. These strategies were employed when I wrote reflective notes about each strategy in my researcher’s journal.

**Limitations**

Some strengths of the study were discussed in the research design and rationale study section. However, there are some limitations to my dissertation study to note. This dissertation
sample represents social identities based on race, gender, and sexuality. The proposed population was chosen based on men of color student demographics from previous literature findings in Chapter Two. Another limitation was the nature of co-researchers self-reporting their social identities. This research study aimed to best capture co-researchers who identify as Black gay, bisexual, and queer individuals. The literature has shown that Black gay men tend to conceal their sexual identity from others (Strayhorn & Tillman-Kelly, 2013). I asked the co-researchers to share how they make meaning and negotiate their intersecting identities in this programmatic context. Lastly, there is a demographic of students who may struggle with accepting their sexual identities who this study does not represent. While this study aimed to share the perceptions of these men’s experiences, there are no direct observations of their experiences. This study primarily relied on BGBQM’s perceptions rather than direct views of their experiences within the MoC and BMI programs.

Wiersma (2000) stated that “because qualitative research occurs in the natural setting, it is extremely difficult to replicate studies” (p. 211). Given this study used two different methodological approaches, there are some limitations in its research design. A limitation of phenomenology is its emphasis on generalizing “lifeworld subjectivity” (Ziakas & Boukas, 2014, p. 1). The findings could risk falsification of the reality and representation of reality between co-researchers and researchers (Sandelowski, 2006). While this study focused on BGBQM’s experiences within MoC and BMI programs, the study’s findings did not generalize this demographic and programmatic intervention. Atkins (2012) shared that one limitation was how academic research can pose challenges to “address adequately the complex questions of human experience” (p. 61). Additionally, Atkins denoted that art-based methodologies can propose
stimulating research opportunities to offer substantial contributions to research methodology in various fields. While this study aimed to merge different qualitative methodological approaches, it is vital to share limitations regarding the study.

**Conclusion**

This chapter provided an overview of my methodology. It included the research questions, research design and rationale, my epistemology as a researcher, data collection and analysis processes, and the design’s strengths and limitations. By using semi-structured interviews, podcast-style focus groups, and individual art projects, I explored the co-researchers’ lived experiences more deeply within this programmatic context (i.e., MoC and BMI programs). By merging phenomenology and ABR, BGBQM constructed their meanings and understandings of their experiences within MoC and BMI programs in higher education. Using IPA to analyze my data, I aimed to explore the essence of gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality in my data collection methods, using data triangulation for my dissertation study.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Utilizing IPA allows the researcher to examine the lived experience of researcher co-researchers to explore “the deeply-rooted causes of the phenomena” (Alase, 2017; Wu & Wu, 2011, p. 1305). This dissertation explores the essence of gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality within MoC and BMI programs. This phenomenon (i.e., Blackness preferred, queerness deferred) creates a complex state of consciousness for Black gay, bisexual, and queer men (BGBQM) in these programs to exist as gay, bisexual, and queer men. The phenomenon illuminated that Blackness is omnipresent in how BGBQM understand and express themselves within these programmatic spaces. However, their Blackness is viewed as subordinate due to their gay, bisexual, and queer identities in these programs. The challenges are that Blackness in itself operates from the lens of heteronormativity. Thus, these programmatic spaces are positioned and function from a heteronormative, cis-patriarchy lens. This heteronormative space inhibits BGBQM from genuinely existing in these spaces with their Blackness, sexuality, and gender. BGBQM are continually negotiating and shifting their thinking because these programs center cis heteronormativity, as stated in Chapters One and Two, rather than exploring femininity and queerness. This phenomenon highlights that Blackness is welcome. However, expressing femininity and queerness is tolerated rather than accepted. Consequently, these men often have to compartmentalize their identities (i.e., sexuality and gender) that renders their queerness and femininity invisible. The presentation of these findings seeks to unearth the lived experiences of
As stated in Chapter Three, Black queer people use art to express how they navigate and experience the world. Mckenna and Darder (2011) posit that “art is a form of resistance since it seeks to reinterpret reality, engage in it controversy” (p. 673). Consequently, art uses a complex and multifaceted approach to dismantle oppressive structures while seeking possible solutions to address pertinent social issues (Mckenna & Darder, 2011). It was important to present my findings to capture the complexity and nuance of BGBQM experiences in MoC and BMI programs. Podcasting is a space where Black queer people can collectively share and co-construct their narratives in a brave space environment. Aligned with my co-constructive epistemology stance and theoretical framework grounded in sexuality, gender identity, and expression, and intersectionality, a podcast provides a thick and rich representation of my data sources. To represent the data sources (i.e., interviews, podcast-style focus groups, and individual art projects), I synthesize the rich data sources into one substantive artistic narrative (i.e., podcast script). Thus, this findings chapter will be designed in the form of a podcast script, threading the collective narrative experiences of BGBQM within MoC and BMI programs.

**Podcast Script Format**

Thus, this oral narrative will integrate these men’s stories through a podcast script. Due to the expansive narrative podcast script format, I have decided to break this chapter into two chapters to provide the reader space between the podcast topics. I have provided some nonverbal cues to emulate an oral podcast to add to the podcast script’s descriptive effect. Each topic will
outline emerging themes from analyzing my data methods (i.e., interviews, podcast-style focus groups, and individual art projects). Each participant quote will be cited by data source and date to interweave the data sources in an analysis format. Aligned with phenomenology and ABR, this chapter will highlight how these men made meaning of their intersecting identities and revealed how they negotiated their myriad identities inside and outside these programmatic spaces. This podcast script template provided an organic flow, ad-libbing, and organizational structure to capture these men’s experiences in a cohesive format. Please see the template below as the podcast script will follow this format:

1. Podcast Cast
2. Episode Notes
3. Sponsor message
4. Introduction
5. Musical jingle/sound effects
6. Longer explanation of what’s in store
7. Topic 1
   1. Main point
   2. Supporting point
   3. Supporting data
   4. Supporting quote
8. Segue
9. Topic 2
   1. Main point
   2. Supporting point
   3. Supporting data
   4. Supporting quote
10. Sponsor message
11. Segue
12. Topic 3
   1. Main point
   2. Supporting point
   3. Supporting data
   4. Supporting quote
13. Segue
14. Topic 3
   1. Main point
   2. Supporting point
Podcast Cast

Wayne is a Black bisexual man working at a private PWI institution. As a higher education professional, he has previous experience in creating a BMI program.

Jamal is a Black queer man pursuing his graduate degree. He attended a public, PWI institution as an undergraduate student. Jamal was involved in a BMI mentorship program as an undergraduate student.

Jay is a Black queer man pursuing his undergraduate degree. He attends a private PWI as an undergraduate student. Jay is currently involved in a MoC program at his institution.

Shawn is a Black and Biracial pan/bisexual man pursuing his undergraduate degree. He attends a private PWI as an undergraduate student. Shawn is currently involved in a MoC mentorship program at his institution.

Kai is a Black bisexual man pursuing his graduate degree. He attended a public, PWI institution as an undergraduate student. Kai was involved in a BMI mentorship program as an undergraduate student.

Brendan is a Black gay man working in a private PWI institution. As a higher education professional, he is currently serving as a mentor within the MoC mentorship program.

Gabriel is a Black gay man pursuing his graduate degree. He attended a private PWI institution as an undergraduate student. Gabriel was involved in a BMI mentorship program during his transition into college.
Tre is a Black gay man pursuing his undergraduate degree. He attends a public PWI as an undergraduate student. Tre is currently involved in a BMI mentorship program at his institution.

Roger is a Black gay man working at a public HBCU institution. As a faculty member, he was involved in creating a BMI program during his time as an undergraduate student.

Isaiah is a Black gay man pursuing his graduate degree. He attended a public PWI as an undergraduate student. Isaiah was involved in a BMI mentorship program as an undergraduate student.

Germain is a Black queer man pursuing his graduate degree. He attended a public PWI as an undergraduate student. Germain is a higher education professional supporting an MoC at a private PWI institution

From the Outside Looking In

Episode Notes

Femme-ing, living in a cishet masculine world, and centering Blackness are just a few topics of From the Outside Looking In. This podcast centers eleven narratives of Black, gay, bisexual, and queer men’s (BGBQM) experiences in men of color (MoC) and Black male initiative (BMI) programs at higher education institutions. Learn about how these BGBQM experience what Quortne calls “Blackness preferred, queerness deferred.” Join Wayne, Germain, Isaiah, Tre, Gabriel, Jamal, Kai, Brendan, Jay, Roger, Shawn, and Quortne as they spill tea, throw shade, and read higher ed spaces that are dominated by heteronormativity and hyper-masculinity.
Sponsor Message

From the Outside Looking In is a written podcast that examines the experiences of Black, gay, bisexual, and queer men’s within MoC and BMI programs in higher education. The narrator’s voice is in italicize font.

[This podcast episode was recorded in studio in Chicago, IL]

Topic 1: Femme-ing and the “M-Word”

[As “The Way” by Jill Scott before music begins to fade, you hear the entire group scream “GRITS,” Quortne begins to speak]

Quortne: That is my favorite part of that song, I just love Jill Scott. Well, I want to welcome you all to From the Outside Looking In, a digital podcast narrating the experiences of BGBQM within MoC and BMI programs at colleges and universities. In each episode, you will hear about these men’s lived experiences from their own words.

Furthermore, I’ll share my understanding of these men’s lived experiences while interpreting their narrative experiences. I hope that through each episode, you invite yourself into their lives. This invitation centers on their stories. From the Outside Looking In allows readers to center Blackness, femininity, and queerness through storytelling.

Today’s episode unpacks the societal constructs of Blackness, gender identity and expression, and sexuality from your personal, professional, and mentorship experiences in higher ed. Today, we will hear from Wayne, Germain, Isaiah, Tre, Gabriel, Jamal, Kai, Brendan, Jay, Roger, Shawn, and myself of From the Outside Looking In in hearing more about how they define masculinity and queerness. First, I’m excited to hear your thoughts on this question. Can you all share with me, “how do you define masculinity and queerness and how it shows up for you all”?

[As they all look at each other, deciding on which person should speak first.

Wayne thoughtfully shares how masculinity and queerness can be complicated terms to operate and express within LGBTQ communities]:
Wayne: I think oftentimes, society tries to make those two separate entities as if they can't coexist at the same time. Interesting enough, I was just having a conversation about this with a friend of mine last night, about how even within the LGBTQ community where you would think there'd be a little bit more flexibility in terms of queerness and identity and expression of sexuality.

That there's still this need to strive for ideal optimum masculinity really been something that I've noticed over the years, especially moving from [Midwest] and purposely working in [Midwest] to coming out here and seeing how not only is that message very similar in those three contexts, but I was very different in these three contexts.

So yeah, masculinity is very toxic space to be in. And when you add the level and layer of queerness on top of it, it becomes even more so problematic. And something that I can't separate out of it is then how much racism then plays into it too. Because then it's just layer on top of layer on top of layer. So I often think of those three, and just how they're entangled but how they can also be problematic because they're striving for something that somebody else has identified for us to utilize and therefore navigate the world, when in actuality it's a social construct that shouldn't have been there in the first place.

[Roger gives an anecdote to how he refrains from using the word queerness and how it does not fit how he identifies]

Roger: My first thing, I'm queer, I guess I'm not saying that I'm totally opposed to it. I just don't. And that's primarily because and this is gonna sound really crazy, because I'm also very black and very southern, and I use the N word all the time... Queer has definitely changed. I think now I've had I have the language for for my understanding of queer again, not to say that I wouldn't use it. I have used it. I tend not to, and when I do, it's kind of like, I don't feel right.

As a thing of offense to me, it's for me, I know that people are using it now to sort of as a, in a in many ways, not everybody but sometimes as a catch all for all of these different identities within the spectrum. However, I would prefer this is also why you shouldn't tend not to say people of color because I like to also be very intentional about who I'm talking about. So if and if I can't take out that I said this on Facebook about something else, but if if one can't take out the time to identify and call someone you know, in a very appropriate way and not use a catch all you got to check it. You I think maybe you got you maybe at times you gotta check you know your intentions.
Isaiah: I think when I hear masculine and queerness a lot comes to mind. It's very hard. I think that I would say, if we look on apps, you know, the idea of certain gay individual’s queerness. There's a huge trying search for masculinity, but I feel like if you're searching for masculinity, it's a feminine trait. I think then, what I mean by that quote is that so long we've been bullied for being feminine or being flamboyant, or whatever or not, per not sticking to traditional hegemonic black masculinity. That it's hard to navigate some of those arenas sometimes.

And so sometimes masculinity is a double-edged sword you both we both repress it, but we still want it. And we want to obtain it. And sometimes when it comes down to queerness, it becomes it can become pretty toxic that we're trying to push this image like this is what masculinity is, so nobody won't pick on me anymore. And as a result, that's why we look to masculinity. That's why a lot of I think a lot of masculinity sometimes tries to a lot of images on the media tries to downplay femininity. But at the end of the day, it's usually always the feminine guys that are the ones doing the work so the masculine guys can reap the benefits that they need.

When we look at Marsha P. Johnson, we look at we look at the individuals that are doing the work behind HIV are and pushing in that are in the in their in that work aspect is the feminine gaze. It's the trans women, trans men, gender non-conforming, gender nonbinary it's those individuals that who we consider quote unquote feminine and not transmits excuse me, but like trans women that we can necessarily consider feminine are those individuals that are meant to work for the quote unquote, masculine, stereotypical white muscle gays to do their thing?

Jamal: Whew. If any, we did talk about this in my class, about masculinity and how we define that also incorporating toxic masculinity. And I think for me, I, it's hard for me to answer that masculinity question because when I think about it is always rooted in a negative connotation. Like, I can't because to me a healthy man, I don't I don't know. I can see a healthy masculinity and I feel like with queerness that's a little bit of both I think it just depends on how the person to define it for themselves and for me.

Quortne: Thank you all for sharing. Does anyone else want to share their thoughts?
[Germain, affirming Wayne’s story, shares how he thinks masculinity operates from cis-white men]

Germain: Yeah, so I think masculinity is also one of these things. I think we’ve been taught a very specific understanding view of masculinity, thinking about it as being attributed to Male identified folks often folks who are a sex assigned male at birth, folks who have penises, and thinking about like men that are strong men that are able to provide men that are the hunters the aggressors, able. I honestly aligned a lot of what I’ve learned about masculinity with cis-white maleness.

And so, anything in the category of a white, privileged male, that is what masculinity aspires to be. And so, when we think about communities of color, queer men of color, were often not afforded the same opportunities or access that white males are, whether queer or straight, and so we're never meet that standard of what masculinity is. And so, I think that is a lot of, well, I won't get into that, but a lot of the reasons why we have issues with like toxic masculinity in communities of color is because of that issue.

[Tre, looking over at Germain and Wayne, shaking his head in agreement, shares how he doesn’t subscribe to masculinity (i.e., “M word”) and how men uphold masculinity practices]

Tre: That That M word it just I can't relate to it. It doesn't. It doesn't really captivate me doesn't grab my attention. It’s a word that has been more oppressive to men than beneficial. Holding up men up to the standard of masculinity is like almost the same as being oppressed. Because not all men fit up to that standard because we're not all meant to fit up to that standard. So, the idea that masculinity is something that, you know, was, I didn't say conjugated it's something that was like, decided, by society to make men more appear a certain way or look a certain way, or come off a certain way.

[Kai, decides to chime in after Tre, expressing how toxic traits have been exposed to Black men throughout their upbringing]

Kai: I just feel like not that I grew up in a toxic household when it comes to toxic masculinity, it's just that I see through just my interactions like through undergrad just through just enter like, like mills and all that I've seen a lot of toxic traits that most Black males carry because of the way they were raised up and stuff of that nature. Not to blame my parents because you know, I tell people all time, parents teach what they know.
And so, they know that's why they're going to teach it. But it's up to us to change that toxic mentality. It's up to us to really change, like, how we go about handling males, and more specifically, how to speak about Black males. So, handling Black males and then growing up in today's society.

[Isaiah furthers what Kai's anecdote, shares how being both masculine and feminine can be challenging and frustrating when he in different spaces as a butch queen]

Isaiah: I'm in that. It's hard. It's frustrating. It's annoying sometimes. But it's the role the role that I have to play, whether I acknowledge it today or whether they acknowledge that tomorrow or you know, I don't know if you're religious person or two people doesn't maybe watch it just, but you know, God, whoever you believe in the Goddess, whatever. They are the same book; they all talk about the same book. But when you look at that full circle, you have to do the work that necessity needed to be sometimes that scary being the first being the first is always terrible.

Why? Because you're the rough draft, you're gonna burn, you're gonna get the races you're gonna get the scratches, you're gonna get the right the red mark like this and shit. But you have to continue to push for so that the next generation can do better. And that goes down the line. It goes down the line, and no, I'm not necessarily the first. I'm one of many rough drafts, but I'm not there yet. I think that you make your space, and you make your you make yourself full supported, and you make yourself feel that you belong there. I think it's always a constant battle of gayness of Blackness of queer identity of masculinity and femininity, that like for my identity, because as a butch queen, I'm both masculine and feminine. I'm very gender fluid. So, depending on which way I want to take it. My identity as when I'm more flamboyant I have for you stay where you have to just stand your ground. And it's hard, because you don't think you don't think people are going to respect you. Well, you know, they'll respect you, of course, face value, but are they really trying to understand where you're going?

[Isaiah continues on sharing why he loves to identify as a Butch queen in owning his femininity]

Isaiah: Because baby, butch queen all day, honey butch queen all day. Now we're getting to a topic I like, I think honestly, (laughing) femininity. Searching for masculinity is a feminine trait. So, let's start. Let's start there. And what I mean by that is that when you have this when you search for a masculine me, Ah, that's what it is. But
I think that femininity is it's pure, it's under it's the Yin to the Yang of masculinity, but it's much more nurturing. It's often seen as weak when it's actually I think more powerful than masculinity.

I think that masculinity is an outward looking that this power while femininity is an inward looking that is powerful. Though you, I might appear to be soft and supple on the forefront, I cut your throat, and you wouldn't even know. Um, so it's a sense of false bravado. Um, but I think that femininity comes into play with like, again, that's with the creative side that's the that's the I'm, I'm me, and I'm only gonna be me, and I'm gonna force myself to have to express myself in the way that I want. Where masculinity is a strict, rigid rules. Femininity to an extent is more open and freeing.

[ Gabriel, who adds to what Isaiah shares in how he often has to change his voice tone as a nurse when working with specific patients]

**Gabriel:** And you know, just trying to figure out when my femininity comes out when my masculinity comes out, like I remember, I see patients at a hospital. And so, this happened like two days ago. So, I was approached by this patient and voices Hi, Hi, my name is Gabriel. I'm here to help blah, blah. And he looked at me a certain way, and my voice dropped like I dropped out voice immediately. I mean, I did it so quickly. I didn't even like, I saw myself doing it in a way…well, that didn't feel good.

I mean, by the end of the his session with me I was as gay as I want it to be, but it's just seeing how I was like triggered to, cold switch real quick and just give him this blank sort of less dramatic, less nice and sweet tone. Ah yeah. Ah, but yeah, I do I that's why I picked the [art curation] I did because it just exudes who I want to be and even oh, I'll show you this even the my [art curation] for when I like block out my camera I've just love this picture of me because it embodies who I want to be like moving forward in life like just here present and it's as feminine as I want to be. Yeah. But it's been hard. (Podcast Style Focus Group, June 2020)

[ Jamal agreeing with what Gabriel shared, expresses how he views the word queerness and what it embodies for him]

**Jamal:** I feel with queerness that's a little bit of both I think it just depends on how the person to define it for themselves and for me. I believe that queerness is more of a liberation in a sense of I'm able to embody and embrace the feminine energy that I have and not become hyper masculine or toxic in a sense of whatever spaces that
I'm in. And so, you know, I'm not saying I'm perfect and every space I go into, I'm like, Oh, I'm just gonna do this.

I'm gonna have this healthy energy within myself, but also do find myself to check myself and don’t no need to exert my masculinity I can just, you know, become or whatever the case may be. So, for me hard to find queerness is more so just liberation and understanding that I can embrace all sorts of energy that I embodies what is masculinity and femininity, I like to have a balance of both.

**Quortne:** Thank you all for sharing, whew chile.

*[Folxs in the space laughing and smiling at one another]*

**Quortne:** So, what I’m hearing is you all saying is that you experience tensions within your identities to exist in various spaces as BGBQM. Whether internalizing how you all define and experience masculinity and queerness, it can pose as separate sides on the same coin. While gender and sexuality performance will always inform how you express your intersecting identities, being a BGBQM creates more complex ways of being for you all as you shared Wayne. For you, Germain, you brought up a great point on how we can’t separate masculinity from its construction from whiteness, specifically white men.

Tre, while you loathe the “m-word,” there is a standard that men often have to emulate within a society that operates in masculine norms. Kai, you shared that Black men often are socialized with specific messaging about harmful masculinity practices within the home environment. As you all express masculinity and femininity as Blackmen, there are times when you experience some dissonance with other cishet men.

Isaiah, I appreciate how you provided some layers of complexity, even within our communities, to express our gender. I’m sure it is cumbersome to express your identity as a butchqueen, given how others perceive you complicating existing cishet gender norms. Gabriel, having to negotiate your voice change as a nurse is very taxing to do not only in a health profession but as a Black gay man. You should never have to deepen your voice to accommodate for someone else’s comfortability. Finally, Jamal, its beautiful to hear for yourself, its healthy to balance masculinity and femininity.

This is something I would like to further explore as a group in our next topics. You all speak to how we, as BGBQM, are situated in the context of being hyper-visible in masculine centered spaces like MoC and BMI. However, at times, you discern when you feel comfortable enough to express your gender performance at others’ expense. That discernment can prevent you all from existing at the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality.
It’s very insightful for you to provide these various perspectives on how you all define these words and experience them as BGBQM. I look forward to hearing your thoughts on the next topic that further explores your lived experiences in MoC and BMI. I want to extend my appreciation to you all for sharing your lives with me and the audience.

[You hear claps, fingers snapping, and side chatter between the men in the space]

Segue

This topic dived into exploring the confines of masculinity and queerness for these men in their MoC and BMI program spaces. We will further discuss how they experience MoC and BMI programs within their Black gay, bisexual, and queer identities as men.

Topic 2: “I feel like I’m tolerated, and I show up as I am”

Quortne: Okay, so switching gears and topics, I’m super intrigued to hear how does navigating your Blackness, gender identity and expression, and sexuality within MoC and BMI programs.

This might start a bit of a reading and dragging session, but it’s important for you all to share your experiences and narratives with others. What’s been some of your experiences in MoC and BMI programs and how have your identities shaped those experiences?

[Tre’s share why he was apprehensive to join the BMI program for more people that looked like him]

Tre: I was tired. I had no, I was tired, I wanted no part of it. Then I realized, you know, me moving to Houston was a big transition. And I wanted to learn to open myself up more. I wanted to learn to not be so guarded and pessimistic and actually allow people to help me. I think that’s what it was, and I applied, and it was very difficult for me to allow myself to be emotionally vulnerable. Not even that I would just share with people how I felt about certain topics, you know, because we all have points of view and we will share things and I might people actually think like this. I can't even. You know and I knew you all share, but you know, during the interview process, it was stressful because I feel like from the jump, I did not belong here.

I was like those are straight heterosexual men that have a goal of being in business and economics and maybe stocks or had to contribute to the government
in that way. And it would be music elementary school teacher. And none of them necessarily connected to the arts and I'm very influenced by the arts and all the restoring all of them are more cool with each other and have a more understanding of sports, and I was like, this is like middle school and high school over again, like, I don't fit in here, I don't belong here.

So, they asked me, you know, they asked you in the group interviews, which I think is stupid, but group interviews are so intimidating. And I'm comfortable with just me. I want to talk about being here is enough. Then they asked me why should you be an [mentorship program student]? And I said because I don't fit in here, and there needs to be more people that look like me in here.

[Jay, who acknowledges Tre's experience, shares a different experience on how his MoC mentorship experience gave him space to “form his identity without judgement”]

Jay: I think it really much is just from the exposure to gay Black men on campus or to even other Black men on campus and how I can be myself around other men of color. And it really helps that they're my age a lot like the students and so that way I can really form my identity without judgment. And so, when I go out into the world with my identity, I don't feel attacked or persecuted or like insecure about anything because I know that you know, at the end of the day, my friends got me and that's something I don't think I touched in a lot [MoC program] gave me a lot of friends that I know I can always go to in that I see around in class.

Almost three of my roommates were in [MoC program] or even the two of them still are in so it's kind of like, really gave me a sense of self. So that that's, that's something I'm really grateful for.

[Kai shares a similar sentiment on how his BMI program has been beneficial to him and his peers in their holistic development]

Kai: Honestly, just I would say the importance of these type of mentoring programs it can't just be, we want to have a program, we want to show that we care about Black males. It has to the intention has to be there. I care. I cared about my men so much I literally, if any of them called me today, I would do anything for them honestly and they know that, but just to just to reiterate like the importance of these programs and how much it has influenced males of just not even just the community identity, but just all identity and how it influences all males in a sense, so that's pretty much it.
[Jamal, chiming in shares the importance of having the program director as his mentor]

Jamal: I think my [BMI program] was the foundation of my identity foundation of just me as an individual. I think also because my mentor was the Director of the program. And so, our relationship will continue to form and strengthen because of the program and I was always willing to help him, I will always, even when I didn't want to be a part of the program, that I felt like I was outdated.

I've always had a hand in it, and some sort of way and so we also put on a [BMI program summit], in which we invite our high school students and also college students to create their pipeline for high school to college. That program really helped me and inspired me to become a McNair scholar and with I did research setting sexual abuse against Black men. And how it affected their masculinity and because of my personal experience and so that's another way back to the live question of how I understood masculinity and my queerness identity because through that research.

[Shawn adds to what Jamal was sharing how he expressed the admiration and love for his Program Director]

Shawn: Definitely, [my Program Director], [my Program Director] is honestly I've never met a man with a kinder heart than him. I've never met a man who could, who would put more on his back and on his heart than [my Program Director], I could honestly just cry right now.

He’s like, oh my God, I've never met somebody who would be, who would listen to you cry for an hour, and then you'd laugh for another two hours after that. It's so crazy. It's so crazy. And then you would do some work for like four hours after that.

Quortne: It’s beautiful to hear you say, Shawn and Jamal, that you both have had such strong relationships with your program directors. Kai, I can tell you truly care about the program and the men who were involved in it. Jay, I’m happy to hear that your program experience gave you an opportunity to build queer kinship with your peers in the program. Tre, I’m sorry to hear that your introduction to the program was not a positive experience.

I can gather from the conversations that you all have experience a variance of experiences within your MoC and BMI programs. I really appreciate you all for sharing these different experiences, I know some of you that have shared are
current undergrad and graduate students. Would any of the professionals in the space share their experiences in their roles within MoC and BMI programs?

[Brendan shares how he really valued building strong connections with students in the program]

**Brendan:** It was interesting. Yeah, you know I think I would just curious how they were experiencing life. I'm always super intrigued by young people who just go through life naturally, you know, as a queer person. That felt so foreign to me, you know, in my teenage years and even in my early 20s, but I was like, "What are you? What are your conversations look like?" You know, because I think, for me, anytime I found someone who was secretly like, gay or whatever it was, like we were talking about facts we were talking about, like, you know, all the taboo things that we couldn't really talk about openly because we had a present as hetero.

So, I find myself super curious about their lives. And they not doing nothing other than talking about class. And drama that exists in the community, and maybe from conversations to topics sprinkled in there.

[Roger then adds sharing mentoring his first student at the HBCU he was teaching]

**Roger:** Oh, yeah, probably my very first student at [his HBCU institution]. My first male student, really, really good. Well, you know, fine bass, you know, potential for a really good voice. He was, he was just kind of given to me. You know, a lot of times at our school, we don't get to pick who gets into our studio. So, he was just kind of like putting my studio. It was my first year he was he was a freshman. And I vocalize them. And I said, now look, I was at the piano. I looked up and I said, Well, I'll be dang. Okay, good voice. (laughing) And I saw this little tall, skinny boy, you know, and I think the other thing that's a little different is in turn are shaping. You know, he was. So that was what 2015 or 2015 I think fall 2015. So, you know, he's 18 I'm basically fresh out of grad school.

[Isaiah, who pauses for a second, shares the overwhelming positive inspiring experience he had within a mentorship program with all BBGQ men]

**Isaiah:** Oh, it was a phenomenal I mean, phenomenal, phenomenal, phenomenal. I'm one I think that I've never been in a room with that many Black gay men who were quote unquote educated. You had doctors, you have lawyers, you have businessman you got HIV advocates, it was just some range of individuals in the
writer’s dot. And it was just a range of range of people that I felt seen. I feel sometimes individuals we're always that one other. That one in the room. And it's hard. It gets fucking tired.

I need you all to give me something just a little bit special so that I can feel like I'm not always by myself or I'm not gonna always be the one representing my community.

Roger: At [my undergraduate institution], myself and two or three other young men, it was actually my idea too. I wanted to start a chapter of the [BMI program]. So, I've got, you know, I got some folks together. And one of the guys he was, you know, an SGA and stuff and performing Arts with SGA. So, people knew me around and we, you know, we had got a close friendship. Eventually, we're sitting in his apartment at school, we're talking about you know, all sorts of stuff. We started talking about, you know, gay folk, and I was like, well, this is this and this. How does like, I was like “bro you realize I'm gay right”. And he's like “oh, man, okay” and it just changed everything. So, the conversation stopped.

Now mind you we've already talked to we are already in good talks and good connection with the with the [chapter of the BMI program]. They're already like ready for us to go. You know, the university is pretty much tapped like Okay, were good. We can set this up. That all stopped. That was maybe my sophomore year, junior year.

Quortne: Thank you all for sharing that. Brendan and Isaiah, I’m happy to hear that you both have been able to build strong connections with your mentees and other BBGQ men. It’s really important to not feel like you are the only one that identifies within the community. In learning more about everyone experiences there seems to be a thread that even in the midst of finding community within MoC and BMI programs.

To add to Roger’s story, he shared a different narrative of feeling othered or different within the mentorship space as a gay man. If anyone is willing and able to share, has anyone else had a similar experience?
[Tre, tapping the mic as if he's Pray-tell from Pose, expresses how he feels tolerated but not accepted within the BMI environment]

Tre: I have really been out there I haven't done anything ridiculous; you know, I haven't said anything that's out there. I haven't really made my opinion or presence known as often, but they've made their opinions about queer people all the time. And I just haven't said anything because I mean, I don't debate I state facts. They don't have facts so we shouldn't talk about it. So, I'm okay with not talking about things they don't know about. I'm okay engaging, because it's not even about getting one up on them. It's just, I don't have time. I don't have energy, you know, all the willingness rather to debate or go back and forth with certain issues.

But the program, I think, could use a little bit more work with understanding that there are other minority males that are also LGBTQIA. There's another member and I feel they tolerate him too. He's like, way more feminine than I am. But I feel we're definitely tolerated.

I feel you know, because we're in the same group. We can't necessarily be mean to each other. We can't necessarily judge one another. But they definitely asked us to hang out. They don't have our numbers. We don't really interact unless we're in meetings. And so, which is fine, when we're not so it's not a it's not a fraternity at all.

Remember that it's not a sense of brotherhood, even though that's what they like to call it. But that's not what that is. This is us giving back to a community and coming together as a minority group, not necessarily establishing a family type environment.

Gabriel says “damn I'm sorry, Tre” to Tre as he shares how he didn't feel comfortable in sharing his queer identity within his program. Gabriel is thinking what to say.]

Gabriel: No. Of course, no, no, I know. It was. I mean, it was a lot. For me, I felt a lot of anxiety. Even though I felt at the time, like I was focused on scholarships and money and building my resume and what can I put on scholarship applications. If anything, I was like super anxious I remember them asking me to like to pray during this like session, like to pray for the food or whatever. And just be so anxious. I've been probably anxious most of my life seriously. But yeah, as far as being supported or like, it's okay to be gay or like be yourself and no, it was not that for me.
That's a hard question to ask. Because I think at the time “Hell’s No absolutely not”. Don't miss me with, “Oh, you think I'm gay?” But as an adult, me right now. Absolutely. For sure. I think that's just so important. Even if the kid does not want to participate, knowing that they have that avenue to, talk about those things.

And even if it was just a thing where they said, you know, hey, this is sort of a one off or actually, I probably would not have been okay with a one on one session with adults. I'm not cool with that. But like if they said like, hey, if you want to, express, you know, your gender identity in the oboe, blah, like, here's a number that you can call and, you know, talk to a counselor or something. I probably would have snuck into that, for sure.

**Quortne:** Wow, I’m a bit speechless [you hear a few men respond, “it’s always been like this in some respects” and “it be like that sometimes”] that you both have had experienced such harmful experiences in your programs. To experience feeling isolation and concealing your sexuality within these programs shouldn’t have to be.

Both of your narratives bring up something I wanted to go a bit further into. From our conversations, I’m curious to hear from folxs in the space how have you all navigated your gay, bisexual, and queer identities within your programs?

[Germain, pushes up his chair closer to the mic, talks about sharing his queer identity and why he feels it’s not needed to come out as a queer professional]

**Germain:** I think a lot of my personal opinions around coming out in a professional and personal settings. Is that it's unnecessary and the only folks that come out in a lot of ways are queer folks, LGBTQ identify folxs. So, my straight younger brother never has to come home to his to my parents and say, “Hey, I'm dating this girl and in work where sports professors like he's never actively identifying as a straight Black male”.

And so, for me, it's why am I taking on the extra labor and burden to always identify my identity or in my interactions because me being Black isn't going to change. My productivity or the way that I do my work. It may change the content of my work or the or the communities that I actively try to center in my work, but it's not going to change how well I do my job.

And it's not going to change the ways that I support students my queer students as support similarly to my straight students. And we may have different conversations around what their experiences are, but yeah, I think that's more of my goings as in, I shouldn’t, or I don't feel that needs to disclose my identities at
all points within my professional career? Because my work is still going to be my
work.

[Wayne then interjects and tells a story about the importance of his bisexuality
visibility and expressing his identity]

Wayne: Well, I'm often coming from work. So, wherever I work that day is where usually
I show up or went to the gym before that is how I show up. I think I'm
comfortable and just showing up however I am so I think that's something totally,
yeah I mean yeah I usually am coming from work so I hair is up in a bun or
something or it's down like this depending on how pro Black I'm feeling down my
throw on a head wrap just so people know not to mess me.

Don't mess with me. Today is not the day. (laughing) Um, yeah, I don't yeah, I
don't actually I don't do too much to, go to that group, I just show up as I am.

Quortne: Hmm very interesting that you both shared similar experiences in navigating your
identities as professionals. Germain, I agree with you that we should not have to
“come out” especially in a society that doesn't deem the same narrative for cishet
people.

They never have to come out, because heteronormativity is situated as the default.
Wayne, come on with showing up as you are. That’s so important to speak your
truth in any space. For the undergrad and grad students in the space, do you all
have similar ex

[Kai, began shares his thoughts on sharing his bisexuality identity with his peers]

Kai: Oh, I actually share my identity with those who I knew identify within
community, not great and under greater, larger the community. And it was more
so because I am a very private person in general. It wasn't me just, I'm not trying
to you know hide my identity does. I mean, if you acknowledge but yeah, no. It
was inside those community I did, let them know if you ever need anything like,
you know, I got you, I'm here for you.

I wanted all my students to know like, regardless of whatever, like, I will always
be there for them…Oh, openly, probably not. Because like I said, if you asked, if
you and I'm gonna be honest, like, I don't I'm not gonna lie.

So, it's don't ask don't tell type of situation....so it’s if you're asked me imma tell
you but you'll ask me. I mean, it is what it is. It is. Yeah, I still love you and
support you. So that's what I think about it in a sense of yeah. So, if they asked me
I'll say yeah.
[Shawn, agreeing with Kai, shares how comfortable and as he says “casual” it is to share your queer identity within the MoC space with his peers]

Shawn: I mean, it's really casual. It's not you know, like we all sit in a circle and just be Hey, I'm this... it just comes up in conversation or sometimes we don't even have to say, it's just we talked about, be our partners and then use their pronouns or like, talk about like, Past relations or just talk about if we're hanging out or something be Oh, they look cute, whatever, whatever, you know what I'm saying…. just comfortable.

Why would it matter? You know what I'm saying? It's that feeling. It's just, you know, he's my friends, you know?

[Jamal shares how he shared his queer identity with his peers and some of the conversations he had with them around queer relationships]

Jamal: I think for me, but more so in my circle, um, and so one thing to provide context, I didn't really come into having conversation, I'm thinking about it, or even came out until about my, toward the end of my junior year beginning of my senior year. And so, really happened in that time frame, I would say between junior and senior year. And it really happened to my core group, which is about four or five men. And, one, I'm only one who identify, they identify. I don't know if he identify that's a whole another story. But we know he had quick experiences.

And so, we've had those conversation I'd like to say I've never really had it in a group segment with them. It was more so probably one on one. And it was, it was good like the men that I talked to whether, you know, if they were straight, it was still a good conversation. And it also me grinding them up too because it would just be like one of my, one of the guys that I talked about the one the researcher we were having a conversation about relationships. And he was trying to make it seem like and I felt like I sided I think there was somebody else in the conversation too.

And I felt like an outsider and I think because of the language they were using, and then it was just, "Well, you know, you have, you know, you wouldn't know because you know, you mess with men." I'm like, mmmm. that's problematic. And I'm grinding you up about it because just because I pursue, I have relationship with men. Doesn't mean the content of the foundation of the conversation isn't like I still am a part of it because at night, it's also about masculinity or femininity.
Because there are, even in queer relationship, there's always that dichotomy of one person or more than one person more feminine. And it's still wishes. That's a whole nother thing. But I still could be a part of the conversation I even dated women in the past. So, I know so I haven't gone too much about it. I was just, I understand and I'm not coming for you.

But I'm just saying, be critical about how you engage in a conversation moving forward. And I think that's more than labor work for me, and I've learned that I mean, I think that's also applying those to my relationship with white individuals and how you know, and kind of giving them grace and meeting them where they are because some people just don't know.

And I have to do a lot with Black history, typically straight Black men and giving them grace and saying okay, I get that, you know, you think like that, but especially when I'm in the space or just in general moving for like, you don't have to be more conscious of your language and how you can be more inclusive and bring in like, we could have a comment about relationship as a whole.

[Quortne looks up at the ceiling, gathering his thoughts]

**Quortne:** Thank you all for being vulnerable and sharing your stories within this space. Kai, I think it’s so important for us to be mindful that our identities don’t have to be shared with everyone. It’s truly a gift to be invited into our lives as gay, bisexual, and queer men.

Thank you, Kai, for reminding us that. Shawn, there is an organic vibe I hear when you talk about your identity with your peers. It’s comforting to hear that’s been your experience within these programs. Jamal, you bring up great points about how we often have to navigate not only our gay, bisexual, and queer identities with friends who are supportive, but also have to “read” them to “grinding them up” as you eloquently put. You know we have to “read” them sometimes to get our points across.

I’m sure we all have had moments, many moments that we had to call folxs in for them saying some problematic things. Actually, let’s take a few mins to take a break and recenter ourselves before we go into the next segment of the podcast. Does anyone have anything else they would like to contribute?

*[The group just looks around at each other and folxs start saying “yeah let’s take a break, I need to get something to eat”]*

**Quortne:** Okay cool, yeah let’s take a break and then will be back in a few mins.
Segue

This topic explored the ways in which these men experience their MoC and BMI programs in an array of experiences. Some of the men expressed challenges in navigating their sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression in predominately cis-hetero men environments. This topic many of the men shared this complex of being Black while being gay, bisexual, and queer. The next topic will unpack more how they experience different spaces outside of these programs.

Sponsor Message

From the Outside Looking In is a written podcast that examines the experiences of Black, gay, bisexual, and queer men’s within MoC and BMI programs in higher education. The narrator’s voice is in italicize font.
CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS PART II

The previous chapter captured how BGBQM define masculinity and queerness and experiencing complexities of being Black, gay, bisexual and queer within their mentorship experiences. This next chapter continues the podcast script, exploring how they experience cisheteronormativity within MoC and BMI programs. This final findings chapter will end with centering artistic curations made by the co-researchers.

**Topic 3: “Living in a Cishet Masculine World”**

**Quortne:** We are now back and I hope y’all are ready for this next conversation. I know for the past two topics we talked about how you all define masculinity and queerness and your experiences within your MoC and BMI programs. I wanted to switch topics on a different conversation about our identities exist in other spaces, like the barbershop.

I know in MoC and BMI programs, getting your haircut is something that is talked about. Hopefully, you all got a chance to look at the clip and no worries if you didn’t. I asked you all to watch and listen to a one-minute clip about an HBO show, The Shop, that involved a conversation with Lil Nas X and Kevin Hart prior to the episode.

[You hear the folxs say “Whew, here we go”, “Come on, let’s get it going”, and “If you stay ready...you ain’t gotta get ready”]

**Quortne:** Okay, folxs are ready from what I’m hearing. So, can people share what their thoughts of the video and what are some of your reactions to the clip and if anyone has had similar experiences in a barbershop?

[Roger, eager to start the conversation, shares his thoughts on the clip and how it bothered him]
Roger: I will say that that clip felt very familiar, whether that's a good thing or not is another part because there are aspects of it that are... You could say problematic, but troubling because what you hear Kevin Hart saying is, "So what? So what?" And it's, so, it doesn't matter that this young person, that young man is declaring all of who he is and loving all of who he is?

Because the thing is, you get to do that! You come into the world and say, I'm a Blackman and act a certain way, and you don't have to make any definition or provide any clarity regarding anything else about yourself and can even, because if we're talking specifically about Kevin Hart, can even historically say problematic things across the board, not just in terms of gender sexuality. So, it's like familiar, but then because you hear that and just, Oh, he's trying to say "So what?" And this is what I interpret, to his mind it's, "Oh, I don't care. I believe in equality." And it's interesting, it's sort of like, is this submissive? Is this submissive how we have our non-Black colleagues, and I wouldn't just say white colleagues, but non-Black in general because other folks will say this and they'll say, "Oh, I don't see color. It doesn't matter who you are."

It's really the same dynamic now within this smaller microcosm space, not just the macro, but the more micro. You're saying, "Oh, so he's gay. I don't see that. It doesn't matter to me." Well, when you don't see someone's color, when you don't see someone's fullness, you're not doing an attempt to really see them in their full humanity. It's mad disrespectful, it's very flippant, and you think you're doing the right thing and that's what's so troubling. Yeah.

[Jamal, who looks up at the ceiling for a millisecond, goes on to share how he thinks the clip invalidates queer people in barbershops]

Jamal: I think it's something that we all we're gonna have to continue to deal with being black, queer, especially in dealing with cisgender straight Blackman is this you have to reaffirm your queerness and I sense this idea of, no one care no one blue and it's just the invalidating my one your invalidating my voice. And you invalidating the experiences that we have Black queer men have to base in the straight Black spaces, typically a barber shop like that even setting.

I think it I don't think people truly grasp how important that was because oftentimes the barbershop can be the most toxic, detrimental, harmful space for Black queer men. And so, for someone like Lil Nas X to talk about his experiences in that space with profound way, spoke a lot to me.

But the fact that again, you have a strict treat Black men who oftentimes can take themselves out of their reality and put themselves into someone’s else shoes and saying, Oh right, no one cares like when do you read a book? Like do you do you
know, everything nowadays? You do you read a read? Have you read a book? Do you know did a reading?

[You hear people in the space say, “they don’t read...that’s the problem”, Wayne chimes into what Jamal said, sharing how the clip prevents gay, bisexual, and queer men to repress their identity]

**Wayne:** I watched the clip twice and I did it intentionally to watch it twice because I wanted to watch it one time to kind of get my knee jerk, instant reaction, take a moment, think about it and then watch it again. But even after watching it the second time, the, "So what?" felt very disingenuous for me. It didn't feel that it was, it didn't have this nature of, "I hear you. I accept you. I don't care that you express yourself that way. I'm going to love you anyway." Which is what I think a lot of people attempt to do when they say that "So what?" kind of comment.

And there was that, just this underneath of like, "So what? Don't talk about it." As opposed to embracing what it actually is and that feeling never left after I watched it the second time, because there's so many people who will say that "So what?" And it's in this nature of like, you can be gay as long as you don't talk about it. You can be this as long as you don't talk about it. Similar to, you can be Black, but don't be too Black.

**Quortne:** I know we are talking about the clip with Lil Nas X and Kevin Hart, but this brings up some really good discussion about being in the barbershop as a gay, bisexual, and queer man.

[You hear a bunch of voices saying “well, this bout to get interesting”]

**Quortne:** Yeah, I get it. I don’t have the best thoughts about the barbershop either, but I’m curious can people share about their own experiences within the barbershop given your identities.

[Jay shares his experience in having a Black lesbian barber and how comfortable he was getting to know her]

**Jay:** It's, it's funny how the world works. During COVID I got this new barber kinda because my old barber... has sickle cell, right? So, um, she's a Black lesbian woman in [Midwest] who ended up needing to share all these similar life experiences, like experiments is a very, special place. And so, it was I feel like that really changed it for me because, instead of the barbershop being this place of, masculine energy. You know it's always it's always it's been interesting cuz I
feel every barber means always a good person kind of yeah. I don’t know I think it's just been really interesting just that the influence that you can get from your barber on things.

Quortne: Thank you for sharing that Jay for sharing. Having a barber who is a part of the community is so important for us. I’m happy that you have that in your life. So, I want to talk about something I haven’t brought up in our time together yet, Blackness.

You all have talked about being in spaces with other Black men, primarily cishet Black men. It’s something I’m interested in hearing more about your definition of Blackness, especially as gay, bisexual, and queer men. What does Blackness mean to you?

[Jay continues on to talk about what Blackness means to him from a lineage perspective]

Jay: What is Blackness to you? Oh my gosh, I think Blackness is. I mean, maybe it was from flagging BlackAF on Netflix, but I think, um, someone, made the comparison that Black people are the ugly history of America. I think that's, where we kind of, kind of I think that's kind of where it comes from. I think that's why a lot of people feel guilty when you talk to them about those kind of things. And, I think that's what Blackness is, to me. I think like this is knowing that your ancestors, kind of like we talked about it, we're You know, like my ancestors were slaves, they, you can you can trace them back to a plantation. And you could probably trace them back like a financial transaction. It's crazy.

Gabriel: Man, Blackness man, it's is everything it makes me when I think about it, at its core, what makes me Black it makes me so beautiful and just makes me so happy and proud to be Black. Because I haven't always been proud. I grew up in rural South, small town in Arkansas. My dad's a pastor. And so, I think he kind of sort of passed along. Like the notions of like how not to be instead of, instead of cultivating my Blackness, it was more about don't do this, don't do that. And eventually you'll be successful. Which, in a lot of ways, it served me and helped me a lot.

But now, as I get older, I'm just finding, trying to find more ways to, cultivate and appreciate my Blackness and know, that it is warranted it's needed, it's worthy, it's
everything and spaces. And it's not about me, being for instance, in my doctoral program, it's not about me being there, to try to be like them. It's being there to be me. Because I am there, you know. Yeah, and I mean, I'm not I've been in this program for two years already, and I'm still working on that I've been I feel like I've been in school my whole life, but it's finally taken me like this many years thirty something to like figure that out that you're not here because you're trying to be like them you're here because you're you. And that's enough, you know. So, yeah, that's one of the thing about Blackness.

[Isaiah agrees with Gabriel in the beauty of Blackness, but gives his own understanding of Blackness is a double-edge sword]

Isaiah: I agree with Gabriel. I think Blackness is beauty. It's grit, it's malleable. Because there's no one way to define Blackness though we all like to try to define it in one way but it's so malleable that we are all together by the unique experience of being Black. I think it's also about turning something you know, giving nothing and making it beautiful. It is definitely an onyx a stone beyond comparable. The mother of all but I think when you are blackness, it’s a double-edged sword on some time.

And meaning that when you are so gifted, so great, people want it. And then when they have it, they don't know what to do with it, you know, and I think it becomes so difficult to try to really get through these particular situation. But it's so powerful. It’s undefinable I think that's what Blackness is. I mean, really, that is what Blackness is. And I, you know, you for me, I can't define Blackness without my queerness it goes hand in hand it is a merge.

And then I went on a date with a guy a couple of days a couple weeks ago, and he was saying that he defined he found his queerness before he found Blackness and I thought that was very interesting. Not a bad thing, because again, different circumstances. He's from rural I think Wyoming. Um, so again, very, very different (laughing) you know, and I'm probably looking at me I'm from the [Midwest] you know my whole accent is coming out.

So, you know, it's a different in terms of like, what comes first what comes after and it all depends on your social environment. Umm and he's Black as well but it's just it's so it's just so different. So, I would say that Blackness is power, Blackness is grit, um Blackness is um yeah, I would say it's the definition of beauty and beauty is in the eye of the holder.
Roger: I want to add onto that really, really quickly, because that’s really important that something that you said made me think about this concept of what is Black even now. But, it came up a while back. I remember there was a video that was going around on social media and stuff that said, “When did you first know you were black?” And, every single point that these Black people who were educated and they look presentable and all of this and very attractive, what have you, all were points of trauma. I was followed. I was pulled over. I had this happen. I had this happen. And, I was like, “What is wrong with y’all? The first time you knew you were black, was traumatic?” Is that what the producers told you to say?

Because, the first time I knew I was Black was sitting in Black spaces and hearing amazing singing, watching the Jubilee singers, Boys Choir of Harlem comes to Nashville and I’m like, "I want to do that." I’m seeing beautiful Black people around me. I’m going to as a little boy going to [his undergraduate institution] football games and hearing... Miss Leontyne Price favorite singer of all time. The greatest of all time, she had a quote to the point, if you're going to be Black, if you're going to think Black, don't think down about it. Be Black, bright, shine. And, so trying to help us in many ways, change the narrative of, we say Black is beautiful and Black is all of that. Dr. King even... Exactly, we could see that there were people who look different from us, but Dr. King even talked about saying, they couched their language and that they said that we weren't this and your hair was this and your nose was this. No, you are beautiful. You're this and the third. And we say it, but do we believe it? Right?

Brendan: But, almost kind of feels like in some ways the whole idea of Blackness also is rooted and the evolution over time from history, from going from slave to Negro to colored to Black or colored to Negro to black. And, even having those conversations with people today about what it means to be black, as I was listening to you, I'm like, "No." Because, of who we are and because of where we come from, we have, I feel a fabric for ourselves that our Blackness can look like anything. Our masculinity can look like anything.

This last year we got into Pose. Oh, my God. I didn't know about the ballroom scene, like "What?". I feel I missed out. I feel watching that and watching those
characters playing out real lives of people who where they can let their creativity, music and there art inspire them in different ways. And, whether that was, and I think about even how we'll go to clubs or dances and it's like we always put on our finest. We don't go like that. You're not turned down and I put community to dress up for somebody. Prom, weddings. Some of us are like, "Look. That's what you got." I got jeans and either from Walmart and that's all you're going to get. And, that's blackness, right? That is.

We all got a cousin or a friend or someone who we all, a lot of us, many of us were like, "I do." But anyway, I'm rambling now, but listening to you all talk about the code-switch thing and the role playing. That's just who we are, and I love it. And, I'm not saying thing that you all weren't saying that. I'm just that's what I was hearing. Yeah, that's us. And, that diaspora and that's the diversity of people and even for our gender as people who identify as male.

[Wayne shares how working with other colleagues is comforting for him to not code-switch and he can authentically himself]

Wayne: But, there's also colleagues on my campus that I do different projects with or different presentations with where I don't give a damn at that point. They know who I am. They know how I show up and they're fine with that, because they do the exact same thing.

The fact that we're able to be authentic with each other and not have to deal with respectability, politics and not have to sit here and worry about what the other person thinks about us, because we've moved beyond that. And, we actually trust each other. I don't have to code-switch in those spaces. And, so I love being in those spaces the most, because it's just one less thing I have to think about or worry about.

Quortne: From everyone’s responses, what I love hearing is that Blackness is ever-present in everyone’s lives. Whether its tracing your family lineage and history from what Jay and Brendan were alluding to or Gabriel and Roger reminiscing about his religious upbringing, our understanding and living Blackness varies from person to person.

Blackness shows up in religion, family dynamics, at work not having to think about code-switching as Wayne shared. Brendan you talked about show Pose, which is actually a good switch into talking about your thoughts on what does it mean to express femininity? I know we have talked extensively on masculinity and queerness, but what about femininity. Thoughts anyone?
[Jay explains why it’s important to express femininity and masculinity in moderation]

Jay: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Everything in moderation. Yeah, everything in moderation and I think that, uh, you know, like, shit what was I saying? I think that you know, you need that feminine and masculine energy. You know, I think you need both to be healthy as a spiritual spiritually maybe I don’t know I think you need I think you’d need both for your persons and I think I think so many especially Black men Black straight Blackman wants to be a man want to be a Blackman need to.

I was thinking when my dad once and like in terms of masculinity or just dads in general and I was like, you know like You get so caught up in trying to be a man that you know, you kind of forget how to be yourself and that I don’t know I feel like that’s how the toxic masculinity would be being in a situation is that that what would I do? What would a man do? And like? I feel like I feel like that’s not healthy. I feel like what would I do? And I think even that question alone is kind of feminine in itself, like when we talk about man who is like feminine energies, like intuitive and yeah, and stuff like that. It was like all inwards to things instead of like dominance in like competition.

[Jamal, takes a slight exhale, and begins to share how showing femininity is a space of comfort for him]

Jamal: I think, for me, it's tapping into my emotion is tapping into how I'm feeling. I'm contextualizing that, and it'd be able to verbally express that being able to be comfortable to tell another man that I love him. And not in the context of sexual but in the context of. I'm telling you, like, I love you, like I respect you, I cherish you, um, without this, oh, let me let me turn that I love you down because they may come across as gay or whatever. Which is problematic but um, being able to hug without trying to adapt to, being able to actually embrace a hug.

It’s also something I had to realize, when I think about being able to also be intimate with Black men outside of sex. And I had a conversation with my little brother about it. I said, Do Black men know how to be friends? Like on a very intimate context? Like, if we're not we're but there's a lot how women, they can cuddle with each other. They can cry with each other; they can hold each other. And it's okay if no, oh, we're attracted to each other. It's just that intimate friendship bond.

Black men. If I ever, you know, cuddle with a layup with, you know, another Blackman.....male equivalent, I can handle that now but and on a heterosexual context, they would be like what are you doing, get off of me so I'd be that's how I
resonate with feminine energy and with no contact being able to just hold my friend being able to you know, I would say for life we can whenever I'm my homeboy came through all queer, all told me here I was laying up never we never we never mess around.

But I felt comfortable cuz that's just my love language, I love like a physical touch. And so, being able to generate that without the...I mean, whew chile my words are giblin being able to express that in a very platonic friendship way? That made me feel good, that made me feel loved that made me feel whole in a sense.

[Isaiah shares his thoughts on masculinity if masculinity is healthy and why femininity is important for people to have]

Isaiah: I think masculinity is always healthy. I think I mean it can be healthy. I think that when it becomes the sought after too much, that's when it becomes negative when you try to police masculinity on somebody else because what is masculinity or what is quote unquote being a man swishing, nobody can tell you how to be a man. But cause that's what masculine it is. It's redefining who you are.

Why I think femininity, womanhood is more of a collective whole. Masculine, you have to find out who you are for you. The difference is that individuals don't respect your version of masculinity and that's why when it becomes toxic.

[You hear someone say, “you gone respeck me and in that order”]

Quortne: It sounds like for some of you in the space masculinity can be healthy, but feminine energy is what is important to exude and express. Having femininity defines how you show love and kindness to others, even other Black men as you beautifully put Jamal.

As you all have been sharing about your experiences with Blackness, queerness, femininity, and masculinity, how do intersecting identities show up in your mentorship program spaces? Do you all have conversations or dialogue about these topics within your MoC and BMI?

[Kai gives a story about how the program supports BGBQM within the BMI program]

Kai: Um, so what's crazy is, we did have a few males that did identify within the community, so we always made sure that they knew that "you're no different than us" like in the beginning, we always, we talked about in the beginning, we talk we do these events. And we have these workshops where we break down all types of
identities. And we do, you write out identities and you write about, you write the things that you will feel like describe that person. And so, we go through those things like really just to break down all of those, all of those walls and those insecurities and stuff like that, that that everybody know, regardless of all the stuff that's on these are awesome family.

So, we made sure that was always a network and me personally, I always made sure that, I reached out to those individuals to make sure like, "Hey, I know this is 60 other Black males, but if you ever need anything, make sure you like always let me know", whatever the case may be, and then you know, my school is real big one offering LGBT, you know, community resources and stuff like that. So, we always made sure that not only we're supporting directly events, but we make sure we support those events as well. Well within our organization.

[Jay talks expressed how the MoC gave him exposure to know there were other peers like him within the program and at his institution]

Jay: I think extremely important. I think especially since [mentorship program] has that ability to do that and that connection, I think it's very important. I know through [mentorship program], I was exposed to a lot of a queer Black men around campus which was super nice.

Also, for some reason, again, I think has to do with me as a person got this vibe of when I was around them, I was like, it's nice to be around them, but they're not me. And I'm not sure exactly where that came from, but I just never really saw myself in any of them.

And maybe that's just because I think of myself as my own unique person, but I think [mentorship program] it's really important for them to advocate for queerness in especially like in the men of color sector because of toxic things like toxic masculinity that like make love to see men feel not as has in touch with queerness, you know, because I feel anyone with a toxic masculine mindset or comes from that background like many of us do, kind of see queerness and be like, Whoa, keep that over there. Keep that away from me. That's not you know, that is imposing on my masculinity. I don't want that. When that shouldn't be the case. I think everybody should embrace.

[Tre shares a story about how the program never addressed topics around LGBTQ identity, but his peers expressed strong views on homosexuality]

Tre: Not directly, we would circle around to it. We talk about. Well, whenever we would have conversations like this, our director would say, you know, don't use,
use I statements, not we statements don't categorize, don't assume. So, we were equipped with the vocabulary, but you know, true feelings, true words came out when they were in either cornered or didn't know what to say. So, it was a lead religious point of views.

I had, like one of the members was like, you know, my religion, homosexuality is a sin or sex before marriage. And this is someone a kid, and I'm like, well, so we not gonna address your wedlock child. So, we're not going to address. And so, you know, I of course I can't say that. But I mean Yeah, but you were thinking it I sure was and I'm like, Well, listen, we can't even because it's like, this isn't the appropriate place to talk about this. And also, you're not you don't have a forcefield you do not have a shield or a cover. I will. I wanted to address certain things.

But whenever homosexuals came around, everybody all of a sudden had opinions. But when we would talk about health care, and lack of funding for minorities within certain districts in our state, they were well, the most, you know, the rich, you know, kids, the rich schools, also, have fun and because of their test scores, well, lower income areas don't have high test scores. We don't have resources. We have outdated books. We have updated materials. We don't have computers that work. We don't have, you know, qualified teachers. You know, there's so many things that are set up for, you know, certain areas to fail. And they just didn't believe that, but they believe that the Bible says in Leviticus that, you know, homosexuality is doomed to by stoning. And I'm like, well, also, that's the Old Testament.

And then there are certain things that we're interested in. And then there's also a thing, it doesn't, it is even valid anymore. And but it's like, I've read the Bible. I was raised in church. You can't tell me what this is. I know what it says. But also, it's like, this has nothing. Your just going by what you think is right. Your going by what something says in print. But do you actually believe it? Do you have your perspective?

[You hear someone say, “You betta read them”. Wayne shares how he and another staff member were creating curriculum and programing for BBGQ men on campus]

Wayne: So, from the one that me and my colleague in Minnesota, were starting we knew that was something we want to bring up, perhaps not in the first couple sessions, but we knew that that would be an important thing to talk about, because some of the men that did talk to us did identify within the community. And both him and I also identify that way, so it'd be really weird if we'd never brought it up. Um, we
knew that that would be a topic that perhaps was later on in the curriculum, but it's definitely something that we would not want to avoid.

We think it's what you know, all the identities are so intertwined, so it's almost impossible to just talk about being Black without bringing in gender and sexuality and all these other identities because as much as people want to coin, the Black experience, if you will, is so nuanced because of these other identities. It's impossible like looking at me and my brother and sister, for example, same parents, same household, same city, same everything, three completely different experiences. And you can say age is part of that you can also say, our other identities are part of that. So, I know that's something we would want to do.

[Jamal talks about how formative the BMI program was for him in his development as a student]

Jamal: I think it's hard because the program is me. I am the program and so a lot of my friendship one because of the program so I know your support that if my friendship with because of the program, I'm in a lot of support. So, for example, I did a lot of activism work on campus and with I advocated. I advocated for our diversity inclusion space I advocated an expansion of our diversity inclusion Phase I advocated for more faculty of color, I advocated for more people of color within our student government.

And so, through that the program did support me. In a sense, the people were showing up to different things, different demonstration was supporting and making sure the word get out about it. And I think that's encompassing all of my identity because, you know, it's our diversity inclusion within encompassing queer wasn't just sexual orientation, sexual identity, also racial identity.

But and also in undergrad, I think I was so focused on my racial identity because I was so understanding my sexual identity, so I do feel supported with my racial identity because we had like different programs and we put on once again put on our Black male summit in which I feel also supported me. My McNair scholar, my McNair research, I felt supported in that atmosphere. Even in how I navigated on campus. I felt supported.

Quortne: Do you think that these programs will ever not focus on like, cis hetero men? Do you think these programs will ever evolve where it'll just be a more of a? Yeah… Do you think that that won't be the focal point? As we as these programs continue on to, you know, be in higher education or these kinds of spaces?
Jamal: No and that's a sad reality is, I personally say no because even when we think about. And I'm only speaking the context. Well I can speak in the context of HBCU and PWI institutions. I don't know there's a lot of us.

Quortne: Yeah

Jamal: Right? And so, we're always going to sort of be outnumbered. And then the thing is you won't ever know unless someone come out. So, someone can be straight that whole time and then wait to after college and then because there's so many other factors that go into the play and how people and how heteronormative is portrayed throughout higher ed would impact these programs and so that's why that's why I feel queerness. Like there. We even think about queerness in a higher context, like we talk about data, we need numbers, but how many who are queer?

I don't that that's hard. Like it's hard to get those numbers. We will always have to do an estimate. We'll always do a rough number because when we think about Black queer folks, like we're still unpacking our Blackness, we're still unpacking that internalized homophobia because of our Blackness. And so, it's typically the program ran by older Black men who are straight. And so, I don't know, I would love to see it. Hopefully one day I will make those programs available. Right now. I can't I can't see those programs becomes unless it unless you designed only for Black queer man.

[Shawn talks about his feelings about wearing fishnet shirt in expressing his gender. Quortne ask him if he would feel comfortable with wearing this shirt in front of his peers]

Shawn: I mean, I really take the human body very seriously. So, if I'm fit, and I feel really confident about my body. I'm going to show it you know what I'm saying. So, I'm not 21 but, you know, when I'm hitting the club, you know what I'm saying. Like going out with my friends. I like to wear fishnet. I'm saying I got like a long sleeve shirt and if it's warm that'll be the only thing I'm wearing on top.

Quortne: Okay, would you wear that outfit in a [mentorship program] space?

Shawn: No because my job was professional to an extent to an extent it is professional.

[The men in the space all are looking at Shawn and Quortne engage in this dialogue]
Quortne: Okay

Shawn: I wouldn’t have worn that like working in Admissions either. Even though I'm only talking on the phone.

[Quortne eager to ask a question]

Quortne: What so let's say for instance, you're at the retreat or you're like in a social space that has nothing to do with your role as a student leader, would you would you still wear would you wear that outfit being in a [mentorship program] space?

Shawn: Possibly, possibly.

Quortne: Why possibly?

Shawn: There's a good chance because our events are on Thursdays and that's a really big night to go out. And if the events and that like seven, that's perfect time.

[You hear someone in the space say “you gotta pull up and let them know”]

Quortne: Come on fishnet’s…you gotta show the gurls and give them what they want. My apologies if y’all saw me and Shawn engage in this dialogue like that Diddy and guy on the voice staring meme. But I felt it was super interesting to ask you Shawn more about why you had this negotiating of wearing your fishnet shirt in a MoC mentorship space.

Often as BGBQM we often have to negotiate how we express our identities in these spaces like attire, mannerism, and our voices. I appreciate you Shawn for engaging and being vulnerable with me. You all have given various anecdotes to your experiences within these programs. Some of you have felt supported for being within the community like Kai, Jay, and Jamal.

However, Tre you’ve had some complex and challenging times with your BMI program not directly addressing topics around LGBTQIA identity. To add to that, Wayne, when you were building curriculum for your mentorship program space, you had honest conversations with your co-staff member about integrating LGBTQIA identity.

It’s so important that these programs truly center our stories and experiences because as we’ve talked about today, it harmful to us to feel silenced or invisible to be who you are. I feel like Super Soul Sunday or something because you’ll are truly getting into this conversation.
Now, I wanted to ask you all about your individual art projects. Not sure if you all were able to bring them today and it’s okay if you didn’t. As I shared before, you all were asked to bring an artistic artifact of your experiences within your MoC and BMI programs. I wanted to give people space to share their artifacts. Does anyone want to share first? You can share your art project and why you chose this piece of art.

[The men start taking their artifacts out their bookbags, messenger bags, purses, etc.]

Segue: This topic explored the interlockings of Blackness and queerness in predominately cis-het men spaces as the barbershop coupled with programmatic spaces. The men discussed the benefits and challenges of negotiating their queerness in spaces that acknowledges their Blackness, but their queerness is dismissed. These men are living a complex reality that impedes them to fully exist within their intersecting identities. The next topic will showcase how they use artistic curations to express how they view themselves in these MoC and BMI programs.

Topic 4: “Art is Life”

[Brendan takes out his photo and shares his art curation to the group]

Figure 2. Brendan’s Art Curation
Brendan: It was stretching. Thinking of an art curation, something that I folk spoke to me/was me. So, it was difficult. I think, sometimes, I am my biggest obstacle. So, getting over the hump of what would look good and moving into “What feels good,” became my intention and what I centered on. When it comes men of color mentorship programs, I think the best approach is to be authentically you. It is to say at certain times an individual’s identity may be more salient in one aspect over another. In this picture, my queerness is what felt important.

When it comes to mentoring, I think it’s important to be aware of the identities one holds. A mentor may have to tap into one of those identities to connect with their mentee. It’s important to know those personal stories, as well as the stories of others (well enough) in the event they’re needed to connect with a mentee. Everything won’t always be Black and White. Put a splash of color into life.

I would say 100% this curation is a representation of how navigate the world. There are times where different aspects of my life feel more colorful, while others feel a little more blah. In the “blah” moments it becomes pertinent to embrace and to hold on to anything covered in brightness.

[You hear claps and snaps by the group. Isaiah takes out his photo and shares his art curation to the group and starts reading]

Isaiah: Just like the rose that grew from the concrete. Black Queer Mentorship is important. It took away the pain of isolation. It grew me to be resilient.
Fierce in the way I strut.
There is power in my gaze.
I blossomed and let the bees
Do their magic to help spread love
For the next season.

[You hear claps and snaps by the group. Jamal takes out his photo and shares his art curation to the group]

"as always, your silence will not protect you. do you love. asé."

Figure 4. Jamal’s Art Curation

**Jamal:** To be honest, this exercise is not anything new to me. I am always finding ways to deconstruct myself in a way that brings about healing for myself. Though through this exercise we're doing through a visual lens, I am still being introspective about my experiences and how it molded me into the man I am today.

This art curation, in my most humble opinion, articulates intersectionality at its core. Though I didn't have the language nor understood the work of Audre Lorde. I embodied a part of who she was writing for. When she stated within her essay *The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action*, "your silence will not protect you", I vividly remember experiencing the act of silence and the suppression of my queer identity because of the space that I was in. It was very hypermasculine, some may say it had a splash of toxic masculinity, nevertheless, I didn't feel that it held space for my queerness. I thought I was protecting myself but I was causing more harm to my overall wellbeing.
Moreover, I think about the work of Black Feminism and how it holds and speaks to a level of experiences that are shared similarly to the Black queer experience. Through being a part of the [BMI program] at my respective institution, I was introduced to the work of amazing Black Feminist scholars in which breed this level of allyship in which I consider myself a feminist, specifically Black feminist.

Toward the end of my time within the program, I tried my best to insert the values and belief of these scholars into the program to create a holistic inclusive community that breed healing, authenticity, and vulnerability. Yes, this art curation depicts vividly the values I hold within my life and is the foundation of the work that I do and am planning to do. My work is rooted in the attainment of freedom and liberation. For not only myself but for everyone.

Creating that space for individuals to find language to the experiences that they are going through. Freedom to be who I was called to be. Living in a space of authenticity in all of the salient identities I embody. Freedom to understand that I am more than what individuals label me as. Freedom to fight for the liberation of all people. In the words of Assata Shukar, "it is [my] duty!"

[You hear claps and snaps by the group. Wayne takes out his photo and shares his art curation to the group]

Figure 5. Wayne’s Art Curation
Wayne: So, I've been trying to create this art piece for like two, three weeks and failed miserably. I've tried to choreograph three different times. Fail. Didn't like any of them, there's numerous videos of me throwing myself on the floor of my house, trying to figure out this choreography, couldn't figure it out at all.

So, I'm also recognizing that, trying to depict my experiences within this work, it's going to take even more kind of deep diving for me in order to create something that I was happy with. And so, I ended up settling on more of like a photo project. And so, I was already doing some photos here for another reason. And then I ended up using... Well, I was taking the photos for this specifically, and use some other ones for later.

But the reason why I chose the image that I chose was that within queer men of color, there's often this either blatant silencing of us or subconscious silencing of us. And so, I wanted to represent that visually, but then I also kind of created a haiku to challenge myself as well. But I, really wanted to represent the silencing that happens with this particular group on so many levels. Like it happens within the higher ed. spaces. It happens within society. It can happen in family structures, if nobody's open to having these conversations.

And so, I definitely just wanted to kind of depict the fact that there's this group of people who are looking for connection, looking for visibility, and not necessarily receiving that for a variety of reasons. Whether it's, not much interest or folks in higher ed. doing that. So, silence, forgetting, yearning to be connected. Where is my guidance? So, it's kind of like this... it's almost sounds like a cry for help, even when the folks that we encounter aren't necessarily coming to us in a state of despair.

But I often feel like our community is in a state of despair because... Blackbodies are already under attack and then queer bodies are under attack. And so, when you compound it, it's like this, it's coming from multiple directions. And you know, I feel like this is a community that could thrive so much more, but you know we don't even get love for our own Black brothers and sisters. And you know, the racism that we may experience within the LGBTQIA+ community is ridiculous. So those are some of the thoughts I was kind of having when I had this moment.

[You hear claps and snaps by the group. Jay takes out his poem and reads his poem to the group]
BlackBoy

Blackboy don’t know no ways,
Blackboy just wanna catch plays

Blackboy don’t know about real love,
He just wanna be a thug

BlackBoy don’t know what it means to love himself,
He don’t know about all the
Different forms of wealth.
He was only taught how to rob,
He was never taught what he was robbed of
His heritage
His lineage
His kingdom.

Blackboy was always much more than a thug.
But if you put these parameters around him his whole life,
He’ll never know love,
The best kind of love
And that’s self-love.

Jay: So yeah, it was just, I kind of ran off with noise extra saying about, you know, being a Blackman and I was like, Whoa, What is it like to be a Black man in it's just being taught all this missed information basically. Always and it's really sad. It's really sad. And it's Oh, it's awful and I think that I think it's, takes the gays to fix it obviously. Oh, And I feel that's it's beautiful and but also not easy you know.

[You hear claps and snaps by the group. Gabriel takes out his photo and shares his art curation to the group]
Gabriel: Okay. So, I'll explain it when I saw this. I immediately saw a dancer. Head here, arm stretched out and like leg up top. Yeah, yeah, that's what I saw immediately when I saw this. Ah, I actually showed this to another friend (laughing) when I found it and she didn't get any moved by it at all which is fine because it's supposed to move me.

But yeah, umm looking at that just makes me so happy it makes it makes me want to express myself in that way moving forward in life like just carefree head back happy leg in the air, just pop Yeah, it just really makes me so happy looking at that and I want to try to emulate that somewhere like in my room cuz it just makes me so happy. Yeah Yeah.

[You hear claps and snaps by the group. Tre takes out his music lyrics and reads his lyrics to the group]

Creep by Radiohead
Verse:
When you were here before,
Couldn’t look you in the eye,
You’re just like an angel,
Your skin makes me cry,
You float like a feather,
In a beautiful world,
I wish I was special,
You’re so fucking special.
Chorus:
But I’m a creep, I’m a weirdo,
What the hell am I doing here?
I don’t belong here.

Verse 2:
I don’t care if it hurts,
I want to have control,
I want a perfect body,
I want a perfect soul,
I want you to notice,
When I’m not around,
You’re so fucking special,
I wish I was special.

Chorus:
But I’m a creep, I’m a weirdo,
What the hell am I doing here?
I don’t belong here.

Tre: During my time in BMI I went through constant moments of self-doubt. I would constantly question my belonging in these said groups. What did I have to offer? What did the program have to offer me? And why should I be interested in yet again “putting myself out there.”

While discovering a piece of music that best represented my feelings towards BMI’s, I came across a song I used to listen to almost every day in middle school. This song is the tale of an inebriated man who tries to get the attention of a woman to whom he is attracted by following her around. In the end, he lacks the self-confidence to face her and feels he subconsciously is her. Of course, this plot is not relatable to me, however I can relate with the lyrics of the first verse and the chorus. A couple lyrics that stand out personality are “I wish I was special,” “I don’t belong here,” and “I want a perfect soul.” These words grab my attention based on my constant battle with my inner saboteur.

For the majority of my teenage and adult life, I questioned my existence in certain spaces. BMI spaces obviously included. Most of the self-doubt stemmed from my sexual orientation and not being accepted by pretty much everyone. In addition to my self discovery, I was my own worst enemy in enabling my own self-hatred. For years my own negative views about myself were projected onto others. I would not allow myself to be open to meeting new people especially men because I already decided they did not like me. And I asked myself, why should I force myself to “belong” in spaces that I am clearly not welcomed. Or that I convinced myself that I am not.

Now that I am in my mid-twenties, I have a better understanding of who I am and what I have to offer. It took a while to allow myself to grow, however I am glad that I went through this self-discovery. When I listen to this song, I no longer
think of myself as a “creep” or a “weirdo.” I see myself as a strong-minded person with talent, love and creativity.

My wish is young men to be welcomed into spaces that will not judge them for being different. Also, for young men transitioning to adulthood to not close themselves off to the possibility of change. Being uncomfortable is the start of new development which is inevitable. Be kind to yourself and accept change.

Quortne: Wow these all are powerful artistic representations of your curations. With every photo, poem, and music lyric, your pieces of art tell a story and who are behind those stories. Its honestly such a beautiful and complex reality for you all to navigate and endure.

Your art curations are manifestations of you all centering your experiences through art, it’s just really beautiful. I am blown away at what you all have shared with us today, so thank you, truly thank you.

[You hear tears wiping, claps, snaps, and folxs affirming each other]

Quortne: Whew okay, well we are going to start wrapping up our time together. But before we all close the space, I wanted to ask does anyone want to share any final concluding thoughts about their experiences within the MoC and BMI programs? Any reflections or recommendations you have to share with the group and each other?

[Folxs in the space are looking at each other, and Jay gives an anecdote on how his MoC program has been beneficial to him and how it keep him here as a student at his institution]

Jay: Yeah so, I want to say that those programs one do a great job. In my opinion, I feel like they do. They do a good job. They they're there they're present they're active listening. I feel you know, [Program Director] is dope. Um, [Jay’s mentor] is dope for [Jay’s mentor] he he'd be in the cuts, but mark is. [Jay’s mentor] is my like, personal mentor to me. So, you know, he's really an older brother to me. And I feel you know, they're there and that definitely needs to be there present. You know where to find them.

Yeah, and I don't I strangely enough, I don't know about the students like the gay students in terms of with the, mentors, I don't know about their other relationships I just know about mine personally. And I guess that's all that matters for, because I really feel they do a good job. I do. And I think is a whole lot better for me
personally, knowing that they're there. Um, because whew if they weren't in [this mentorship program] was what it was. Oh, Q. Q. I wouldn't be here.

[Isaiah gives some advice on how MoC and BMI can support queer students in how we understand constructions of masculinity in these programmatic spaces]

**Isaiah:** Give them a space to be themselves and let them know that masculinity is not the ideal or standard. But also give them space to learn that you don't have to be the first person to speak in the room. Ah, you don't have to carry the weight of 1000 people, and to learn that it's a breeze, and tough to work on that inner hatred. Whether that's from society, from family, your father, from your mother, or your grandmother, don't hold on to it and understand that as a boy queer individuals, not just men as trans as every is trans lesbian is everything in the in everything in between that there's community.

And it might not be the best sometimes, but we will always stick up for you. And the difference between friends and family is that you can't choose your family, but you can always pick your friends to hold and to need people to hold you accountable when you need to be held accountable. And to also hold them accountable as well. And to know that you're not alone. Once they get off, once you cut off superficial shit in the Channel bags and yada yada you know, depending on what king of girl you get, but at the very core to allow them to embrace their differences their sass, Let them and teach them the ways to how to hone those skills to be deadly, but and what I mean by deadly is so that they can be able to stand up on their own and play in those environments and which they choose to be in.

Whether that's the medical field because I definitely have some in the medical field, whether that's the law field, whether that's business, whether it's architecture, whether that's construction and let them know there's hope. And you iconic and for those gays that love Beyonce your queerness is beautiful. Cause that was the first time she says some shit like that to me and I was like bitch, we been buying your albums for years. Can we get a scholarship for us too? Can you pay off my student loans? Shit. You know, I got no sense, but that's me.

[Gabriel affirms what Isaiah shared about supporting BBGQ men in mentorship spaces and how these programs should not dictate how these men should perform their gender and sexuality]

**Gabriel:** I think we sort of talked about this last time. And it was exactly kind of what you're saying too Isaiah that like holding a space for people to express themselves
as a way that they want to not pushing an agenda on them based off of what you think they need to be. As mentorship programs, they're not to tell you how to think and how to be. They should be to cultivate the best you possible.

And if that best to you, and like you said, fuck the glitz, the glamour and sort of faces we put on and the drag that we are in for other people to see us assimilate or for us to like, show this thing, that front face of what we're showing, you know, that aside, there's a deeper part of you that should be cultivated that should be talked to and nourished and, and autonomy is something that should be taught not, this is what you need to do. This is how you need to be.

[Brendan chimes in and share why the space in itself is important to explore your identities]

**Brendan:** I think the space. The self. And the space that they have to kind of explore their identities in every facet, right? And so whether that's gender, sexuality, what does their Blackness mean to them? Religion... so on and so forth. But I think, from working at a college, time again and time again, year after year after year, I think it's always the same question of like, "How do we get more people to end?"

Seems to be the question that never gets answered. Or the answer is always food. And what I think though is that that space being provided to people who want to show up and who need that space will be there.

You know? Wayne, when you were talking, you were talking about like, "I didn't have it, have that, like I had to wait for it." You know, and I don't know if that space existed at [Midwest institution] where you are or not, and whether it did or didn't, it doesn't matter. The fact that you found a community that you felt supported by, that's what mattered, right?

And I think, we have this argument too, when it comes to like Black students not coming to Black Student Unions and things like that. It's just like, why aren't they here? Why aren't they coming? Not everybody talks with the Black community like that. And they're good, and they have but what we are, like if you ever get tired of that over there, like we're here. And we got your back and we got one another's back.

I think about both spaces of just like... I think that's what's most important to me. That you can come to a place and connect with someone. You can connect with someone from a similar background or different background, someone who knows your pain. And if nothing else, to have a little bit of... they're part of the LGBT+ community. Which reminds me of being black, sometimes I felt in this space, "I don't know that person from Adam, but they Black and that's all I need to know." So...
Jamal gets ready to share that challenging cishet Black men is pivotal

We're gonna have to be comfortable with challenging Black men. And I don't want to, I don't want to assume their sexual identity, but we're gonna have to, we're gonna have to be hidden. When I think about what's going on today with this whole J-Cole thing. Like straight men. They do not kin well to critiques and I remember I think it was Bettina love Who said this? Are y'all familiar with Bettina Love?

People in space shake their heads in agreement of knowing who Bettina Love is

Whenever she came to our institution last not last year but then introduced me to an undergrad and she made a comment. I believe it was her I'm gonna it's not gonna give her credit you know what she said is I want to how Black men can be so educated on the issues of race and how they are oppressed and identity of race, but not understanding of their oppression to other people.

And I think in Oh bell hooks actually been reading this feminism is everybody by bell hooks has already amazing I have ah You have what I have all about love. That's my book. I actually finished that book. Can I really want that version but I had when I tell you, sis, drag me. Drag me like to the point where I need therapy... I need therapy. I need to process it. Yeah, look at amazing and it's my second time reading it. I think that Brittney Cooper she's one that only have you a eloquent rage. Yeah.

Moving forward with so Oh, think about how Black men can ever be. Straight Black men can never truly understand how they oppress other people, which is so mind blowing to me, is so mind blowing to me. And when she said that, chile I said look well, who do I look? bell hooks, let me find some other people. So, I can understand Black women experiences, I can understand I can unpack more my Black queer experiences. And I think we create these spaces by Black millionaires, [BMI programs] as a way for Black men to voice their concerns as a way for them to open up and pour their heart out.

But we never challenge or critique them. It's never a spade. Yeah, yeah, we're all about empowerment. But what framework are we using to empower these men? What context are we using to are we empowering them to be hyper masculine Are we empowering them to? Yeah, all of that. Like, that's why I say I look forward to when I become an when I get in a position.

Hearing men in the space say, “come on and change the narrative Jamal,” “we need more of us in these position”]
Outro and Call to Action

Quortne: I just want to say one, thank you all so very much from the bottom of my heart, this means the world to me. It's something that I came up with an idea for when I was starting my dissertation months ago. And so just to finally see this come into fruition is... You all are a part of my life.

There's just not one part that I'm just, "Oh, I have these things. This is great." That's not what research is supposed to be. It's not how I look at research as a scholar. So, I just want to thank you all for showing, and being, and existing. There are times when we feel like we are the only one and often times we are, especially in these MoC and BMI programs.

However, today was a true testament that there are more of us than we know. From professionals, graduate and undergraduate students, we exist and belong to be here. I think that is what I’m taking with me, we belong to be here. We should not have to fight for our existence and identities to be acknowledge. We are here and folxs have to deal with their own uncomfortability, not ours. Just know that you all are beautiful as you are and please don’t change for anyone. Not for these MoC and BMI, higher education, your careers, families, friends, etc.

I hope you all take what we have built together as a collective and share your gifts with others. I believe our voice and stories are so important for others to know and I thank you for gracing each other with this. Does anyone want to pick a song before we end?

[As “Do It Remix” by Chole x Halle, Doja Cat, City Girls, & Mulatto plays, you hear the group singing along to the lyrics as they gather their belongings]

Sponsor Message

From the Outside Looking In is a written podcast that examines the experiences of Black, gay, bisexual, and queer men’s within MoC and BMI programs in higher education. The narrator’s voice is in italicize font.
CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the essence of gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality for Black gay, bisexual, and queer men’s (BGBQM) experiences within men of color (MoC) and Black male initiative (BMI) programs. The previous chapter unearthed the complexities of negotiating Blackness, queerness, femininity, and masculinity within BGBQM mentorship program experiences. Key findings highlighted how BGBQM problematize masculinity norms, challenge MoC and BMI programmatic spaces, engage in cis-heteronormativity environments, and gay, bisexual, and queer art self-representation.

The designation and implementation of MoC and BMI programs aim to address Black men’s recruitment and retention efforts on college campuses. These programmatic interventions have supported Black men as they integrate, academically and socially, into their campus environments (Brooms, 2019). As stated in Chapters one and two, there is an assumptive archetype of the typical Black man who engages within these mentorship programs and spaces. As higher education institutions continue to create these vital initiative programs for Black men, they fail to recognize that not all Black men identify as cis, straight, and masculine. Thus, Black heterosexual men within these mentorship spaces do not have to compartmentalize their identities in ways their gay, bisexual, and queer men peers in these spaces do, given the normalization of heterosexuality in American society.
Masc-ing Phenomenon

Edwards and Jones (2009) denoted that college men “wear a mask to conform to society’s expectations” (p. 217). These societal expectations enact how these men perform and express their race, gender, and sexuality (Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harris, 2010). Collegiate men develop, negotiate, and make meaning of their race, gender, and sexual identity on college campuses. Edwards and Jones’ (2009) study found that men perform masculine societal expectations (i.e., putting on a mask) when conforming to meet the expectations of being a man. These societal expectations created rigid and binary approaches to performing their gender, making for a complex reality for these college men. I argued that, while these interpersonal and societal expectations are essential to examine within collegiate men’s development, organizational environments (i.e., MoC and BMI programs) have a significant influence on how college men express their race, gender, and sexuality. The pervasiveness of masculinity creates a complex and dominant narrative that masculinity is primarily situated and performed by cis, White, heterosexual, able-bodied men (Harris, 2010).

As a result, these mentorship spaces create what I termed the “Masc-ing (e.g., masking) Phenomenon.” The Masc-ing Phenomenon influences organizational spaces (e.g., MoC and BMI programs) which restricts the expression of one’s gender identity, expression, and sexuality in a heteronormative environment, for gay, bisexual, and queer men. This reality deploys how these mentorship spaces allude to traditionally hetero-gendered enclaves in which expressing queerness and femininity is obscure. These mentorship spaces present the Masc-ing Phenomenon in overt and covert ways regarding how these men navigate, make-meaning of, and negotiate their myriad identities in a hyper-masculine setting. As gay, bisexual, and queer men engage in
MoC and BMI programs, they become hyper-aware and hyper-visible of their intersecting identities, compared to their Black heterosexual men peers. Consequently, the Masc-ing Phenomenon limits the ways in which gay, bisexual, and queer men can fully express living in their truths. Thus, this study extends existing scholarship regarding BGBQM experiences in MoC and BMI programs in the following three sub-areas: navigating queerness within MoC and BMI programs, the quest to live in an intersectional world, and challenging heteronormativity. Following the discussion section, I offer implications for practitioners, research, future researchers, and concluding thoughts based on the Masc-ing Phenomenon concept.

**Navigating Queerness within MoC and BMI Programs**

As stated, the Masc-ing Phenomenon highlights how heteronormative mentorship spaces can be cumbersome environments for BGBQM. Therefore, they navigate these mentorship programs while grappling with their myriad identities. As these men experience the Masc-ing Phenomenon, they explore their sexual and gender identities in hyper salient ways. By navigating queerness, I illuminated how these men build strong relationships with mentorship program peers and staff members and endure hostile environments due to their intersecting identities. Thus, this section focuses on how the Masc-ing Phenomenon is related to how these men navigate mentorship spaces coupled with a critical lens on literature related to programmatic retention efforts and sense of belonging.

Given BGBQM experience heteronormative environments within MoC and BMI programs, their participation and navigation of these mentorship spaces is different than their Black men heterosexual peers. It was evident that programmatic retention and a sense of belonging had significant influences in the mentorship engagement experiences of the BGBQM
co-researchers. Jamal and Jay both described how their mentorship programs supported having a sense of connectedness to their institutions. This finding is consistent with previous studies regarding the impact of mentorship programs on students' transitions to college (Smith et al., 2019). Additionally, BGBQM also cultivated a sense of connectedness with their peers within these mentorship spaces. These men forged meaningful relationships by living together with their peers. These findings are consistent with previous studies regarding BMI and MoC programs that encourage men to use holistic support structures (Brooms, 2018; Center Collaboration, 2014; Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014; Gardenhire et al., 2016; Harper, 2012; LaVant et al., 1997; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2011; Wood, 2014).

**Mentorship Program Staff Support**

As these men navigate their sexual and gender identities, findings have indicated they forge strong peer relationships. Similarly, these men build strong connections with mentorship program faculty and staff. Men in both mentorship programs shared how developing strong program director relationships were formative to their mentorship experiences. Particularly, Jamal expressed that his BMI program was the foundation of his identity formation. Jamal’s relationship with his Program Director motivated him to persist in the BMI program and other academic and research opportunities, such as the Ronald E. McNair Scholars program.

Additionally, Shawn spoke about how his relationship with his Program Director gave him a space to speak about his life and, at times, cry when he needed to. Furthermore, students noted having similar experiences regarding positive mentorship relationships with their mentors, faculty, and staff professionals. Brendan, a professional and MoC mentor, often met with his mentees and found he had a desire to learn more about his students. Brooms (2019) found that
staff members can serve as “key institutional agents” in inspiring Black men to pursue other academic opportunities in BMI programs (p. 760). Roger, who recalled the first student he mentored, said that experience shaped him as a faculty member at his HBCU. Existing research has indicated the importance of Black faculty and Black collegiate men’s mentorship relationships in supporting these men’s academic and personal success on college campuses (Brooms & Davis, 2017).

**Mentorship Program Kinship**

As indicated by Brooms (2017, 2018), BMI programs support retention and persistence efforts for Black men at higher education institutions. Kai, a student leader in his BMI program, cared deeply about helping other Black men in his program. Kai described how, even if one of his peers contacted him after Kai became an alumnus, he was willing to support. This sense of connectedness and community building by the men in his BMI program proved to be a meaningful experience for Kai. It was apparent that these men were heavily invested in each other’s success, as noted by recent literature regarding BMI programs and community building (Brooms, 2019). While these men noted positive experiences within these mentorship spaces (i.e., strong peer and mentor relationships, sense of belonging, and community building), there were some challenges in navigating their intersectional identities.

**Isolation within BMI Programs**

While navigating their queerness within their mentorship programs, BGBQM also endure negative experiences with peers. This hostility highlights the Masc-ing Phenomenon placed on BGBQM within these mentorship spaces. Roger, a faculty member, described establishing a BMI program chapter at his undergraduate institution. Once he mentioned to his heterosexual
men peers that he identified as gay, his participation in the BMI chapter's formation ended. This experience did not prevent him from mentoring and supporting other Black men as a faculty member. However, this experience illuminates how pervasive homophobia is within the Black men community. Previous studies have found that Black gay undergraduate men have experienced homophobia with their Black heterosexual men peers (Strayhorn & Mullins, 2012).

Tre shared a similar sentiment to Roger’s experience within his BMI program. Tre felt his BMI program should have been more inclusive of the LGBTQIA community. He shared, “I feel we’re definitely tolerated,” along with another Black student who identified with the LGBTQIA community. Similarly, Gabriel described concealing his sexuality during his BMI experience while he matriculated to college. This finding is consistent with studies regarding LGBTQ students who hide their sexuality or gender identity for fear of their safety (Rankin, 2003; Rankin et al., 2010; Waldo, 1998; Yost & Gilmore, 2011).

**Disengagement with LGBTQIA Topics**

The Masc-ing Phenomenon influences how these mentorship programs avoid engaging in topics regarding the LGBTQIA community. This Masc-ing Phenomenon affects how these mentorship spaces center heteronormativity rather than homonormativity. There were some notable differences within both mentorship program discussions on LGBTQIA topics. MoC programs differed from BMI programs with regards to being comfortable enough to engage in LGBTQIA dialogue compared to BMI programs. When the men in the study asked about the BMI program's willingness to engage in LGBTQIA topics, these suggestions were met with silence or opposition by their heterosexual peers. Tre described how his BMI program would “circle around” these crucial conversations. MoC mentorship programs have been found to
inadequately address pertinent issues which impact the needs of students who are not heterosexual college men (Smith et al., 2019).

In comparison, Brooms (2018) indicated that Black men engage in conversations regarding femininity within BMI programs. However, discussing femininity should not be framed as a weakness but as a strength. Wallace (2007) shared that in traditional masculinity, men are conditioned to not emotionally express themselves in ways that exhibit femininity. These dichotomies provide unique experiences for men involved in these programmatic interventions. There is a lack of intersectional lens and professional feminist praxis which can impede BGBQM from expressing their intersectional identities. Thus, as these men navigate their queerness, the Masc-ing Phenomenon influences how they search for spaces to express their intersecting identities within MoC and BMI programs.

**Quest to Living in an Intersectional World**

In Chapters Two and Three, Queer of Color Critique complicates how the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality are intrinsically connected within American culture. As these BGBQM seek spaces to live fully in their truths, the Masc-ing Phenomenon hinders these men from expressing their queerness within mentorship program spaces. With these men living in their truths, I illuminated how they endure insider/outsider experiences with their Black heterosexual peers and navigate various environments, given their intersecting identities. Thus, this section focuses on how the Masc-ing Phenomenon engages with these men while they also carry their myriad identities. This section also discusses the Phenomenon’s critical inference to literature related to BGBQM’s experiences in higher education and seeking liberatory spaces.
For Black gay and bisexual men at PWIs, they navigate institutional and personal environments in multiple consciousnesses (i.e., race, gender, and sexuality), which can impact their holistic development (Mitchell & Means, 2014). This study advances previous research regarding how gay, bisexual, and queer men navigate heteronormative mentorship spaces. BGBQM indicated that queer representation was important for these men given the lack of Black men who identify as gay, bisexual, and queer within these programs. Tre shared that “there need to be more people that look like me in here.” It was evident that their gay, bisexual, and queer representations signified their intersectional identities disrupted these heteronormative spaces. Jay mentioned that his MoC experience allowed him to meet other gay Black men on his campus. This experience was formative for him to develop his “identity without judgment.” Shawn spoke about how organic and casual it felt for him to share his queer identity with his peers in his men of color mentorship program. However, this experience differed from BGBQM within BMI programs.

**Insider/Outsider Experiences**

As these men express the fullness of their queerness, the Masc-ing Phenomenon poses unique challenges to how these men negotiate their intersecting identities when engaging with their peers. Jamal pinpointed that, while his heterosexual Black men peers within his BMI program accepted and supported him as he shared his truth, he experienced isolation from them when discussing dating relationships. Jamal noted one of his friends said Jamal’s perspective on relationships differed from his heterosexual peers because he “messed with men.” While Jamal had strong peer relationships with his Black men heterosexual peers, they still viewed his perspective as that of an outsider. Kai described how he shared his bisexuality with peers who
identified within the LGBTQIA community. However, he did not share this with the broader BMI community. Other studies have shown that Black bisexual men have concealed their sexuality from peers due to biphobia stigma within the Black community (Harper, 2004; Patton, 2011). Understanding how and when to share their sexuality, gender identity, and expression posed similar challenging experiences for other men in the study. Shawn described wearing a fishnet-styled shirt when he hangs out with his peers. Shawn’s fishnet-styled shirt signifies an expression of his queer identity. When I asked him if he felt comfortable wearing this outfit around the men in his MoC program, he said, “possibly.” He thought due to his student leader role in the MoC program, it was not professional to wear such attire. This negotiation of attire, leadership, and queer professional identity can pose an internal conflict for students like Shawn. Miller and Vaccaro (2016) found that queer student leaders of color endure various stressors that impede their leadership experiences on college campuses. Leadership and personal identity can create a complex yet nuanced duality for BGBQM, who must negotiate and make meaning of their identities in various collegiate spaces in higher education.

Navigating Spaces

While the Masc-ing Phenomenon is situated within organizational environments (i.e., MoC and BMI programs), these men also experience this phenomenon in other spaces. Even within these programmatic environments and outside of the collegiate environment, these men often seek spaces where they belong entirely within their Blackness and queerness. Isaiah discussed how his identity as a butch queen, and expressing masculinity and femininity, has been challenging for him as he navigates various spaces. Isaiah pointedly stated:

It's hard. It's frustrating. It's annoying sometimes. But it's the role the role that I have to play, whether I acknowledge it today or whether they acknowledge that tomorrow or you
know… I think it's always a constant battle of gayness of Blackness of queer identity of masculinity and femininity, that like for my identity, because as a butch queen, I'm both masculine and feminine. I'm very gender fluid. So, depending on which way I want to take it. My identity as when I'm more flamboyant I have for you stay where you have to just stand your ground. And it's hard, because you don't think you don't think people are going to respect you. Well, you know, they'll respect you, of course, face value, but are they really trying to understand where you're going?

For Isaiah, his butch queen identity and expression, which he is proud of, presents a subversive expression of masculinity and femininity in a society that adheres to a gender binary (i.e., masculine or feminine). His Black identity, coupled with his gender and sexuality variation, creates both an internal and external expression. Ferguson (2013) stated that “African American cultures indexes a social heterogeneity that oversteps the boundaries of gender propriety and sexual normativity” (p. 120). Gabriel explained how he deepens his voice when working with specific patients in his nursing profession. He shared how changing his voice to accommodate a patient felt disingenuous to his gay identity. Changing his vocal expression for a patient perpetuates the idea of living in a heteronormative environment. Societal hetero-gendered norms prevent Black gay, bisexual, and queer people from expressing their intersectional identities (Ferguson, 2013). Thus, conforming to racial, gender, and sexual heteronormative norms creates complex realities for BGBQM to continually negotiate and navigate various spaces both inside and outside of higher education.

BGBQM further explored how queer embodiment was a liberatory space for living their truths. Jamal noted that his queerness allows him to be critically aware of harmful masculinity practices in which he may engage while embracing his femininity. It was apparent that Jamal connected his queerness embodiment as a state of feeling. Anzaldúa (2007) beautifully posited,
I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my own voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent’s tongue—my woman’s voice, my sexual voice, my poet’s voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence. (p. 81)

Anzaldúa’s (2007) quote references the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality as forming one’s identity. Castro Samayoa and Nicolazzo (2017) furthered this notion of centering queer and trans people of color’s (QTPoC) feelings as a liberatory space of living one’s truth. Embracing the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality creates a temporal space of existing in a world that allows QTPoC and BGBQM to seek true liberation. While these men seek spaces to express their intersectional identities fully, they also un-masc how to challenge heteronormative and hegemonic mentorship environments.

**Challenging Heteronormativity**

As stated in Chapter Two, hegemonic masculinity illuminates how dominance, power, and patriarchy operate in our current society. In seeking to live in an intersectional world, BGBQM find ways to dismantle heteronormativity to unveil the influence of the Masc-ing Phenomenon. As these men exist within the Masc-ing Phenomenon environment, they center their gender and sexuality on disrupting heteronormativity. By disrupting heteronormativity, I elucidated how these men use artistic curations to challenge hegemonic masculinity norms while still grappling with the pervasiveness of masculinity. Thus, this section focuses on how the Masc-ing Phenomenon was used to explore the BGBQM’s intersecting identities. Further, this section discusses critical inferences to the literature regarding the complexities of BGBQM’s masculinity performance in higher education environments.

hooks (2000) stated that

from the moment little boys are taught they should not cry or express hurt, feelings of loneliness, or pain, that they must be tough, they are learning how to mask true feelings.
In worst-case scenarios, they are learning how to not feel anything ever. These lessons are usually taught to males by other males and sexist mothers. Even boys raised in the most progressive, loving households, where parents encourage them to express emotions, learn a different understanding about masculinity and feelings on the playground, in the classroom, playing sports, or watching television. They may end up choosing patriarchal masculinity to be accepted by other boys and affirmed by male authority figures. (p. 38)

This quote resonates with how Black boys and men intrinsically perform and perpetuate rigid and harmful masculinity practices in their formative years, which often determine their present state of being. In exploring the definitions of masculinity and queerness, each co-researcher provided various interpretations of these words. Wayne described how LGBTQIA communities have an affinity for masculinity performativity. Germain explained how masculinity derives from cisgender White men's gender performance, and queer men of color often subscribe to these masculinity standards. The social constructions of race, gender, and sexuality derive from White supremacy ideals and norms. Ferguson (2005) argued that social constructions are built on economic theories and capitalism. Historically, Park (1950) stated that:

> In the long run, however, people and races who live together, sharing the same economy, inevitably interbreed, and in this way, if no other, the relations which were merely cooperative and economic become social and cultural. When migration leads to conquest, either economic or political, assimilation is inevitable. (p. 354)

Park’s (1950) argument underscores that constructions of masculinity trace back to Whiteness and White supremacist norms and ideals. Curry (2017) proposed that these masculinity theories position Black men’s racialized and gendered experiences within White supremacist structures. Roger noted that he was reluctant to identify with the word queer given his Black southern background. While he stated he was not opposed to the word, Roger further explained how he found the term offensive. Johnson (2011) acknowledged that Black gay men from the South have an affinity and devout relationship to their religious and racial backgrounds.
Constructions of gender and sexuality within the context of masculinity and queerness are dictated by one’s race, gender, class, and sexuality formation. Thus, the intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality profoundly influence how one experiences American society (Ferguson, 2013).

**Artistic Expression**

Considering the Masc-ing Phenomenon, these men used various artistic curations to challenge heteronormativity within mentorship program spaces. One of the highlights of this study was each person’s opportunity to express their mentorship experiences using various artistic avenues. Each person provided narrative responses which connected their art curation to their mentorship program experiences. The art curations consisted of self-portraits, poems, and musical lyrics. The various art curations represented how these men navigate both their programs and the world, itself. Their narrative responses and art curations symbolized their reclaiming and embracement of their intersecting identities. It provided these men space to collectively share their lives while centering their stories in an environment of self-love, agency, and empowerment.

**Affinity to Masculinity**

While artistic expression can help these men center their myriad identities in MoC and BMI programs, adhering to masculinity standards creates a complex reality for them as they grapple with unveiling the Masc-ing Phenomenon within their mentorship program experiences. Other findings indicated that while BGBQM shared harmful definitions of masculinity, they still thought masculinity could be healthy in moderation. Jay explained how it is essential for Black
men to exude femininity and masculinity. Isaiah shared a point of contention which exists for BGBQM. He said,

I think when I hear masculine and queerness, a lot comes to mind. It's very hard. I think that I would say if we look on apps, you know, the idea of certain gay individual’s queerness. There's a huge trying search for masculinity, but I feel like if you're searching for masculinity, it's a feminine trait. I think then, what I mean by that quote is that so long we've been bullied for being feminine or being flamboyant, or whatever or not, per not sticking to traditional hegemonic black masculinity. That it's hard to navigate some of those arenas sometimes. And so sometimes masculinity is a double-edged sword you both we both repress it, but we still want it. And we want to obtain it. And sometimes, when it comes down to queerness, it becomes it can become pretty toxic that we're trying to push this image like this is what masculinity is, so nobody won't pick on me anymore. And as a result, that's why we look to masculinity. That's why a lot of I think a lot of masculinity sometimes tries to a lot of images on the media tries to downplay femininity. But at the end of the day, it's usually always the feminine guys that are the ones doing the work so the masculine guys can reap the benefits that they need.

Ford (2011) argued that the construction of Black masculinity derives from idealized images of a sense of self which reveals how men perform masculinity. Isaiah’s narrative represents a larger issue within the BGBQM community, as they often adhere to hypermasculine norms and cultural ideals. Blackness preferred, queerness deferred is a term coined by me as it illuminates how BGBQM experience complex states of consciousness within BMI and MoC programs. Blackness preferred, queerness deferred also acknowledges the importance of queerness expression within these mentorship program environments. Ferguson’s (2004) QoCC reified that Blackness is often viewed from a heteronormative and heteropatriarchal context. Further, Blackness preferred, queerness deferred enhances QoCC to acknowledge that queer individuals experience spaces where Black culture ejects queerness from race, gender, sexuality, and class realities. These Black hetero-dominate spaces create a dissonance reality for BGBQM by limiting how Blackness and queerness are performed within these mentorship program spaces. Strayhorn and Tillman-Kelly (2013) found that Black gay men often subscribe to Black
masculine practices for fear of being ridiculed by their peers. While the BGBQM in this study did not subscribe to these Black masculine practices, the behavior was still present while engaging with their heterosexual peers. Consequently, Jamal discussed how mentorship programs must invest in changing cis-heteronormative and heteropatriarchy culture.

Nicolazzo (2019) noted that to challenge cis heteronormativity, it is essential to unlearn cissexism and how cissexism maintains oppressive structures within higher education. It is vital that we unlearn, acknowledge, and explore how cissexism is pervasive within higher education. For MoC and BMI programs to dismantle oppressive hegemonic ideologies, they must address the foundations of these programmatic interventions. Conforming to dominant heteronormative culture is often perpetuated within MoC and BMI programs. The lack of focus on femininity, queerness, and experiences that Black gay, bisexual, and queer men endure is detrimental to these men’s programmatic experiences. When these programs lack spaces for these men to share their gay, bisexual, and queer identities, it prevents them from expressing their truths with their Black heterosexual men peers. Having a heteronormative culture reifies a dominant narrative that BGBQM must segment parts of their myriad identities to appease Black heterosexual men.

While many BGBQM did not adhere to heteronormative practices, their programs often perpetuated these practices through dialogue and conversations which centered around heteronormativity. Furthermore, the Masc-ing Phenomenon reveals how hegemonic structures impede BGBQM from expressing their gender identities and expressions. Connell’s (1995, 2005) work discussed how pervasive hegemonic masculinity adheres to gender performance from a societal context. The Masc-ing Phenomenon further complicates Connell’s (1995, 2005) research in learning how complex gender identity and expression are performed and operationalized
within these mentorship spaces. As a result, the Masc-ing Phenomenon emphasizes the importance of unearthing how gender identity and expression have to expand beyond rigid notions of masculinity performance. It is pivotal that MoC and BMI programs challenge cisgender heterosexual Black men regarding their use of harmful language and thoughts about the BGBQM community. This is important because, otherwise, these mentorship programs will continue to reinforce a heteronormative culture which only supports cis, straight, and masculine Black men. Consequently, the Masc-ing Phenomenon must be uncovered to challenge existing heteronormative norms and culture within these mentorship spaces.

**Researcher’s Process in Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

In this section, I share a few of my reflections which profoundly influenced my experiences during this study. Before starting this research study, I was interested in exploring the experiences of BQM in MoC and BMI programs. Given my previous professional experiences as a Program Coordinator in a MoC mentorship program, I had prior knowledge about the histories and programmatic efforts of these programs. The initial assumptions of my dissertation study were immersed in conceptualizations of masculinity and queerness, expressing one’s gender and sexuality, and how these men navigate mentorship programs and higher education, broadly. Due to COVID-19, there were some notable changes I had to employ which are stated explicitly in Chapter three. COVID-19 and the summer of 2020 challenged me, intellectually. While enduring the uncertainty of COVID-19 and grieving the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Nina Pop, Tony McDade, George Floyd, and many other Black and Brown people, I was left in a constant state of anger, fear, and sadness. Fortunately, the light of my co-researchers brought me hope. The various racial and health pandemics were
almost unbearable to witness and process. I will be forever indebted and grateful for the space these BGBQM provided for me and each other. In phenomenological research, researchers are never disconnected from the proposed phenomena and their co-researchers. After each interview, podcast-style focus group, and while receiving individual art projects, my sense of connectedness to the lived experiences of my co-researchers grew.

Merging both phenomenology and ABR methods helped me explore the essence of gender identity and expression and sexuality for BGBQM within these mentorship environments. Each person’s narrative and story exposed a deeper meaning and understanding of their lived experience. As co-researchers, I asked for their input about the podcast style focus group discussion topics, which created a brave space to center queerness, femininity, masculinity, and Blackness. ABR allowed me to explore the boundaries of race, gender, and sexuality in an artistic format (i.e., art curations and podcast scripts). Using this queer imaginative, creative lens taught me that traditional ways of knowing and being can be radically changed within qualitative research. As a Black queer researcher, I threaded my data sources into one written narrative in Chapter Four, using ABR approaches. With BGBQM co-researchers, I resonated with their lived experiences as they mirrored my own. When analyzing the co-researchers’ experiences, I intentionally kept their narratives at the forefront of my analysis. When I analyzed the collected data, Blackness preferred, queerness deferred emerged, which changed and challenged the initial assumptions of the phenomena of my study, as stated in Chapter Four. These men revealed how they experience their intersecting identities in a non-heteronormative environment which centers on queerness and femininity. As a researcher, this phenomenon guided me to think critically about the conscious complex state of reality for my co-researchers and me. As a co-
constructivist, my epistemological stance transformed how I conceptualized, engaged, and explored the research process. Ultimately, I argue that these BGBQM make meaning of and negotiate their intersecting identities from a triad state of consciousness (i.e., race, gender, and sexuality). This state of consciousness is pivotal for mentorship programs and higher education institutions to understand how they can best support, uplift, and cultivate spaces for BGBQM.

**Implications**

The goal of this study was to expand the dearth of research by exploring gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality of BGBQM within MoC and BMI programs in higher education. By exploring the essence of Blackness preferred, queerness deferred, it was evident that BGBQM endure the complexities regarding the salience of race and the negotiation of their sexuality and gender, within these mentorship program spaces. This discussion of findings will further challenge existing mentorship program environments to ensure all intersecting identities are acknowledged, affirmed, and uplifted. The next section provides some key considerations and recommendations for the BGBQM community, practitioners, research, and future researchers.

**Implications for BGBQM Community**

BGBQM in higher education environments often navigate and exist in spaces which compartmentalize their myriad identities. In predominantly Black higher education environments, gay, bisexual, and queer men’s sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression are often ignored and silenced. In predominately LGBTQIA education environments, gay, bisexual, and queer men’s Blackness is often co-opted and commodified in spaces which supposedly acknowledge the historical oppression these men have endured on college campuses.
and in society. This duality of experiences for BGBQM creates an internal and external battle which is exhausting, harmful, and debilitating. This research has revealed that there is joy, beauty, and liberation in moments of trauma, isolation, and dissonance. These men built queer kinship and made meaning of each other’s lived experiences. This form of queer kinship is vital for these men to discuss complex and challenging ways to navigate mentorship spaces and higher education, broadly.

While conversations and dialogue in this dissertation centered on dismantling heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity, these men centered queerness, femininity, and Blackness within MoC and BMI spaces. These men are involved in these programmatic interventions to represent the spectrum of sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression. This research highlights that the lived experiences of BGBQM can be centered within mentorship programs spaces. Further research, scholarship, and practitioner practice need to explore how these men forge peer relationships, faculty and staff relationships, and queer worldmaking, outside of mentorship program spaces. It is essential that BGBQM in these mentorship spaces are never alienated but celebrated and loved for breaking cis heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy norms and ideals.

**Implications for Practitioners**

This study covered a complex and comprehensive understanding of the limited research regarding sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression within MoC and BMI programs. Higher education practitioners who work with mentorship programs are tasked with helping collegiate men explore their identities. By exploring men’s identity formation, these mentorship programs can no longer default to hegemonic masculinity practices (i.e., Masc-ing
Phenomenon). Integrating a critical Black feminist approach into these mentorship programs can serve as a programmatic conduit to address and unveil the Masc-ing Phenomenon prevalent within these mentorship program environments. BMI programs must center femininity and queerness rather than masculinity in their programmatic efforts. Isaiah provided an anecdote which all MoC and BMI programs should enactment to support BGBQM. He said,

"Give them a space to be themselves and let them know that masculinity is not the ideal or standard. But also give them space to learn that you don't have to be the first person to speak in the room. Ah, you don't have to carry the weight of 1000 people, and to learn that it's a breeze and tough to work on that inner hatred. Whether that's from society, from family, your father, from your mother, or your grandmother, don't hold on to it and understand that as boy queer individuals, not just men as trans as every is trans lesbian is everything in the in everything in between that there's community. And it might not be the best sometimes, but we will always stick up for you. And the difference between friends and family is that you can't choose your family, but you can always pick your friends to hold and to need people to hold you accountable when you need to be held accountable. And to also hold them accountable as well. And to know that you're not alone.

My question to practitioners working in MoC and BMI programs is, “how are you teaching collegiate men to disrupt and dismantle harmful masculinity practices by not learning and understanding the spectrum of gender identity, sexuality, and gender expression outside of hegemonic masculinity?” Any student who expresses their queerness and femme-ness should not experience isolation, hostility, and silence in these programs. If mentorship programs want to center Black collegiate men, it must center all identities to which these men subscribe, not just cis heteronormativity. MoC and BMI programs must be comfortable with challenging cis-heterosexual Black men regarding harmful language and thoughts about BGBQM. Rather than make harmful gender and sexuality oppressive narratives such as “we have to educate our kings” or “teaching men how to dress with suits and ties,” these mentorship spaces should expand gender and sexuality beyond centering cisness. Redefining these mentorship programs as
intersectional and feminist organizational enclaves can broaden student, staff, and faculty participation and representation. These programmatic interventions need to problematize the fears behind centering queerness and femininity. Masculinity should not solely subscribe to cismen, but it should acknowledge and affirm that various gender and sexual identities exist on college campuses. The importance of exploring queer kinship and worldmaking as a programmatic foundation can help dismantle heteronormative and cis patriarchy barriers within mentorship programs.

BMI and MoC programs must remove offensive and harmful language from their program names. Using the term Black “male” initiative creates an othering impact on non-binary, trans, gender non-conforming, and femme students. Advantageously, these mentorship spaces need to redefine how their program name also contributes to isolating and excluding certain students (i.e., gay, bisexual, and queer men). This isolation and exclusion further the pervasiveness of masc-ing one’s identities, to conform to mentorship spaces that harm gay, bisexual, and queer men. The Masc-ing Phenomenon must be dismantled for any systematic and organizational changes within these mentorship programs to occur. I urge practitioners to focus on actualizing “students at the intersections” on college campuses. We can no longer use imaginative performative ideas and unfulfilled promises from higher education as they refuse to change for students and their intersections. Institutions' commitments to student success cannot be fulfilled by solely creating program mission statements. It is fulfilled by evaluating programmatic interventions which exclude BGBQM from their mentorship spaces. These mentorship spaces and their respective institutional environments must examine how they perpetuate heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy within their programmatic efforts. Higher
learning institutions have an obligation and commitment to ensure that every student on a college campus has a space where they feel they belong. Sense of belonging is a formative theory and framework that is often used in MoC and BMI programs. I invite the practitioners who facilitate these programmatic interventions to engage in deep reflection and learning regarding which type of students feel a sense of belonging to their mentorship programs. Furthermore, by mentorship programs omitting BGBQM in their recruitment and retention efforts, it further contributes to the reinforcement of traditionally hetero-gender institutional practices. Whether through the institutional infrastructure of its administrators, faculty, and staff, institutions cannot fail to address its most marginalized students’ needs. Practitioners must use an intersectional praxis (i.e., race, gender, and sexuality) to broaden programmatic efforts and cultivate a “brave space” environment for men to explore their identities without judgment.

**Implications for Research**

There is a lack of acknowledgment of femininity and queerness within mentorship program scholarship. Most of the mentorship program research and scholarship centers on the ways of knowing for cis heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy frameworks. It is essential to note that current mentorship program literature is valuable, insightful, and critical within higher education scholarship. However, as stated in Chapter Two, the existing literature discusses how race, gender, and sexuality are explored with hetero-gendered and heteronormative lenses. Consequently, a second wave perspective of researching mentorship program spaces must center on homonormativity rather than heteronormativity. Mentorship literature must expand its theoretical and research lens to explore gender, race, and sexuality. There needs to be more
critical Black feminist scholarship approaches within BMI and MoC program literature. Most of the masculinity and mentorship scholarships support queer, bisexual, gay, trans, gender non-conforming, and non-binary students in the implication section. I task researchers, scholars, and practitioners to use intersectional feminist theories and frameworks within their methodologies and research designs. Broadening the research possibilities to examine and explore race, gender, and sexuality in mentorship spaces can illuminate the complex realities many college students endure when forming their gender and sexual identities. Future studies should examine gay, bisexual, and queer mentor and staff roles in mentorship programs. Exploring queer mentorship programs in multicultural centers and LGBTQIA centers can help expand higher education’s understanding of supporting college men’s development on college campuses. This study focused on cisgender Black gay, bisexual, and queer men’s experiences within these programmatic interventions. There is much-needed research regarding examining the experiences of transgender, gender non-conforming, non-binary students within mentorship programs. Cisness should never be the standard when researching students' experiences in higher education. Thus, research must examine all students’ identities in higher education environments.

As society evolves and reckons with dismantling oppressive structures, higher education scholarship must evoke this change. Duran (2018) recommended scholars and practitioners need to implement multiple theoretical perspectives to understand the unique experiences of queer students of color. Furthermore, Coleman et al. (2020) stated that “historically, society has categorized lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students under one umbrella, but this conflation can be problematic for many reasons, particularly when researching retention and persistence issues among these populations” (p. 468). This dissertation furthers the need for
future researchers to use a critical and intentional lens to examine the experiences of BGBQM in higher education. Researchers should grapple with their epistemological stances when researching mentorship program spaces. Within each co-researcher’s identity and story, there are a plethora of individual, collective, and nuanced experiences that should be honored, acknowledged, and affirmed. While there have been prior studies on LGBTQ student leaders (Renn, 2007), there needs to be further research conducted regarding BGBQM’s experiences in leadership positions within MoC and BMI programs. Many of the BGBQM held student leadership positions within these programs. Future examination of leadership identity and social identity formation can help practitioners, researchers, and scholars support these students at the intersection of leadership and identity. Exploring critical research approaches such as Black feminist thought, participatory action research, and Queer of Color critique within mentorship program scholarship can advance the field's understanding of race, gender, and sexuality in higher education.

Conclusion

From The Outside Looking In, the title of this dissertation was an intentional choice at the beginning of this journey. Higher education and society often dictate and impose how BGBQM should adhere to cis heteronormativity. This creates a complex reality in which our stories are told for us, not by us. As BGBQM, we often change, compartmentalize, and renegotiate our intersecting identities, spontaneously. We often do this to survive. Even though we experience hostile and oppressive environments inside and outside of higher education, we often seek the path of resistance to find liberation. As individuals within the LGBTQIA community, we do not choose our family, but we can determine who our chosen family, friends,
and community are. This dissertation is a by-product of that choice. This study was as grueling, convoluted, and emotionally taxing as any dissertation project is supposed to be. All the emotions, the laughs, tears, and joy made this project a meaningful journey for me as a cisgender, Black, queer man. This research is for all Black gay, bisexual, queer, pansexual, femme, butch queens aiming to disrupt normative gender and sexuality realities. By centering BGBQM experiences within mentorship program spaces, it will ignite intellectual and praxis curiosity for educators, practitioners, and scholars to always challenge the status quo. Thus, unmasc-ing a new research approach and theoretical perspective which centers homonormativity within men of color and Black male initiative programs at colleges and universities. These collective narratives will evoke a change in higher education that is necessary and in dire need. Through their voices, this work will continue to breathe life to dismantle oppressive structures and environments within men of color and Black male initiative mentorship programs, higher education, and society at large.
APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANTS RECRUITMENT EMAIL
Hello Student,

My name is Quortne Hutchings and I am a doctoral candidate and researcher in the Higher Education Student Affairs Program at Loyola University Chicago. I am conducting a study under the supervision of Dr. Demetri Morgan in the School of Education’s Higher Education program at Loyola University Chicago. I am currently starting my dissertation study on Black queer men experiences within men of color mentorship programs in higher education. Participants will complete an audio-recorded interview lasting no longer than 60 minutes with myself. If you are interested, please email qhutchings@luc.edu to set up an interview. This is an IRB approved study by Loyola University Chicago.

Through the research, we hope to understand the experiences of Black queer men in men of color mentorship programs and how they navigate their salient identities. I am emailing to invite you to participate in my study. Please see the information below on participant qualifications and how to contact the researcher to set up an interview.

Qualifications to Participate:
- Currently an undergraduate student
- Self-identify as Black queer or gay man
- Currently involved or an alumnus in a men of color mentorship program within the city of Chicago.

If you are interested in participating in the study or have any questions, please email me at qhutchings@luc.edu.

Best,
Quortne Hutchings | qhutchings@luc.edu
Doctoral Candidate
Higher Education, Loyola University Chicago
APPENDIX B

STAFF RECRUITMENT EMAIL TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS
Hello Staff Member,

My name is Quortne Hutchings and I am a doctoral candidate and researcher in the Higher Education Student Affairs Program at Loyola University Chicago. I am conducting a study under the supervision of Dr. Demetri Morgan in the School of Education’s Higher Education program at Loyola University Chicago. I am currently starting my dissertation study on Black queer men experiences within men of color mentorship programs in higher education. Participants will complete an audio-recorded interview lasting no longer than 60 minutes with myself. If you are interested, please email qhutchings@luc.edu to set up an interview. This is an IRB approved study by Loyola University Chicago.

Through the research, we hope to understand the experiences of Black queer men in men of color mentorship programs and how they navigate their salient identities. I am emailing in hopes to find participants to participate in my study. Please see the information below on participant qualifications and how to contact the researchers to set up an interview if you know of any of your students who are interested in participating in this study.

Qualifications to Participate:
- Currently an undergraduate student
- Self-identify as Black queer or gay man
- Currently involved or an alumnus in a men of color mentorship program within the city of Chicago.

If you are interested in participating in the study or have any questions, please email me at qhutchings@luc.edu.

Best,
Quortne Hutchings | qhutchings@luc.edu
Doctoral Candidate
Higher Education, Loyola University Chicago
APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT FACT SHEET
Project Title: From the Outside Looking In: Black Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Men Experiences in Men of Color and Black Male Initiative Mentorship Programs in Higher Education

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Demetri Morgan, Loyola University Chicago

Principle Investigator: Quortne Hutchings, Ph.D. Candidate, Loyola University Chicago

Introduction:

Please complete these following fact sheet in order to be considered to participate in the study.

- Pseudonym:
- Institution:
- Race:
- Gender identity:
- Sexual identity:
- Year classification:
- Name of men of color mentorship program:
- Current student or alumni of the men of color mentorship program:
- Would you be willing and able to attend a focus group sharing your experience with other participants in the study?

Thank you for completing this participant fact sheet form.
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL
Introduction Statement:
My name is Quortne Hutchings and I am a doctoral candidate and researcher in the Higher Education Student Affairs Program at Loyola University Chicago. I am conducting a study under the supervision of Dr. Demetri Morgan in the School of Education’s Higher Education program at Loyola University Chicago. I am currently starting my dissertation study on Black queer men experiences within men of color mentorship programs in higher education.

As I mentioned in the email, I will record you for the interview? If this is not okay with you have the option to leave the interview at no fault. The interview should be no more than 60 minutes (1 hour), but we may end sooner. Also, as a reminder, your name or any identifying information will not be used in any reports or publications that result from this study. If at any time during our interview you want to end the conversation, you have the right to exit the study at no penalty.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Along the lines of protecting your identity in the study, I am asking all participants to select names that I will use to refer to you during the study instead of your actual name. Do you have a preference for a pseudonym?

Ok. So now I want to briefly give you a sense of how the interview is going to go. Since I am interested in your experiences as a Black queer man in men of color mentorship programs, my questions will help guide the conversation to understand your experience and journey.

Interview Questions:

SECTION ONE: Opening Questions

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself? You can include your current year classification and institution, and other salient identities you may have (race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, etc.)?
2. When you hear the word mentorship, what are some things that come to mind for you?
   a. How has that changed over time? When and why?
3. When you hear the words masculinity and queerness, what are some things that come to mind for you?
   a. How has that changed over time? When and why?
4. Can you talk about your college experience/understanding or relationship within the mentorship program? Do you believe that this program has an influence upon your development in college? How so?
SECTION TWO: Reflection on Your Mentorship Program Experience

5. How did you first hear about the mentorship program you are involved in?
6. Are there specific people, events, or general interactions that have shaped your mentorship program and involvement generally within the program? Please describe.
7. How do you feel about the mentorship program in addressing support and advocacy for students who identify within the LGBTQIA community?
8. Can you share when your mentorship program has had conversations on topics around LGBTQIA identity?
9. How, if at all, has the mentorship program given you a better understanding of your salient identities?

SECTION THREE: Reflection on Negotiating and Navigating of Intersecting Identities

10. Tell me about a time in which you felt supported in the mentorship program within your salient identities?
11. Tell me about a time in which you felt like you belonged, as a Black queer man, in the mentorship program?
12. How do you express your gender identity and expression within the mentorship program?
13. How do you navigate your salient identities within the mentorship programs conversations or dialogue around topics on race, gender, and sexuality?
14. Can you please share an experience if any on experiencing a challenging conversation or dialogue within the mentorship program?
15. Is there anything that I did not ask you to share about in this interview that you would like to?
From the Outside Looking In: Black Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Men Experiences in Men of Color and Black Male Initiative Mentorship Programs in Higher Education
Focus Group Protocol

Introduction
I want to first thank you all for taking out the time to attend this podcast focus group. It is my intent that this time will be valuable for everyone in this space. A few community agreements before we begin: I would invite everyone to be respectful of each other’s opinions and lived experience around their experience within the mentorship programs. As each person’s perspectives are important, I want you all to feel empowered to be authentically yourselves in this space and during our time.

Lastly some notes to share I will be recording this podcast in an effort to capture everyone’s opinions and perspectives here today. None of your real names will be attached or share to quotes or ideas and your confidentiality will remain in any reporting. Please be mindful of what is said in this space stays in the space to not share this information with others.

Any other questions or thoughts before we begin?

Focus Group Topic and Questions

Give a synopsis on the Read podcast: The Read is a Black queer podcast that some of you may know about and it deals with popular culture references and conversations on topics about queer culture in society.

SECTION ONE: Opening Questions

1. I want to first start off with asking if anyone has anything to share about ways in which you all have shown Black excellence in your lives?

SECTION TWO: Topics around Black queer men and masculinity

2. In talking about the complexities around blackness, queerness, and masculinity, I wanted to share a hot topic that was recently shared in the news. Lil Nas X and Kevin Hart had a conversation a few months ago around how Lil Nas X coming out story was interrupted by Kevin’s comments during this show.
   a. My question to you all is his story very similar to you’ll lived experience in how you express your salient identities with other Black men, specifically cisgender heterosexual Black men?
   b. If you are willing to share how your coming out stories have shaped your lived experience in college or within the mentorship program?
SECTION THREE: Mentorship Program Experience

3. What has been your experience in negotiating your intersecting identities within the mentorship program?
4. Tell me about how are you able to express and engage with your peers around the salient identities you hold?
5. How do you define masculinity and queerness within your experience in the mentorship program?
6. How do you feel the program is welcoming and supportive of men who identify within the gay and queer community?
7. How has your understanding of masculinity and queerness change or stayed the same during your experience within the mentorship program?

SECTION FOUR: The Read

8. What are ways that men of color mentorship programs can help other men who identify as gay and queer to express their intersecting identities in their programs?
9. What are some relevant topics or dialogue you would like to engage in with your peers within the mentorship program?
10. Is there anyone that would like to share feedback or critique regarding men of color mentorship programs?
11. Is there anything that I did not ask you to share about in this interview that you would like to?
APPENDIX E

CONSENT FORM
**Project Title:** From the Outside Looking In: Black Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Men Experiences in Men of Color and Black Male Initiative Mentorship Programs in Higher Education

**Faculty Sponsor:** Dr. Demetri Morgan, Loyola University Chicago

**Principle Investigator:** Quortne Hutchings, Ph.D. Candidate, Loyola University Chicago

**Introduction:**
You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Quortne Hutchings for part of his dissertation study under the supervision of Dr. Demetri Morgan in the School of Education’s Higher Education program at Loyola University Chicago.

You are being asked to participate because you are a current student that self-identities as a Black gay or queer man, who is currently involved or an alumnus in a men of color mentorship program within the city of Chicago.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

**Purpose:**
The purpose of the interview is to investigate how Black queer men make meaning of intersecting identities and salient identities within men of color mentorship programs in higher education.

**Procedures:**
If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to:

- **Individual Interview:** Participants will engage in an in-person semi-structured interview lasting no more than 45-60 minutes. Before the interview, participants will be given the opportunity to provide a pseudonym or alternative name so as not to reveal any information that would identify the participant. The interview will be recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The audio recording is a requirement to participate in the interview. The audio recordings will be deleted once the transcriptions have been verified for accuracy. Transcripts will be stored in a OneDrive folder only accessible by password to the research team. The results of the interview will be used to better understand Black queer men’s experiences within the men of color mentorship program.

- **Focus Group [Podcast]:** Participants will be asked to engage in a focus group lasting no more than 60-90 minutes. The location of the focus group will be announced prior to the date of the focus group. Before the interview, participants will be given the opportunity to provide a pseudonym or alternative name so as not to reveal any information that would identify the participant. The interview will be recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The audio recording is a requirement to participate in the interview. The audio recordings will be deleted once the transcriptions have been verified for accuracy. Transcripts will be stored in a OneDrive folder only accessible by password to the research team. The results of the interview will be used to better understand Black queer men’s experiences within the men of color mentorship program.
**Risks/Benefits:**
There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. For example, you may experience some discomfort responding to some of the questions.

There are no direct benefits to you from participation, but participants may indirectly benefit by contributing to research about Black queer men experiences within men of color mentorship programs that may have a future positive or collective impact on how these programs are providing inclusive and brave space environments for Black queer men in higher education.

**Confidentiality:**
- All matters discussed between participants and researchers during the study will be kept strictly confidential except in the case where physical danger to oneself or others is imminent.
- With the exception of the principal investigators for this research study and the advising faculty, no one will have access to any recordings or written documents with your named attached that might be obtained during the study.
- Coded information from interviews will not include identifiable information from the participant.
- The audio recordings will be deleted once the transcriptions have been verified for accuracy. Transcripts will be stored in a One Drive folder only accessible by password to the research team.

**Voluntary Participation:**
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you may decide not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

**Contacts and Questions:**
If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Principle Investigator Quortne Hutchings (qhutchings@luc.edu) or the Faculty Sponsor Dr. Demetri Morgan (dmorgan6@luc.edu).

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

**Statement of Consent:**
Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

____________________________________  __________________
Participant’s Signature               Date

____________________________________  __________________
Researcher’s Signature               Date


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VITA

Dr. Hutchings was raised in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the child of a working-class mother who instilled in them the importance of education and giving back to the community. They attended public schools in Philadelphia, Delaware, and New Jersey, as their mother sought them to have the best educational access. Dr. Hutchings graduated from E.L. Meyers High School and attended The Pennsylvania State University, where they completed a Bachelor of Arts in African and African American Studies with minors in Sociology and Human Development and Family Studies. During their time at Penn State, Dr. Hutchings developed a love and passion for higher education as a Ronald E. McNair Scholar participant. As a McNair Scholar, they explored the importance of research at their undergraduate institution and as a Summer Research Opportunity Program (SROP) scholar at The Ohio State University. Their McNair involvement propelled Dr. Hutchings to earn a Master of Education degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign in Education, Policy, Organization, and Leadership with a concentration in Higher Education.

As a new higher education professional in student affairs, Dr. Hutchings worked for a pre-college pipeline program, PEOPLE, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. This access, retention, and scholarship program was pivotal in bridging research and theory to practice. They continued to hone their professional experience transitioning to Chicago, where Dr. Hutchings worked in First and Second Year Advising at Loyola University Chicago. This position led to an opportunity to move into a multicultural affairs position at Loyola in Student Diversity and
Multicultural Affairs (SDMA). As a Program Coordinator for LGBTQIA and Men’s Initiatives, they found a love for connected practice to research and theory in higher education. Subsequently, this led Dr. Hutchings to continue their path to pursuing a Ph.D. program at Loyola University Chicago in higher education.

During their time as a doctoral student at Loyola, Dr. Hutchings was the President of the Higher Education Student Affairs (HESA) organization, one of the co-founders of the Black Graduate Student Alliance (BGSA) and held various research and teaching assistant positions. Dr. Hutchings’s research examines the experiences of minoritized undergraduate, graduate, and student affairs professionals in the field of higher education. They want to continue to give back to the communities that support and uplift them throughout their education, professional, and personal journey. Currently, as a McNair Scholar Director at DePaul University, Dr. Hutchings intends to fulfill this promise in this role by supporting first-generation, low-income, and minoritized college students pursuing their graduate education. Finally, Dr. Hutchings is continuing to dismantle the oppressive institutional system through the lens of their research.