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I Kept Pushin': Exploring the Experiences of Black Gay Male University Students

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I KEPT PUSHIN': EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK GAY MALE

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

by

DANTÉ STUDAMIRE

Under the Direction of Jonathan Gayles, PhD

ABSTRACT

In contrast to resilience research in heterosexual Black male populations, few empirical studies exist regarding the persistence of gay Black men in college. This study examines the relationship between identity development and resilience of fifteen gay Black men enrolled in collegiate academic programs. This research, informed by a phenomenological and qualitative lens highlights the voices of fifteen gay Black men who are currently enrolled in, or alumni of, college programs. The following research questions guide this study: (1) What are the ways in which the specific intersectional identities of Black gay men shape their college experiences and (2) What effect do these identities have on resilience while engaged in college matriculation? The theoretical framework that informs this research is E. Patrick Johnson's Quare Theory.

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Georgia State University

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College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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DEDICATION

In honor of the ancestors and to all of the one's that for the burdens of oppression or security cannot tell their story. This work is dedicated to those who think that they are voiceless, those who think they cannot endure, and those who are in the fight of their lives. This is for the folks that feel unseen. This is for the folks who question if they belong. My hope is to inspire you to keep pushing. To the family that loves me, and the community that supports me- this is for you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I stand firmly in the belief that community does not happen by accident. An African proverb wisely informs, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." None of this, this work and my academic successes and growing experiences, would be possible without the ever-present help and support of those who propped me up and pushed me when I couldn't see the forest for the trees.

First, I must thank my committee. I am indebted in your care in developing me as a scholar and thoughtful person. Dr. Sarita Davis, you encouraged me and challenged me to be firm in knowing the ways that I can shake up empirical data. You were one of the first to tell me that this story was important and needed to be told. Dr. Lia Bascomb, you reminded me to be balanced, and know that it is ok to forgive myself. You taught me to critique, be critical, and be confident. Lastly, Dr. Dean Chair Jonathan Gayles. You always encouraged me in my writing and scholarship, but maybe more importantly, you helped me change my thinking. I am committed to being the thinker, not the thought. I appreciate you all more than I can express.

Special shout out to the African American Studies Department. I have things that I can say to each one you, faculty, staff, and support. Tiffany and Kaniqua, thank you for being a sounding board, a source of joy, for talking me off the ledge, and being an extra set of eyes and ears. LaShawna and Kiana, thank you for being a part of my research team, and helping things make sense. My SFMC colleagues, thank you for allowing me the time to work on this project and other endeavors.

I acknowledge the city of Atlanta and Morehouse College because that's where I began my growth and journey into manhood. It is in many ways the impetus that started me on the road to finding my voice.

And lastly, I acknowledge the men whom without their participation this would not be possible. You trusted me to tell your story and highlight all of your good, your Blackness, and all of your resilience. My aim is to do you justice and make you visible, though the institutional constraint on this work does not allow your full visibility. But to Patrick, Devin, Douglas, Will, Langston, Keith, Rodney, James, Maurice, Omar, Chauncey, Phillip, Marco, Chuck, and Thomas, I honor and acknowledge each of your stories, your resistance, and your humanity.

Thank you all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter situates the study in the larger conversation of race, sexuality and the academic experiences of Black gay men. Background context is provided, followed by the statement of the problem, and the purpose and significance of the inquiry. A brief overview of the methodology is discussed, including th0e nature of the study, the operationalization of key terms, and the overarching research questions. Finally, assumptions and limitations are addressed.

1.1   Background

At the beginning of the twentieth century, in speaking to the unique position of the American Negro, W.E.B. Du Bois (1903/1994) proffers, "double consciousness, the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness…" (p. 2). Research suggests gay Black men in college encounter isolation through systemic racism and disadvantage from their position as Black men operating within hegemonic American culture, and additional marginalization by further being rejected by members of their own race in recognizing and acknowledging their varied sexual orientations in a heteronormative privileged society governed by racialized ideas of manhood and sexuality. Double consciousness forces them to see themselves from not only their own perspective, but through the perceptions of others; nonetheless, as Du Bois notes in *The Souls of Black Folk*, it is their "dogged strength," (p. 2), or resilience, that allows them to persist. While gay Black men students are not the specific subject of Du Bois's statement, their existence, and often their educational experiences reflect these tense identity intersections that Du Bois so eloquently articulated over one hundred years ago (Strayhorn & Tillman-Kelly, 2013). This research approaches its undertaking assuming that

many gay Black men face constant double consciousness in terms of their racial and sexual identities. Often, gay Black men's success narratives are overshadowed and omitted, although for many gay Black men, the ability to exist, persist, and succeed is a revolutionary act in and of itself.

While resiliency research has increased steadily over the years, continued consideration is essential to understanding the human experience, particularly among those who persist through oppressive environments. Utilizing a resilience-centric approach counters the pervasive deficit and victimized narrative of gay Black men's experiences at the intersection of concurrent social oppressions. Research suggests that several personal and socio-environmental characteristics assist in facilitating the process of successfully negotiating these challenges. These strategies, while often demonstrated daily in larger life contexts, also serve to operate within the microcosm of college and university environments as well, (Kim & Hargrove, 2013).

1.2   Statement of the Problem

The transition to college is a significant milestone for many young people. According to Anumba (2015), despite their enrollment in college and plans to graduate with a degree, only an average of 39% of African American students graduate with a bachelor's degree after six years. This statistic lags much further behind their white, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander counterparts' rates of 62%, 50%, and 69%, respectively. As the 39% is broken down by gender, only 34% of African American men graduate with a degree after six years (Anumba, 2015). Among all student subgroups, African American men have the worst college attrition rate. They are the least likely to be enrolled in college, as well as the least like likely to persist until graduation (Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011). Such literature continues to contribute to stereotypes by reiterating negative intellectual performance and outcomes that ultimately affect academic

functioning and self-efficacy of these students. This reporting, as a result, also has a considerable effect on subsequent institutional policy and programming strategies for engaging Black men.

A large body of research studies has investigated Black men's negative experiences in college, particularly at predominantly white institutions (Blockett, 2017; Kim & Hargrove, 2013; Good-Cross & Tager, 2011). Obstacles including racial microaggressions and lack of support services serve to hinder Black men's achievement, but Kim and Hargrove (2013) articulate that Black men have continued to persist and excel even with these impediments. To dispel myths of Black college men as a monolithic group rife with social and academic challenges, scholars have worked to present varied experiences and counternarratives of these students. For example, Harper (2009) documented testimonies of Black men who actively participated as leaders of campus organizations, who attributed their successful navigation to parents, faculty, university officials, and other Black student leaders. To this extent, many Black gay men's university student experiences remain understudied.

1.3   Purpose and Significance

This study seeks to contribute to an emerging body of literature on Black academic resilience, but more broadly to provide visibility to a population that is often discounted in research concerning higher education. More recently, there has been an increase in Black gay populations enrolled in colleges and universities, but a lack of research regarding this demographic. Often research focuses on Black students separate from and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered students (Henry, Fuerth, & Richards, 2011), and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) student research is predominantly white (Dunbar, Sontag-Padilla, Ramchand, Seelam, & Stein, 2017). This compartmentalization of intersecting identities leaves a gap in the analysis of the experiences of students who identify at Black and gay intersections.

Henry et al. (2011) also note the void in literature around gay, lesbian, and bisexual student experiences, retention rates, academic success, and resilience, and posit that for Black sexually marginalized students, the research is "almost nonexistent," (p. 64). This research addresses the complexities of self-identification as it relates to resilience in this specific population of Black men.

This inquiry is significant as it does not approach Black gay men as sexually deviant or victims of the circumstances of sexuality and race. It centers the voices of Black gay men who take license to tell their own stories. It serves to move the needle in Black liberation ideologies by reshaping ideas of Blackness that have typically been hidden, steeped in detrimental pathology, and imprisoned by the stratification of the multiple identities of Black people. Further, this work examines the effects of the scripts, or roles, that are ascribed to Black men as a result of racism, patriarchy, and other systems in American culture. The work is conducted with the hope to contribute to the creation of new and different self-concepts. It is not uncommon to find literature that focuses on the systemic issues that plague Black men in creating a space for themselves. My research focuses on the personal narratives of resilience that flourish in spite of the systems of oppression in which Black men must navigate. It seeks to answer questions to create dialogue and resolutions around understandings of the multiplicities of Black identities, particularly at the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, and education.

1.4 Nature of the Study

This study utilized an exploratory design. Exploratory research design does not aim to determine final and conclusive answers, yet, the exploratory method aids in attaining a better understanding of the problem. Interviews are a standard method of data collection in exploratory

design. Data collection did occur by conducting one on one semi-formal interviews using the researcher as the instrument for data collection.

This research offers an intersectional, qualitative approach grounded within an African centered theoretical framework, Quare Theory, to an area of study that many conventional cannons of education predominantly neglect. More specifically, the phenomenological approach demonstrated here rejects the notion of research as objective. Exploring the understandings of the human experience through the unique lens of the individual is critical to understanding the society in which they navigate. Through this inquiry, Black gay men provide an additional narrative for Black men who are students to change the conversation, or, move the center, on the subject of student success and resilience. These accounts refute the countless deficient depictions of Black men's academic pursuits. This work, in turn, provides implications surrounding systems of education specifically for Black people inclusive of varying sexualities.

1.5   Key Terms

Specific terms are of significance to the conceptualization of this study. They are operationalized here:

- Ethnic identity formation- "multidimensional process that includes a sense of exploration and belonging to one's cultural group," (Watson, Langrehr, DeBlaere, Zelaya, Flores, 2016, p. 658).

- Insidious trauma- "characterized by multiple lower level, harmful events that occur through an individual's lifetime. In addition, insidious trauma is inherently identity-based and directed at those with marginalized identities by persons who hold power and privilege," (Watson et al., 2016, p. 656).

- Self-efficacy- "a person's beliefs about his or her capacity to influence his or her quality of functioning and the events that affect his or her life," (Wilson et al., 2016, p. 135).

- Resiliency- "a dynamic process wherein individuals are capable of positive adaptation or resistance, recovery, coping, and success within the context of adversity," (Buttram, 2015; Walker & Longmire-Avital, 2012).

- Intersectionality- "a theoretical framework that asserts that multiple social identities such as race, gender, SES, sexual orientation, and disability intersect at the individual micro level to reflect and interlocking systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and privilege at the macro social-structural level," (Bowleg et al., 2016).

1.6   Research Questions

The research questions that guide this study are as follows:

1) What are the ways in which the specific intersectional identities of Black gay men shape their university experiences and

2) What effect do these identities have on resilience while engaged in college matriculation?

1.7   Assumptions

As previously highlighted, many Black gay men experience significant occurrences of insidious trauma as a result of multiple areas of marginalization. In one of the most expansive samples of sexually marginalized college students ever studied, Dunbar et al (2017) found that lesbian bisexual, queer, and questioning students continue to face higher rates of discrimination and harassment and report more negative perceptions of campus climate than heterosexual peers,

potentially contributing to psychological distress and mental health problems. If untreated, they continue, such issues may negatively impair student functioning in several ways (e.g., attentional problems/trouble concentrating, avoidance/skipping classes or assignments, decreased motivation, etc.) that could lead to poorer outcomes. Consistent with much of the existing literature, the researchers neglect to address the intersectional needs and unique positionality of gay Black men in that study. While several studies suggest this, trauma cannot be generalized across all Black gay men's experiences in life, or during their academic enrollment.

1.8   Limitations

To the researcher's knowledge, no study in gay Black male college resilience across educational levels has been conducted through the theoretical frameworks as is done for this research study. Despite recruitment strengths, limitations may occur. To participate in this study, students must be born biologically male. Exclusion of members of the transgendered community who may identify as Black men, and experience some of the same challenges, but were not born biologically male may occur as a result. It is also essential to understand my position as a researcher and biases that I may bring to this research. As a college-educated gay Black man, who has, and continues to experience insidious traumas, I must be mindful not to allow my perspective to lead my interview sessions to ensure that the primarily highlighted voice is that of the participant. Lastly, this study seeks the participation of gay Black male university students without a specific designation to level (i.e., undergraduate, graduate, doctoral). The response across different levels in degree attainment and institutional enrollment can deliver results that, although they may speak to the demographic in which I am interested, offer a broad range of responses that would take considerably more time to analyze than if broken into specific levels

of enrollment. Nonetheless, these accounts present insight into the perspective of individuals whose stories aren't often shared.

1.9 Summary

Chapter One engages ideas of perception with specific consideration to being an outsider within social and communal contexts. Research suggests many Black gay men experience feelings of double consciousness during their college engagement as a result of being systemically oppressed for being Black and further marginalized by being gay. Studies further suggest that social isolation and instances of insidious trauma that result from these intersectional oppressions serve to create a feeling of invisibility and lack of engagement that threaten positive outcomes in the educational experiences of Black gay men. Glaringly absent are the voices of gay Black men who prevail against these structural oppressions and persist despite these challenges. The next chapter provides a review of current literature relating to Black masculine identities, Black male sexualities, resilience, and the integration of these elements in the college experiences of Black gay men.

2   LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to examine the multifaceted and nuanced experiences of Black gay men in college. It endeavors to understand the ways in which their identities have affected their college matriculation by seeking to answer the questions: 1) What are the ways in which the specific intersectional identities of Black gay men shape their college experiences and 2) What effect do these identities have on resilience while engaged in college matriculation? The literature presented in this chapter contextualizes the aim of the work by presenting historical and contemporary conversation across milieus including race and ethnicity, masculinities, higher education, and gender and sexuality. Work is cited from noted publications such as the

International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, Psychology of Men & Masculinity,

National Association of Student Affairs Professionals Journal, and *Psychology of Sexual*

Orientation and Gender Diversity to deliver a critical analysis that speaks to identity formation,

the negotiation of race and sexuality, resilience in general, and academic resilience in particular.

2.1   Identity

2.1.1   *Historical Context: Black Men and Masculinity*

There exists a discordant relationship between America and African American

men. From modernity and colonialism, through enslavement, and strides for human and civil

rights, African American men are often marginalized in political, social, and economic arenas.

Historically, African American men have been, and continue to be, assaulted by socio-economic

and academic challenges that generate identity conflict, (Bridges, 2011). Systemic

marginalization extends across media, through adverse visual representation, to educational

settings where African American boys are disproportionately targeted for special education and

remedial courses- by and large, leading to a pessimistic view of the world.

In *Dismantling Black Manhood,* Daniel Black (1997) offers insight into the context in

which the idea of manhood was developed and achieved in pre-colonial West Africa and the

deliberate process by which that manhood was stripped through the dehumanization of the

Middle Passage. It is critical to understand these processes to understand the historical

framework that shaped the unique positionality and construct of African American manhood, and

notions of masculinity presently. Black masculine identities are not only formed by those who

represent the identities but are also influenced by those outside of the identity group. More

recently, there is a growing push for a self-determined understanding of manhood within the

African American community as it is becoming increasingly understood that there is no

monolithic process or perception. However, Black (1997) notes that in precolonial West Africa, the title of "man" was bestowed and offered by the community as a collective recognition of stature as opposed to a self-declaration. Similarly, Kimmel and Messner (2013) proffer, "To be a man is to participate in social life as a man, as a gendered being. Men are not born, they are made" (as cited in Johnson-Bailey, Ray, & Lasker-Scott, 2014, p. 9).

In *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, hooks (2004) suggests that Black men are hated, feared, admired, or made the object of sexual fantasy, but they are rarely loved- either by others or themselves. hooks offers that traditional ideas of Black masculinity, what it means to be a Black man, are born out of the frustration and pain as a result of patriarchy and patriarchal masculinity. hooks argues in the chapter entitled, "Plantation Patriarchy" that, although African men that were relocated as a result of the slave trade may have come from cultures where gender roles may have shaped the division of labor and their status may have in fact been higher than women, these men had to be taught to equate their higher status as men with the right to dominate women.

In her examination of Black masculinity, hooks (2004) suggests that Black people have not always passively accepted the imposition of White historical representations of them, but just as often have not challenged those representations. Instead, they have internalized the myths and stereotypes, including narrow notions of Black masculinity. Although images of Black masculinity emerged from slave narratives in which Black men were hard workers who longed for the freedom to take care of their families, the gender politics of slavery and "White supremacist domination of free Black men" (2004) was the school where African men from different tribes, languages, and value systems learned "patriarchal masculinity." Contemporary Black men have continued to be shaped by these representations.

With the emergence of a fierce phallocentrism, a man was no longer a man

because he provided care for his family; he was simply a man because he had a

penis. Furthermore, his ability to use that penis in the arena of sexual conquest

could bring him as much status as being a wage earner and provider. A sexually

defined masculine ideal rooted in physical domination and sexual possession of

women could be accessible to all men. (hooks, 1992)

What hooks describes as the gender politics of slavery, cultural theorist Na'im Akbar describes

as "plantation psychosis" (Akbar, 1991). For Black men, one particularly salient stereotype may

be people's perception of their masculinity. Reflecting the privileges attached to Whiteness in

U.S. society, white American men tend to be stereotyped as having "normal" levels of

masculinity. In contrast, Black American men are stereotyped as hypermasculine (Wong, Horn,

& Chen, 2013).

Athena Mutua's (2006) *Theorizing Progressive Black Masculinities*, and *A Telling

Difference: Dominance, Strength,* and *Black Masculinities* by Patricia Hill Collins (2006)

express that ideal American masculinity is grounded in the tenets of domination and power. As a

result, anyone not socially located as a white, cisgendered, heterosexual male is viewed as

subordinate and experiences systemic oppressions as a result of their social position. Both texts

also reference domination and oppression, not to be confused with strength, as critical

components of normalized American masculinity. Discussions of domination are directly tied to

the dynamics of power. Traditional ideas around Black masculinity reflect a people that have

historically been oppressed imitating their oppressors in an attempt to get closer to those they see

as the socially, politically, and economically powerful. Collins offers that idealized masculinity

expresses strong men and weak women, but through systemic oppression, Black people (in this

case, men) are not afforded this view. Ultimately, Black (1997) writes, "Consequently, the white man and his world, especially his perception of men and manhood, became the yardstick by which black men began to measure their own manhood," (p. 100).

Several contemporary studies have significantly advanced research on Black masculinity but are relatively atypical. The first, Hunter and Davis (1992) conducted interviews with 32 Black men to examine Black men's construction of manhood. The participants were asked, "What do you think it means to be a man?" They found that Black men conceptualized manhood in at least three ways: (1) self-determination, expectations, and accountability, (2) the relationship and responsibility to family, and (3) and spirituality. In 2005, Hammond and Mattis conducted a similar survey asking "What does manhood mean to you?" with the ideas of responsibility and accountability emerging as the most frequent response type. The most common answers included autonomy, providing/waymaking, spirituality, morality, and familial ties. In *Measuring the Pros and Cons of What It Means to be a Black Man: Development and Validation of the Black Men's Experience Scale (BMES)*, researchers, Bowleg et al. (2016) also note the construction of The Masculinity Inventory Scale (2014), and The African American Men's Gendered Racism Stress Inventory (2013) to measure Black men's stress at the intersection of race and gender. However, data from the Black Men's Experiences Scale indicates that "optimal human functioning and subjective well-being are culturally bound, the strengths of racial and ethnic minority populations should be considered within their own cultural contexts," (Bowleg et al., 2016, p. 184).

More often than the self-ascribed characteristics that Black men used to describe notions of Black manhood in those studies, Black masculinity is commonly thought of in terms of the performance of specific behaviors. Masculinity as a performative expression continues to garner

interest within the social sciences. Particularly for Black men, the notion of "cool pose" is arguably one of the most recognized and discussed performances. "Cool pose" was designed as a coping mechanism and alternative expression of masculinity by African American men as a response to the sense of being invisible and countering the unfair characterizations ascribed to them by mainstream, hegemonic society (Majors & Gordon, 1994). The system of *playing it cool*, understood as maintaining the façade of being unbothered or unphased, empower Black men by showing traditional culture that they are strong and capable of survival. In creating these behaviors which include gestures, clothing, handshakes, and stance to navigate the adverse conditions, Black men affirm their self-identity. Although cool pose is an empowerment method for Black men, there are several negative consequences as well. The performance of cool pose reinforces the notion that Black manhood is about being tough, emotionally unavailable or detached. It becomes a sort of exaggerated caricature of Black male responsibility. These actions reiterate long-held negative stereotypes held by society. The focus shifts to the behaviors of what men do instead of the people that they are. Emphasis is placed on "doing" instead of "being." The same acts of autonomy are reflected in Dancy's (2012), *The Brother Code*, referring to the rules that govern manhood for African American males.

　　　　With consideration to much of the existing ideology of Black male masculinity, much of the literature suggests that traditional white masculine ideals are thought of as unattainable for many Black men leading to alternative ways to prove manliness. Many of the ways that researchers have previously communicated this alternative strategy are through the pathologization of Black men and their lived experiences. It is critical to know that not all Black men understand or practice masculinity in such hegemonic ways, but when asked to consider their experiences at the intersection of race and gender, many Black men acknowledged that

African American masculinity is different from masculinity in general because of systemic barriers and systems of inequality, (Rogers, Sperry, & Levant, 2015).

2.1.2   *Black Men and Sexuality*

> *I am a Negro faggot, if I believe what movies, TV, and rap music say of me. My life is a game for play. Because of my sexuality, I cannot be Black. A strong, proud, "Afrocentric" Black man is resolutely heterosexual, not even bisexual. Hence I remain a Negro. My sexual difference is considered of no value; indeed, it's a testament to weakness, passivity, the absence of real guts-balls. Hence, I remain a sissy, punk faggot. I cannot be a Black gay man because, by the tenets of Black macho, Black gay man is a triple negation. I am consigned, by these tenets, to remain a Negro faggot. And as such, I am a game for play to be used, joked about, put down, beaten, slapped, and bashed, not just by illiterate homophobic thugs in the night, but by many of Black American cultures best and brightest.*
(Riggs, 2001, p. 293)

Riggs' quote has significant meaning for several reasons. In this passage (of which text?), Marlon Riggs keenly depicts the challenges that one must withstand as a Black gay man. He passionately explains the constraints felt on his being and the notion of rejection of any idea of his potential. Similarly, and subsequently, to the love/hate relationship America has with Black men, its relationship with Black sexuality denotes the historical conflicted nature of race relations in the United States. The oppressive, yet fascinated gaze has served to shape "sentiments, images, and behavior about Black sexualities," (Battle & Barnes, 2010, p.1).

One must place the issues regarding Black sexuality within a socio-historical, political, and cultural context. Historically exploited by mainstream White society and policed by

segments of Black and white general public has meant that genuine concern about the sexual beliefs and behaviors of Black people has habitually been relegated to limited conversation and research leading to focus on traditional gender roles, sexual conservatism, heteronormativity, and homophobia. Patton (2014) incorporates hooks (1989) position that as there is no monolithic Black thought and that it would be erroneously assumptive to project that Black communities are any more homophobic or heterosexist than any other group. However, much of the existing literature suggests that "a large majority of African Americans are vehemently against homosexuality due to reasons such as conservative religious belief deeming it unnatural or perverse, accepting the belief that it weakens the race, or presumptions that it lessens the options for heterosexual Black women to have same-race mates," (p. 726). Patton furthers her argument by acknowledging that acceptance often occurs in the form of "open secrets," (p. 727) suggesting that Black communities are aware of differing sexualities but refrain from the critical engagement of what that means regarding implications to the broader Black community, culture, and society.

Although many Black gay men have centered their experiences at the intersection of race, class, and gender in collections of works such as *Brother to Brother* (1991/2007), *Black Queer Studies* (2005), and *No Tea, No Shade* (2016), empirical studies examining the intersectionality of Black gay men are particularly rare. A search of academic, scholarly research on the Black gay experience produces countless studies focused on HIV/AIDS and risk factors, behaviors, etc. often void of the daily experiences of those individuals and communities. More problematic is that on a superficial level, this indirectly suggests that contraction of the disease is an inevitable fate for members, particularly males, of the Black gay community. With distinct and increasing attention in both mainstream media and the academy, through television and research inquiry,

over the past thirty years, diverse sexual identities have continued to shift from the periphery of conversation to the fore as a result of lesbian and gay civil rights movements and exploratory inquiry. Neither discourse, however, has significantly or sufficiently situated considerations of race, ethnicity, or culture within the discussion, (Phillips & Stewart, 2008).

Utilizing the Multidimensional Identity Model (MIM), Henry, Richards, and Fuerth (2011) note ways in which individuals fitting multiple marginalized culture groups embody their identities. The MIM suggests "the individual passively assumes the identity assigned by society, the individual consciously chooses his/her identity, individual vacillates between identities depending on the environment, and the individual embraces multiple identities simultaneously," (p. 67). Henry et al. (2011) also indicate five shared themes that affect identity development in gay and lesbian African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans: discrimination, oppression, choosing between cultures, rejection, and social support. Each of these is salient to the experiences of Black gay men as there may be benefits or consequences resulting from the manner in which one chooses to express their identity. Although the Multidimensional Identity Model does not explicitly speak to gay African American men, additional research indicates that gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals of color face discrimination and oppression in multiple communities, including racial discrimination from the larger white society, as well as persecution within their ethnic community for being non-heterosexual. Integration can often be difficult as a result of being forced to choose between cultures (Wilson et al., 2016; Buttram, 2015). Lastly, according to researcher Ilan Meyer (2010), rejection is felt from the white-dominated gay, lesbian, bisexual community leading to often inadequate social resources, support, and role models. These findings reinforce Henry et al.'s (2011) assertion that Black sexual minoritized people face psychological and physiological issues specific to their intersectional position. Black

lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities reflect poorer health than cultural counterparts. Black men, specifically, have higher incidents of adverse mental health outcomes than their White counterparts, and homosexuality was found to be a predictor of suicide.

Though there is increased activity in studies that consider the lived experiences of Black gay men, consistent with considerable volumes of existing literature, the needs and specific positionality of gay Black men are also compartmentalized and not considered within the context of intersectionality in much of the general conversation. Intersectionality is defined as "a theoretical framework that asserts that multiple social identities such as race, gender, SES, sexual orientation, and disability intersect at the individual micro level to reflect and interlocking systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and privilege at the macro social-structural level" (Bowleg et al., 2016). In the implications of their work on the intersectional experiences of Black gay men, Reed and Miller (2016) contend the many Black gay men thrive in the face of marginalization, and there is a necessity for complementary research on their resilience.

2.1.3   *Black Gay Men in the University*

In recent years, there has been an increase in Black, gay, and lesbian individuals enrolled at colleges and universities across the United States (Henry et al., 2011). Although a precise count of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students is unidentified, a study conducted by the American Psychological Association (Harley, Nowak, Gassaway, & Savage, 2002) estimated that one in six college students were lesbian, gay or bisexual. Research suggests several methodological challenges for empirically and quantitatively representing LBGT populations in higher education assessment and analysis. On the national level, of the ten most widely used survey instruments, only four inquire about sexual identity (Rankin & Garvey, 2015). At the local level, though

countless institutions serve a myriad of students across the sexuality spectrum, many academic establishments are just now beginning to tackle sexual identity on institutional forms.

McCready (2004) offers that research approaches Black gay male students uncritically merely because "Black male students whose identities are congruent with dominant representations of Black males in mass media receive more personal attention because their marginalization is seemingly better understood," (p. 142). The perceived better understanding results in a perceived normal and acceptable, yet exclusionary and restricted, experience for anyone not engaging within that specific purview. Only recently has a scholarly exploration of Black gay collegians garnered significant engagement, although there is considerably more to glean from the lived experiences of these individuals.

Strayhorn and Tillman-Kelly (2013) organize earlier analyses on Black gay male students into four main categories: a) an attempt to quantify the number of Black gay and bisexual men across the country, b) accounts of the coming out process and the ways that they self-identify if they identify along the same gender loving spectrum at all, c) detailing Black gay men's sexual behaviors and practices, and d) examining particularly undergraduates social and academic experiences in college. Research in all categories, while growing, is limited at best. The first, for the reasons offered above. The second, for example, despite generally held beliefs that Black gay men conceal their "affectional status" (p. 86) by living on the own low" an idea made popular by J.L King's 2004 work, some Black gay male collegians recount going to college to "come out" and live openly as gay men. Also, although popular theory places disclosure in a linear order of identity development, studies suggest that for many Black gay men, in college notably, the decision to make known their sexuality is often a complex process where men demonstrate

agency to either disclose or hold back this element of their identity to different people, at different times, in different ways.

Furthermore, the research on Black gay men's sexual behaviors and practices usually operates to highlight and exploit high-risk behaviors and subsequent consequences of sexually transmitted disease, substance abuse, and suicide. This popular narrative cannot surely be painted of all Black gay men, but unfortunately, this occupies a large part of the social dialogue. A review of the literature on the fourth line of inquiry, Black gay college students' academic and social experiences while in college suggests three major conclusions, (Strayhorn & Tillman-Kelly, 2013). Black gay male collegians, whether at predominantly white institutions of historically Black colleges and universities face social isolation from other Black and male students on campus. Next, besides finding difficulty engaging with college community, the complications surrounding disclosure can be "detrimental to psychosocial development," (p.87). Lastly, the bulk of data demonstrates that Black gay male collegians encounter discrimination in the form of microaggressions, harassment, derogatory comments, threats, graffiti, the pressure to conceal identity, written comments, and in some cases, physical assaults on college campuses. Nevertheless, the unsympathetic conditions under which Black gay male college men may find themselves often regularly compels them to resist, forge new spaces, and locate moments of liberated autonomy to contend with these occurrences of insidious trauma.

According to Mobley Jr. and Squire (2014), "Within the societal context and many higher education environments, Black gay men live 'invisible lives,'" (p. 466). In contrast to resilience research in heterosexual Black male populations, few empirical studies exist regarding the persistence of gay Black men in college. Researcher, Reginald Blockett (2017) asserts that Black male college resilience research attributes high achieving Black men's success to community

involvement and strong ethnic identity ties and uplift. He expresses, "These studies explore the intersections of gender and race within higher education, yet the same attention has not been given to men of color who are also sexual minorities," (p. 801). This becomes problematic as many studies maintain a heteronormative perspective of college men as a "monolithic demographic either without sexual orientation, or with a perceived heterosexual orientation," (p. 801). Despite emerging literature and contribution to knowledge about gay men of color, and Black gay male college student specifically, gaps remain in the research regarding self-efficacy, student success, and resilience.

As Black men are not a monolith, it can be assumed that social positionality as a racially and sexually marginalized group could present a unique set of challenges to gay Black men's college experiences. Specifically, as it relates to resilience in gay Black men, studies indicate that social relationships are often crucial (Buttram, 2015), however, forging these relationships in an environment such as a college campus can be difficult as gay Black men experience both racial and perceived sexuality microaggressions from non-Black and heteronormative communities. Because of the challenges at this intersection, Black gay men often experience marginalization that can cogently affect academic success. However, just as research exists for larger Black male student populations, stories of resilience and academic triumph abound for Black gay students as well.

2.2 Resilience

Prominent literature thoroughly describes the challenges with which Black men in particular, and Black gay men, though less explicitly considered, are met. Arguably more critical and less studied, however, is the fact the many Black gay men flourish and thrive despite these challenges, (Follins, Walker, & Lewis, 2014; Hill & Gunderson, 2015). More recently, evolving

research is beginning to address the notion that many gay Black men, while often thought of at a more significant disadvantage, function at levels equivalent to those who do not experience the same identity marginalization. Given the considerable ability to successfully negotiate racism, both internalized and external homophobia, and racialized perceptions of being, it is worth examining the strengths and resilience mechanisms of gay Black men.

Various approaches to operationalize the idea of resilience emerged within the existing literature (Alim et al., 2008). Despite varying definitions, a recurring theme in the description of resilience is that the phenomenon of overcoming challenges or traumas is not a singular, one-time occurrence, but a process (Buttram, 2015; Walker & Longmire-Avital, 2012). In his work examining the social environmental elements of resilience among vulnerable African American/Black men who have sex with men, Buttram (2015) acknowledges Panter-Brick & Leckman's (2013) definition as the "the process of harnessing biological psychosocial, structural, and cultural resources to sustain well-being," (p. 924). Similarly, Follins, Walker, and Lewis (2014) present resilience as "a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation or resistance within the context of significant adversity," (p.191). Even more, Masten's (2001) definition elaborates on these ideas offering that resilience is multi-dimensional, dynamic over the life course, and context dependent. Synthesizing these points, for resilience to occur, it is clear one must experience at least two conditions: (1) exposure to, or the presence of, a threat or adversity, and (2) the positive adaptation to, or despite, that threat.

Utilizing a resilience-centric approach counters the pervasive deficit and victimized narrative of gay Black men's experiences at the intersection of concurrent social oppressions. Research suggests that several personal and socio-environmental characteristics assist in facilitating the process of successfully negotiating these challenges. These strategies, while often

demonstrated daily to some degree, also serve to operate within the microcosm of college environments as well, (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). In a 2016 study, Wilson et al. highlighted several resources that emerged as protective or mediating factors to adversity while examining profiles of resistance in Black gay and bisexual men. These resources included personal tactics such as self-efficacy, adaptive coping techniques, and social support. Though classified separately, Black men engaged in these behaviors simultaneously to influence and persist through their adversities. Several studies supported these classifications and elaborate both in the context of Black men, inclusive of nonheteronormative identity, as well as within the framework of the post-secondary educational experience. There is considerable room for more scholarship concerning resiliency and the determined spirit to overcome in Black gay men, but the following are the most prominent strategies in the existing literature.

2.2.1 Self-Efficacy

Performing a brief web search of the terms 'Black gay men' and 'self-efficacy' in tandem will produce a plethora of links examining the sexual practices and unfavorable syndemics often ascribed to gay Black men. An idea that is considered a central concept to resilience literature (Wilson et al., 2016) and prominently held regarding positive outcomes, self-efficacy, when attached to Black gay men often serves to perpetuate pathological narratives. Self-efficacy, defined as "a person's beliefs about his or her capacity to influence his or her quality of functioning and the events that affect his or her life," (Wilson et al., 2016, p. 135) plays a significant part in the agency involved in achieving a goal. Some degree of self-efficacy is measured, and considered a central concept, in many of the studies that involve Black gay male college resilience and success.

Not only is self-efficacy seen as the ability to influence one's quality and function in life, but in research by Follins et al. (2014), several Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals spoke to the belief that they could resist and change oppressive environments. Because self-efficacy is regarded as more of a cognitive and psychosocial process, there is less empirical evidence than the observable behaviors regarding resilience. However, several studies, particularly of Black gay men in college, suggest that self-efficacy is considerably salient because of the stigmatization of their identities that can result from their social position. In a study conducted by Strayhorn, Blakewood, and DeVita, (2008) examining the factors associated with college selection choice for Black gay male undergraduates, along with supportive relationships, participants identified self-determination and independence as factors that seemed critical to their success in college. Students articulated that they were "self-determined, motivated, and independent" (p. 99), all contributing factors to self-efficacy. Noteworthy in their study, many participants expressed that these characteristics that contributed to their self-motivation and determination were fueled by their "lived experience" (p. 101) in having to combat racism in predominantly white spaces and homophobia in predominantly Black spaces. For many gay Black men, self-efficacy functions to protect from feelings of depression, helplessness, and low self-esteem.

Anumba (2015) attributes self- motivation and determination, strategic aspects of self-efficacy, to the decision to attend college, remain focused on achieving goals, and actively working toward goals. In a study wherein the primary focus was to highlight the voices of African American males and factors that heavily contribute college persistence, conversation with participants indicated that despite the experiences of college life, self-motivation "influenced the individual's response to the environmental stimuli and outcome of the

experience," (p. 46). It is important to note that the study, much like many of the existing literature, did not identify the sexuality of these men. However, the findings can be theorized for gay Black men in college as well. Research has indicated that self-efficacy plays both a compensatory and protective role as a resilience factor for Black gay men in college.

2.2.2 Adaptive Coping

Black gay men are situated at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities. As such, in many social contexts, including campus environments, these men also find themselves laboring under the "negative effects of stigmas and discriminations from within their own racial group as well as the majority gay community," (Henry, Feurth, & Richards, 2011, p. 66). To maneuver these circumstances, Black men formulate coping strategies to buffer them from instances that pose a physical or psychological threat to their well-being as a result of their specific social position, (Bridges, 2011). Adaptive coping also considered 'hardiness,' is another factor that is central to the idea of resilience, (Wilson et al., 2016). Similar to self-efficacy, hardiness references personal attributes that individuals utilize to adapt to situations. However, unlike self-efficacy, it has been described as "an individual difference trait and less susceptible to fluctuations as a result of environmental factors," (Wilson et al., 2016, p. 146). Research also suggests that people with high levels of hardiness possess three universal characteristics: (1) the belief that they can control/influence the events they experience in life, (2) commitment to their personal and interpersonal goals, and (3) cognitive flexibility- such that they believe change is a challenge that enhances development in some way, (Wilson et al., 2016).

Black gay men employ strategies to successfully negotiate and navigate spaces that may not be initially, or ultimately, inclusive. Specifically, since higher education communities act as microcosms that reflect broader social ideals, many of the same coping behaviors employed in

daily negotiation are applied within college environments. Effective coping strategies incorporate cognitive flexibility in response to oppressive conditions. Some approaches, however, allow a person to 'cope' with a situation but are adverse to their hardiness. Many coping strategies that Black gay men engage are acts of resistance or reclamation of agency within interlocking racialized and extreme heteronormative oppressive systems. Although there is no specific strategy with which to homogenize Black gay male coping, for this research, coping strategies are considered as either embracing one's multiple identities or distancing and/or compartmentalizing identities.

Follins et al. (2014) refer to previous research by Wilson and Miller (2002) that identified six cognitive and behavioral coping strategies Black gay men adopt to manage their sexual minority status: changing one's actions, dress and mannerisms as a way of disassociating their gay and heterosexual worlds; drawing on spiritual connectivity; direct confrontation of homophobic sentiment; abstinence from same-sex sexual behavior; creating opportunities for community and socialization for other Black gay men; and practicing intentional self-love and acceptance.

2.2.3 *Social Support*

Social support is often regarded in terms of the quantity and quality of one's social connections. Concerning resilience, unlike self-efficacy and adaptive coping strategies, social support is considered a resource in that it is dependent on factors in one's environment, (Wilson et al., 2016; Hill & Gunderson, 2011; Brown, 2008). Among other connotations, it is broadly defined as "resources and interactions provided by others that may be useful for helping a person cope with a problem," (Wilson et al., 2016, pg. 146). Significant sources of social support are found from family, both biological and chosen, within institutional resources including

educational and workplace initiatives, and community resources such as religious institutions, affinity groups, and social organizations. The variety of these supports assist many LGB individuals in moving toward what Brandon-Friedman & Kim (2016) highlight as "truth in being," being true to one's self in spite of cultural negativity and feelings of empowerment and validation. Though resiliency theory suggests support from parents is the most foundational form of all supports (Buttram, 2015), research with LGB individuals acknowledges that peer support is a critically important factor in managing stress related to sexual identity, (Simmons, 2013; Patton, 2011; Blockett, 2017).

To understand how some African American people have been able to overcome adversities, it is necessary to explore the aspects of African American life and culture that may serve as protective components. There has long existed a strong tradition of communal support within the practices of African descended people. Community does not happen by accident. The family has primarily been regarded as the nucleus of the support system working in union with the church as well as nonbiological kinship networks, (Brown, 2008). Internal support systems such as those mentioned above have proven to be the bedrock of persistence in African American communities, but not without nuance, particularly with regard to those of same-gender loving experience. Religion is considered a pillar in the Black community. However, for Black LGB emerging adults, Walker and Longmire-Avital (2012) assert that "religious institutions that may present pervasive negative images of same-sex behavior may have a negative effect on identity development, mental health, and resiliency for these individuals," (p. 1723). To combat this, perhaps in a counteract of resilience, some may or may not choose to leave their church communities and instead look beyond traditional organized religion for personal understandings of faith, (Means, 2017). Still, others have found ways to manage and negotiate language and

ideology that disavows their identities. In attempts to seek counterspaces, some Black LGB seek out or create "open and affirming" (Walker & Longmire-Avital, 2012, p. 1725) churches that effectively intermix religious and sexual identities.

The same sort of laboring to create affirmative networks can be observed in familial and peer networks especially within the educational enterprise of Black gay men. Studies suggest that peer support is essential for Black gay male collegians as they matriculate toward graduation and navigate racial and sexual oppression inside of educational settings, (Blockett, 2017; Patton 2011, Simmons, 2013; Means et al., 2017). Patton (2011) expressed that peer support was the most significant resource for participants in her study of Black gay men, and Strayhorn (2012) found that family-like kinships that were often self-facilitated were vital to academic persistence. One reason for the active effort to forge these strong peer bonds centers around shared experiences of comfortability and exclusion. Often resources such as LGBTQ centers on campuses are seen as bastions of resource and communion for students that are out, the idea of publicly declaring one's sexuality, and seeking others of the same affect. This is to no means say that African American men are not out, or do not come out, however as Blockett (2017) suggests, disclosure has "both personal and psychological ramifications for Black gay and bisexual men," (p. 802). Because of the historical perception and implications of nonheteronormative sexuality in Black communities, many gay Black men are often more comfortable maintaining discretion with regard to their sexuality or simply being discreet with whom they disclose their sexual identity. It is also worth mentioning here that, preserving a lower key perception of their sexuality, maintains a sense of privilege afforded to men who are otherwise marginalized in a patriarchal society.

While Blockett (2017) articulates the necessity of creating peer connections at predominantly white institutions, Squire and Mobley Jr. (2015) found the opposite at Historically Black College and Universities (HBCUs). What is interesting in their study on negotiating race and sexual orientation in the college choice of gay Black males, is that while some participants considered the salience of their race and sexuality at different levels, HBCU participants, "found comfort" (p. 484) in being able to embrace their gay identity and focus on their race during their matriculation. In both instances, however, examples are provided of college campuses as sites of active endurance not just to establish community with one another, but also to resist racism and homophobia in the daily lives of these men. These opportunities brought Black gay men together across age, discipline, and graduate or undergraduate status to create affirming environments and carve out counterspaces to persist within educational contexts.

2.3   Theoretical Framework

Although queer studies has the potential to transform the way scholars theorize

sexuality in conjunction with other identity formations, the paucity of attention given to

race and class in queer studies represents a significant theoretical gap.

(Johnson, 2001, p.1)

Although growing interests in diversity and inclusion have created a space for extensive research in marginalized populations, much of that same research compartmentalizes facets of an individual's identity and studies pieces in isolation that have a significant impact on other parts of one's social positionality. Individuals are multifaceted and thus are influenced by their multiple identities. Intersectionality is the lens through which this research is employed. An intersectional lens is particularly useful because as Osei-Kofi states (as cited by Means et al. 2017, p. 112), "Intersectionality refers to the idea that people have multiple identities and that

people experience and perform/live within multiple, intersecting, and concurrent positions of privileges and oppressions." For gay Black men in college, not only is there stigma mirroring larger negative social ideology around being a Black man, multiple studies indicate the prejudice toward gay and lesbian students on college campuses as well (Strayhorn, Blakewood, & Devita, 2008; Henry, Richards, & Feurth, 2011; Blockett, 2017; Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011). Henry et al. (2011) offer that although all sexual minoritied students face marginalization on college campuses, students that situate their position as Black and non-heteronormative find themselves in a position of "double jeopardy" (p. 67) at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities.

To utilize a complementary framework to this lens that is specific to the epistemology of the participants of this exploration into the lived experiences of gay Black men, E. Patrick Johnson's Quare Theory is the chosen theoretical framework that informs this study. As traditional Queer Studies continues to solidify its niche in the academy, many Black gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people are hesitant to embrace its position, (Johnson, 2001). Johnson conceptualized Quare Theory as "a strategy for theorizing racialized sexuality," (p. 1). Within E. Patrick Johnson's (2001), "Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother," the author critically assesses queer theory's strong critique of selfhood and agency strongly informed from a white position. Johnson quotes cultural, feminist, and queer theorist, Gloria Anzaldúa offering, "queer is used as a false unifying umbrella which all 'queers' of all races, ethnicities, and classes are shored under" (p. 3). She goes further to acknowledge that "at times we need this umbrella to solidify our ranking as outsiders, even when we seek shelter under it, we must not forget that it homogenizes, erases our differences" (p. 3).

Quare Theory was birthed out of the African American experience to situate race in the conversation along with gender, sexuality, perspective and lived experience. The term "quare" emerged from Johnson's grandmother who pronounced queer as quare in her Southern vernacular. He also notes the use of "quare" in Irish literature to mean odd or strange," (p. 3). In the broader scheme of identity politics, E. Patrick Johnson's Quare framework combats the adverse effects of invisibility. In 2000, Johnson co-organized "Black Queer Studies in the Millennium" at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. The conference had two specific goals: "to make an intervention into queer studies because of the elision of race and to push Black Studies to incorporate sexuality as a key analytical frame," (Johnson, 2014, p.52). Means (2017) notes that Quare Theory is becoming increasingly popular as a framework in higher education and student affairs scholarship.

Means (2017) highlights Quare Theory's functionality in engaging Black gay experience by underscoring its three fundamental concepts: intersectionality, resistance and agency, and performativity and theories of performance. In the context of a lens that asserts that multiple social identities such as race, gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and disability intersect at the individual micro level to reflect and interlocking systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and privilege at the macro social-structural level (Bowleg et al., 2016), one can understand the applicability with which this view is not only fitting, but critical, to engage the scholarly analysis of Black gay men. Drawing from Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) Intersectionality Theory, to use the title of Bowleg's (2013) study exploring the intersections of identities of Black gay men, "once you've blended the cake, you can't take the parts back to the main ingredients."

In "Quare Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know..*," Johnson (2001) also addresses the tension between the idea of racial essentialism and non-heteronormative identities. To do this, Johnson critically engages Marlon Riggs' 1994 film, *Black Is...Black Ain't.* Riggs paints a picture of the multiple layers and diversity of Blackness by offering it as a gumbo recipe to "[demonstrate] that like blackness, the recipe can be altered, expanded, reduced, and watered down" (Johnson, 2001, p. 17). All of its separate pieces work together to make the dish the amalgamation of flavors to be enjoyed. This also suggests that heterosexuality is no blacker than homosexuality.

Furthermore, the conflation of racial essentialism with sexuality also necessitates the elevation of the Black gay voice and scholarship from an authentic space. Quare Theory does just that. The Black gay scholar illuminating the voices of other silenced members of the community (hetero- and nonhetero), or the individual without any title telling their story in an inclusive way that does not create a hierarchy in their identities, placing race or sexuality above each other, or negating or minimizing other's experiences within Black communities, is, in fact, revolutionary.

Johnson (2001) grounds the quare framework in performance theory because performance theory, "not only highlights the discursive effects of acts, but also points to how these acts are historically situated," (p. 10). Historical situation is also referred to as "historicity," (Akinyela, 1995, pg. 37). Akinyela (1995) articulates,

> Culture is constructed in the constant process of dynamic change motivated by
> shifts in asymmetrical power relationships within complexes of various subject
> positions. The resulting material manifestations of cultural phenomenon- for
> example, the artistic, social, and political expressions of groups and individuals-

are behaviors of resistance and survival which assist and motivate cultural actors

to make sense of and give meaning to the collective experience. (p.33)

This explanation supports and elucidates the necessity of performativity and Johnson's Quare Theory. The work, and call, of Quare Theory, is about the combination of theory and praxis. Understanding the Quare framework, it is evident that agency plays a significant role in the performance of identity, thus motivating marginalized people into action, and to ultimately utilize their resistance as resilience. In this study, I use Quare Theory as a conceptual framework to understand the intersectionality of race and sexuality, and how these facets of participants' identities fuel their resilience.

2.4   Summary

Chapter Two included a discussion of the literature regarding prominent research in the foundations of Black masculinities. Historically, the role of manhood has been defined and often conflated with ideas of domination and power. Simultaneously, Black men have continued to advocate for themselves to reshape notions of Blackness, Black manhood, and that have typically been hidden, steeped in detrimental pathology, and stratified the multiple identities of Black people. There has always existed a desire by African descended people to define one's self outside of the imposed restraints placed on them by subjugating forces. Black manhood and sexuality with specific consideration of Black men who express their sexuality outside of traditionally perceived roles of heteronormativity and embrace the same gender loving or gay identities is no different. It is here that we acknowledge the dearth of attention to Black gay male collegians voices or experiences with regard to college socialization. Black gay men within educational practice resilience as an active form of resistance to social and psychological

oppression that they face. By enacting this strategy, many Black gay students successfully navigate their college experiences- this is the framework of Quare Theory in practice.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Questions

In contrast to resilience research in heterosexual Black male populations, few empirical studies exist regarding the persistence of gay Black men in college. This study examines the relationship between identity and resilience of gay Black men that are enrolled in, and have graduated from, collegiate academic programs. This research explores the following questions:

(1) What are the ways in which the specific intersectional identities of Black gay men shape their college experiences and

(2) What effect do these identities have on resilience while engaged in college matriculation?

3.2 Researcher Positionality

I identify with my research participants in several areas. I am a Black gay cisgender man who is also a student pursuing a degree in an academic program. Also, similar to all of the participants, I am open about my sexuality and have disclosed that information with most family, friends, and colleagues. To date, I have attended two different undergraduate institutions, a small HBCU and a substantially large urban research institution in the south. Currently, I attend the same PWI from which I graduated with my undergraduate degree. Upon entering my first undergraduate institution, like many of my participants, I was the first person in my family to attend college.

Compounded with the isolation that I felt as I began to explore my layered identity as a Black gay male student, I found myself affronted with racial opposition from non-Black spaces,

and sexual persecution intraculturally. My social positionality as a racially and sexually marginalized individual on campus presented a unique set of challenges to my social and academic experiences. The obstacles that I faced resulted in a shift from the exceptional performance for which I was known. All of these things resulted in a break in my enrollment. Part of the reason for this was that I sought support from those with whom I could identify; however, many of these people were outside of the university. What I longed for were support systems, resources, or programming on my campus from students facing similar challenges as myself, but because of social stigma, perception, and marginalization, locating comrades was exceedingly cumbersome. Through self-reflection and the support of a host of faculty and staff, I ultimately came to realize that I was not a victim of my circumstance, and my best approach to grappling with adverse notions, self-inflicted and otherwise, was through rigorous intellectual work to counter these perceptions. I tapped into my personal efficacy, determined to be resilient. The research that I am conducting is birthed from my personal experience. That experience allowed me to engage in dialogue with an understanding of the subject matter to gain trust as well as to not alienate or objectify my participants. As a researcher, I must be mindful of how my experience and social identities appear within my interpretations and understandings of my work. Careful precaution was taken to ensure that presentation and analysis of data is both reliable and valid.

3.3   Site Selection

Requests for participation were extended through several predominantly Black meeting locations including African American Studies course classrooms, the universities' Multicultural Center and LGBTQ centers, and Black student organization meetings. Also, a recruitment flyer

was provided through the researcher's online social media. All recruitment methods were utilized with the intent to create a purposeful snowball method for recruitment and participation.

3.4 Sample Selection

The population for this study consists of 10-15 Black gay men who are either currently active college or universitystudents or alumni. Through self-reported demographic information garnered from a demographic questionnaire, individuals must have identified as at least 18 years of age. Participants also self-identify as biologically male and/or as cisgendered men. The men must have also identified as Black, and gay. Lastly, all participants are currently enrolled in a post-secondary program or a college graduate. Those involved are of various ages, socioeconomic statuses, and different levels of education (i.e., undergraduate or graduate), so although the sample is not large enough to be representative of the total population of Black gay men in college, there are a variety of experiences and perspectives represented.

3.5 Design Type and Approach

Creswell (2007) offers that a qualitative method is useful when a problem needs to be explored within a group or population, but especially when the aim is to hear "silenced voices" (p. 40). A qualitative method is the most effective method to answer the proffered research questions. More specifically, my research employs the theoretical lens perspective and format. The theoretical lens framework, Creswell (2007) denotes, provides a clear literature review and theoretical lens for that which is being studied. E. Patrick Johnson's Quare Theory informs this work. Quare Theory emphasizes the notion of being an outsider within a community and using resilience as a form of resistance when confronted with systemic oppression in the way of racialized, gendered, and class biases. As a researcher, and a person to whom these theories

can apply, I understand how these lenses shape my perspective, but I cannot expect or anticipate the experiences of the individuals that participate in the study.

I offer that phenomenology, in particular, transcendental phenomenology, best fits my research questions. Transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) is focused less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on the descriptions of the experiences of the participants. We have already established through the literature that most academic resilience research for Black men is presumptively heteronormative, and minimizes, if it recognizes at all, voices of Black gay men. The phenomenological approach allows for several individuals to share their experiences of specific phenomena, whether they are situations with marginalization, instances of trauma, or experiences of resilience. This research explored the perspectives of participants within these phenomena.

3.6   Data Collection

All participants that agreed to partake in this research study were informed that the purpose of this research is to give voice to, and better understand the relationship between identity development of gay Black men and college resilience. Participation in this study was entirely voluntary and could be concluded at the request of the participant without incurring any penalty. Participants were asked to participate in a one on one semi-formal interview with the researcher. Each interview took approximately 45-90 minutes to complete and was facilitated at a location and time of their convenience. All key terms were operationalized in the introductory explanation. Once in agreement to all terms and the Informed Consent and demographic questionnaire signed, interviews were conducted. An electronic recording device recorded interviews. During the interview, copious notes were also captured to contextualize the conversation and provide a rich description of the layered experiences of the participants. The

combination of audio and written notations served for later coding to draw attention to patterns and similarities that address the primary research questions, as well as to report emerging themes that may not have been initially considered. Because of the nature of conversations elicited through the interviews, participants were granted the opportunity to choose the locations of the sessions for confidentiality, security, and convenience. As this study asked participants to recount experiences, there were several emotional moments for some participants, but no more risk associated than experienced in an average day and when those moments did occur, participants were given time and asked if they wished to proceed. For their participation, participants that completed the interview were able to choose between a $10 Starbucks gift card or $10 Visa gift card.

3.7   Data Analysis

Upon completion of the interviews, the audio recordings were submitted, sans identifying information to Rev transcription service to provide transcripts of each conversation. Upon receiving the transcribed interviews, I listened to the audio recordings while checking the transcriptions to be sure all typed information was precisely documented as each participant stated. My research questions explored how the participants experience the intersections of their identities and thus how their resilience is affected. For that reason, I thought it best to utilize emotion coding. Emotion Coding is defined as "the emotions recalled and/or experienced by the participant or inferred by the researcher about the participant" (Saldana, 2009, p. 87). In addition, Goleman defines emotion as "a feeling and its distinctive thoughts, psychological, and biological states, and range of propensities to act" (Goleman in Saldana, 2009, p. 87). Although numerous words can be used to describe emotions, as Saldana states, it can become frustrating for the researcher as they attempt to find the describer that best fits what the participant vocally conveys.

However, "Emotion Coding could be subcoded or categorized in such a way that it allows for the analyst to discern which emotion occurs" (Saldana, 2009, p. 87).

According to Saldana (2009), the primary function of Second Cycle coding is to "develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization from your array of First Cycle codes," (p.149). Again, with my research questions speaking specifically to circumstances of identity formation, possible incidents of trauma, self-efficacy, and resilience, I grouped participant responses, my themes, and their subsequent codes into groups that spoke directly to the information for which evidence sought to express.

3.8   Reliability and Validity

To ensure reliability and validity of data, Creswell (2007) advises at least two procedures to provide an audit for findings. For this, participants were invited to review recordings, transcripts, and subsequent codes to confirm the integrity and accuracy of their words and my representations and findings. Additionally, two graduate students who attend the university of the researcher were selected to assist in establishing inter-rater reliability. The inter-raters were provided with a copy of each interview transcript void of any identifying information of participants. Per the instruction of the researcher, these individuals read each transcript to triangulate evidence of each theme. To establish confirmability, the principal investigator and inter-raters convened to corroborate themes. All members presented the most prominent themes that were found by each. Being that we were a team of three, two of the three members of the research team had to agree on a theme for that theme to be included. If a theme was found by one member, but the other two did not agree that the theme was appropriate, the theme was disregarded. The inter-raters were compensated with $10 Visa gift cards as well.

3.9   Summary

Chapter Three includes the presentation of the overarching research questions that this exploratory study sought to address. I chose to employ a qualitative research approach to illuminate the marginalized, if not altogether silenced voices of Black gay men in college. Purposeful snowball sampling allowed for these men to demonstrate agency in providing the narratives of their lived experiences within the phenomenon of college resilience. Several cycles of coding were used to analyze data collected through one on one interviews, and two additional processes, inter-rater auditing, and participant review, ensured that the rich, descriptive articulations of the men are accurate and reliable. The next chapter provides the findings of this study.

4   FINDINGS

4.1   Research Interest and Background

The purpose of this study was to critically examine Black gay men's college experiences. I especially sought to understand how those experiences were affected by their specific position at the intersections of perceived marginalized racial and sexual identity locations. I came to this line of questioning after seeking a story that was similar to my own. I experienced insidious traumas, but worked diligently to navigate and overcome. I had strong feeling that my narrative was not an isolated experience to those who found themselves in positions similar to myself. Because literature suggests these men may encounter challenges in their college socialization, I was also interested in the ways in which they persisted and demonstrated resilience through their academic journeys. The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. What are the ways in which the specific intersectional identities of Black gay men shape their college experiences?

2. What effect do these identities have on resilience while engaged in college matriculation?

Over the course of three weeks, gay Black men who identified as college or university students or alumni were interviewed through semi-structured interviews. To get an idea of their experience, participants were asked questions such as "What influenced your decision to go to college?" "How did being Black and gay play into how you saw yourself on your college campus?" "Taking into consideration all of the things that you experienced while enrolled, how would you say your experience has been?" Likewise, to gather if the men felt that they were resilient in their time in college asked: "Do you feel you were resilient in college?" "Tell me about a time you faced a challenge that was directly tied to your identities. How did you push through?"

This chapter begins with a general review of the demographics of all of the participants, followed by individual profiles of the men highlighting reflections that speak to identity or resilience. The next section of this chapter indicates themes and subthemes that were uncovered in response to the principal research questions. Direct quotes are used to provide rich examples of the men's experiences, and to emphasize their voice.

4.2   The Participants

Fifteen self-identified gay Black men from various cities in the United States participated in this study. The men ranged in age from 18 to 40 years. All but one identified as Black or African American, by specifying his ethnicity as Afro-Caribbean. Similarly, most men reported their sexual identity as gay. Two participants recognized their identity as fluid or queer, and one person self-identified as same gender loving, but recognized that their attraction to men is understood as gay, and used their self-identified identities and gay interchangeably throughout

our conversations. Demonstrating a broad range of occupations from students and teachers, to higher education administrator and union organizers, all participants except one had completed at least one college degree program inclusive of bachelor's degrees. The lowest completed educational level was a high school diploma from a current university freshman, while two participants have completed doctoral degrees. Nine of the fifteen received or are working toward two degrees from both Historically Black College and Universities (HBCUs) and predominantly white institutions (PWIs). Figure 1 and Figure 2 provide a summary of the individual interview participants.

Name	Age	Region Raised	Level of Education	Institution Type	Institution Region	Occupation	Religious Affiliation	Sexual Identity	Ethnic/Racial Identity
Patrick	28	South	Bachelor's Degree	HBCU & PWI	South	Higher Ed Admin	Spiritual	Gay	Afro-Caribbean
Devin	29	Northeast	Doctoral Student	HBCU & PWI	South	Program Manager/ Instructor	Spiritual	Queer	African American
Douglas	31	South	Doctorate Degree	HBCU & PWI	South & Mid Atlantic	Physical Therapist	Conservation Judaism	Gay	Black
Will	33	South	Doctoral Student	HBCU	South	Education	Christian	Gay	African American
Langston	27	South	Doctoral Student	HBCU & PWI	South	Graduate Student	African-Traditional	Fluid/Gay/ Bisexual	African American
Keith	36	South	Master's Degree	HBCU	Mid Atlantic & South	Administrator	Protestant	Same Gender Loving	African American
Rodney	38	South	Doctorate Degree	HBCU & PWI	South	Higher Ed Admin	Christian	Gay	African American
James	37	South	Doctoral Student	HBCU & PWI	South	Teacher	Christian	Gay	African American

Figure 1. Participant Table

Name	Age	Region Raised	Level of Education	Institution Type	Institution Region	Occupation	Religious Affiliation	Sexual Identity	Ethnic/Racial Identity
Maurice	36	Midwest	Bachelor's Degree	PWI	Midwest	Union Organizer	Some Christianity	Gay	African American
Omar	18	Various	Undergrad Student	PWI	South	Student	Not Reported	Gay	African American
Chauncey	36	South	Master's Student	HBCU & PWI	South	Graduate Student	None	Gay	Black
Philip	35	Midwest	Bachelor's Degree	PWI	Midwest	Education	None	Gay	Black
Marco	32	South	Doctoral Student	HBCU & PWI	South & Midwest	Higher Ed Admin	Christian	Gay	African American
Chuck	34	West	Master's Student	HBCU &PWI	South	Director	None	Gay	Black
Thomas	40	South	Bachelor's Degree	HBCU	South	Journalist	Baptist	Gay	Black

Figure 2. Participant Table (con't)

Below are brief snapshots of each participant. Because this study aimed to illuminate the humanity of these men, where appropriate, descriptions include their own words to center their voice and contextualize their experience.

Patrick. Patrick is a 28-year-old Afro-Caribbean man who currently works in Higher Education Administration at a mid-size research institution in Atlanta, GA. Raised by his mother and grandfather, who both passed before he completed his undergraduate degree, Patrick reflects on his experiences and considers himself strategically resilient. He says, "with the lifestyle of being Black, gay, and in the south. Then some of it just being a Black male. Some of it was not only because of my sexuality; it was because of my ethnicity. Because of how I looked, because of how I appeared. There were certain things thrown my way. I think out of all of that you have to be strategic and the time when you feel like you failed you have to learn how to use the failure to build upon to gain another lesson."

Devin. Devin, 29, is one of five current doctoral students in this study. He completed his undergraduate degree at an HBCU in the South and two master's degree at a PWI. Beginning his academic pursuit as a vocal performance music major, Devin changed his trajectory because he felt "I could do more than just sing. My voice was more important than for performance. So, I found sociology, and me and sociology worked out 'cause we were able to start having hard conversations about religion and sexuality, and things of that nature." He has completed an undergraduate degree in sociology, master's degrees in both religion and higher education, and now has eight classes of coursework to complete before beginning his dissertation toward a Ph.D. in Educational Policy Studies.

Douglas. At 31 years old, Douglas reflected on his resilience throughout his entire life. Originally from Tennessee, Douglas navigated foster care and was emancipated at 15. Upon

graduating from his vocational high school as a practical nurse, he enrolled at an HBCU. He says that he thought, *"*I'm already up against two odds being Black and being gay. So now I feel I have to prove myself even more. So instead of just getting the degree, I need to get the doctorate degree, or instead of me being a physical therapist, I need to be a specialized physical therapist. And, I feel like that because of social media and because of what I have been influenced by, it led me to believe that being Black and gay mean I had to go above and beyond who I was in order to be accepted." To his credit, Douglas graduated with a dual doctorate with degrees in Health Science and Physical Therapy at the age of 29.

Will. Will, 33, from South Carolina has attained a bachelor's degree, two master's degrees, and is currently working on his Ed.D. in Educational Policy and Leadership. Two degrees that he has earned are from HBCUs. His first master's degree of the two that he earned was through an online university. Similar to several other men in this work, Will's undergraduate institution was not only an HBCU, but an all-male institution. He describes himself as a "Christ-centered" and points to his undergraduate experience to highlight his resiliency: "Just the fact that it took me eight years to finish undergrad and it wasn't because I wasn't academically sound or could not maintain, it was just because I was distracted. Being a boy from South Carolina, barely 17 years old, and going to Atlanta with these feelings of not really knowing who you are completely, it can result in disaster. I think just with everything that I've overcome in relation to school, outside of school, I think that I have defined myself as a survivor. I think I have defined myself as a resilient person. Not intentionally, but just knowing that there was really no other option for me."

Langston. Langston is 28 years old and holds a bachelor's degree in political science, a master's degree in African American studies, and is officially a Ph.D. candidate in Medical Sociology. When asked what resilience is to him, he responded, "I think resilience for me is not

giving up. It's believing in myself when other people don't believe in me. It's believing in myself when I don't have that physical community around me. When I'm in the wilderness, like a type of spiritual wilderness situation. I feel like very much I'm in that right now. That part of my adulthood." He also experienced mixed reactions when disclosing his sexuality to those closest to him. Some, such as his father and other elders minimized his admission as a phase and questioned his surety. Others, particularly in his African Rites of Passage community affirmed his declaration and charged him to live in his truth. Langston acknowledges that he is still evolving. "There are times often when I don't feel like I have confidence. I don't feel like everything will go well; I will catastrophize. Then my community reminds me of who I am. And that maybe I'm greater than what I think."

Keith. Keith, 36, attended HBCUs for both his undergraduate and graduate degrees. He recalled his college time saying, "When I was in college, I was so many other things. I was so Black man. I went to an HBCU; I was indoctrinated. I also appreciated what it meant to be an educated Black man, what it meant to be heir to the traditions and the heritage that the school and the organizations that I was a part of. So being supersaturated with that, in a good way, it's hard to kind of try to navigate what that means to you, as a Black gay, which we really don't have that many examples, you know?" As such, Keith didn't officially come out, or disclose his sexual orientation, though he acknowledges that he was never 'in,' until he was 29 and in between his undergraduate and graduate programs. He continued, "As a Black man, I've always felt included in my social networks be it from birth, be it from affiliation, be it from introductions or memberships, it had space for me. But as a Black gay man, it was almost the exact opposite. There is no room; we don't accept, we don't want..." Overall, Keith enjoyed his college experiences and knew that it was expected of him to complete them. He attributes his

resilience to self-actualization and the process by which he found comfort and security in himself.

Rodney. Rodney is a 38-year-old Texas native. Since completing his EdD, Rodney is a university administrator in the Midwest. Rodney called his college time an "age of sexual discovery and an age of discovery of who I was as a person." Unique to Rodney's journey, he experienced this discovery with a twin brother who was coming to terms with his sexual identity at the same time and was able to navigate some of the nuances, good and bad, that are a part of navigating college as a gay man with a sibling. When asked if looking back he felt that he was resilient, he chuckled and said, "I feel like it has given me the courage to not only navigate my sexuality, but navigate other situations and nuances of my educational journey. Oftentimes I used to say, going back to my fraternity experience, I pledged. I got my ass beat so I can endure anything. Well, then it evolved into, I came out of the closet, and I've navigated this sexuality thing, so I feel like I can do almost anything. If I've made it through this, and I'm still trying to make it through, because every time you go to a new place or start a new job, or meet new people, you have to come out again. So, I'm always constantly reminded of that."

James. James is currently 37 years old, a high school teacher, and in a doctoral program. He spoke fondly to the support that he received from his family growing up. Even though he was outed several times before college, he knew that his older brother would be there to defend him if the murmurs of his sexuality became too oppressive or offensive. One of his biggest motivations for attending college was the popular television show, *A Different World*, a program that highlighted the college experience of a predominantly Black cast on an HBCU campus. Being that he attended the all-male HBCU as well, he described the overall feeling about gay men while he attended. He says, "you were in some kind of way a second-class student, like you were

a student that the school didn't want. The school don't want you on their flyer, because we already got to deal with so much stuff, we don't have to deal with this gay stuff, and everybody think we're already gay, so it felt like you were adding to the stereotypes and you weren't wanted, you weren't really welcome. You felt that. All of those looks helped me say, 'I'm going to finish.'" Sally Mae helped as well, he joked. "But for the most part, it was that. I'm not going to be broken."

Maurice. Maurice, 36, is from and attended a large PWI in the Midwest. He earned his bachelor's degree in 2005 and is currently a union organizer in California. Maurice expressed interest in this study because, according to him, no one has ever asked him to tell his story. He had begun to write some things down to share his story at some point, but to this point, there had never been a formal opportunity. Being proactive in this way is consistent with much of his college experiences. When there were times where opportunities lacked, he proactively labored to create them. He did this by consistently fighting to have his voice heard as one of the few Black students on his campus, mostly through his presentation, and the creation of an on-campus organization that he named the Black Emphasis Committee, the only Black group on the campus. As a first-generation college student coming from a blue-collar background, Maurice's resilience in many ways was fueled by his family. "There were times where I was fed up, and I was tired, and it was just a lot of work. But, I knew that especially, because of my parents, I wanted to see that smile on their face, once I got that degree. It's not the kid that has the high school diploma. I also have a college degree."

Omar. Omar, 18, was the only participant in this study that was still an undergraduate student. Hailing from Florida and now away from family, admittedly, Omar said that he reached out to participate in this research to give him something to do that day; he'd otherwise be in his

dorm room eating pizza. He did recognize that he saw the importance of telling one's story for themselves as often when a person doesn't get to share their story, any narrative can be made about them to suit someone's ulterior agenda. When asked what he wanted people to glean from his story, he assertively responded, "Just to know that I am a person that has worked hard to get where he is mentally and emotionally. And to know that if they are making the same choices then it's not wrong, it's just growth. And that they have a right to want to find themselves in a world that doesn't really give a shit about them." The son of a bisexual mother, and grandson, of a lesbian grandmother, he noted that support from family was everpresent, however, not knowing the sexual orientations of his mother and grandmother at the time, he was uncomfortable by their accepting response because he anticipated the typical resistance. Interestingly, Omar noted the oppression that he feels the most comes from within gay communities, both Black and white. Though feeling tired from navigating school and life, he says "I'm proud that my mom is proud of me. I think through years of being, not emotionally repressed, but being emotionally withdrawn have damaged me in a way where I genuinely build my emotions off of other people sometimes, and my mother is a big generator. If she's proud of me, then I'm proud, and that's really all that matters."

Chauncey. Chauncey, 36, moved to Atlanta from Florida to pursue opportunities that were not abundantly available to him and his family. A non-traditional student, Chauncey enrolled in his undergraduate program in Atlanta at the age of 28. He graduated from that program and is now in his last semester in a Master of Public Health program. Traumas that Chauncey overcame were mainly the expectations placed upon him by himself and his social networks while in his undergraduate program. His identity has always been particularly salient for him and much of his undergraduate experience was spent questioning where he "fit" socially.

He notes that even though others would look at him and see success, he is conflicted on his own

perception of success. Being Black and gay, there are obvious social impediments, he surmises,

"but it's hard to juggle, and that's where we talked about success, it's hard to really truly

understand what success is, or visualize yourself being successful, when you have all these

hurdles you feel like you have to jump in order to be successful. Your mind is battling between

the two- learning how to really appreciate them and not really just associate them with, 'Okay,

cool. I made it. On to the next.' I'm really trying to appreciate them more."

Philip. Philip is a 35-year-old Black male from the Midwest. There is also where he

attended and graduated from his large PWI and resides as he is currently the principal of a

middle school. Philip attributes his motivation to pursue and complete his college education to

internal and external factors. A significant motivation was to increase his social mobility. "I

couldn't be deemed as a failure. I couldn't go back to what the people in my neighborhood, the

people I grew up around were doing. I wanted more for myself. But then I also had a group of

friends who I always felt like I had to catch up to them. I always felt like I had to prove myself to

them as well. That's another thing that kept me pushing. It's like, I can't let my friends get all the

way through college, and I didn't get through it. That motivated me some as well."

Marco. For Marco, 32, as a higher education administrator, being a Black gay man

informs his understanding of intersectional marginalization. He consistently uses this

understanding to shape his doctoral research exploring Black LGBT populations within

educational spaces, particularly HBCUs because for his experience was completely different than

the literature suggests, and what many other participants in this study recalled. "So, when I went

to an HBCU, my Blackness was really the leading agent in that space, not necessarily being gay.

I was initially nervous because my fear, going to a historically Black college, I was afraid that I

was going to fulfill a stereotype as, like the gay dude who's gonna have all the female friends, who was just gonna ... you know, whatever gay stereotype you could think of. But once I got on the campus, it was the complete opposite. Most of my friends were males, and they were straight males, and surprisingly enough, even though I never talked about girls, I never mentioned one thing or the next with them, there was still a level of respect that was given to me."

Chuck. Chuck is 34 years old, from California, and currently the director of a nonprofit education organization in Atlanta. He attended an HBCU for his undergraduate degree and is currently enrolled in a Master's program at a large PWI. Chuck was excited to participate as in his role at his organization, he feels a sense of responsibility to provide representation for those from backgrounds similar to his, not only as a Black gay man, but a Black gay man from underrepresented, often forgotten, urban areas that are typically thought of as not college ready or college worthy. Chuck navigated his undergraduate experience by hiding his sexual preferences and identity because "I was acting or performing in the heteronormative way because that's what was expected. And that's the people that got the privileges and the benefits and got to move on. And so, as a person who was, I would say very smart, academically, very focused, I knew I was hanging out with a group of people who were expected to get a good job, marry a wife, have some kids, and give back to the institution. That was my crew." With time, introspection, and self-actualization, Chuck fully embraced himself while living in his truth and is currently married to another gay Black man.

Thomas. At 40 years old, Thomas is the most senior of the participants. Thomas moved from North Carolina to Atlanta in the late nineties to attend an undergraduate program at a mid-sized HBCU. He described his experience as scary initially and also acknowledged feeling very isolated. During his undergraduate experience, Thomas was very social with networks or straight

and gay friends alike, but also recalled significant challenges from some family members, and unwavering support from others during extremely tough times. These social networks are to whom Thomas attributes his resilience. Becoming emotional at points during the interview, Thomas firmly held "that's how I was able to keep pushing through. Because if it had been up to me, I probably would have just thrown the towel in, but there were people around me who were like, you gonna get through this, we're gonna be here with you, you got it. And when I realized okay. I ain't gotta do this by myself, that's when I was like, I can finish it; I can enjoy it, I can make it."

4.3   Overview of Themes

After analyzing transcriptions and researcher notes of the interviews, three key themes and two subthemes emerged that spoke to the first research question. In response to the question *"What are the ways in which the specific intersectional identities of Black gay men shape their college experiences?"* themes included (1) navigation of identities, (2) insidious trauma, and (3) coping/survival strategies. Within the context of navigation of identities, two subthemes came to the fore- (a) negotiation of expectations of performance and (b) visibility and surveillance.

Regarding the second question that informed my research- *"What effect do these identities have on resilience while engaged in college matriculation?"* data analysis revealed five critical themes that underscored the effect of the men's identities on their resilience. These themes were (1) persistence, (2) self-efficacy fueling resistance, (3) active creation of social support, (4) evolution of self-perception, and lastly (5) liberation. These themes and associated subthemes can be found in Figure 2. The following sections detail these ideas.

Research Question	Themes and Subthemes
What are the ways in which the specific intersectional identities of Black gay men shape their college experiences?	NAVIGATION OF IDENTITIES • Negotiation of Expectations of Performance • Visibility and Surveillance INSIDIOUS TRAUMA COPING/SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

Research Question	Themes
What effect do these identities have on resilience while engaged in college matriculation?	PERSISTENCE SELF-EFFICACY FUELING RESISTANCE ACTIVE CREATION OF SOCIAL SUPPORT EVOLUTION OF SELF-PERCEPTION LIBERATION

Figure 3. Correlation of Themes

4.3.1 *Navigation of Identities*

To gauge how the men saw themselves for themselves and in relation to the larger

student bodies on their respective campuses, I asked several questions about the salience of their

identities at any given point while they were enrolled. All of the men reported being cognizant of

one or more of their identities at all times and having to consider the necessity, benefit, or

consequence of how, as Marco offered, they "showed up." In a similar sentiment, Keith, a two-time HBCU grad continued,

> As a black man, I've always felt included in my social networks be it from birth, be it from affiliation, be it from introductions or memberships; it had space for me. But as a black gay man, it was almost the exact opposite. There is no room; we don't accept, we don't want.

Thomas, also an HBCU graduate said,

> I didn't really even think of myself as a Black gay man. I just saw myself as a Black man who happens to like men. To me, that's so secondary to who I am as a person. I just think we all, Black men period, have a difficult time in this world, this society, in America. So it's hard enough doing that, then you add the layer of gayness on there, again, I think it becomes more difficult because you are treated or looked at differently from within your own community once you add the title of gay on there, because Black people, some of them are very homophobic.

When I asked Phillip what role did being Black and gay play in how he felt about himself in college, he carefully took time to articulate his response to the question. Not only was Phillip a gay man, but in the racial minority on his PWI campus:

> In college, it played a huge role, because back then I tried to suppress it, and I tried to do everything to run from it and fight it. I think back then the whole masculinity role played a bigger part than the gay role, because I wanted to pretend like the gay role didn't exist, and it did.

Interviewer: Was it just shying away, or was it out of fear? Where was that from?

> I used to really, really, really care about how others perceive me. I used to put

a great deal of care into that, and that fear of being shunned, or not liked, or potentially

outcast from family. Stuff like that. That played a huge part in it. I don't want anybody to

look at me and be, you know what I'm saying, that's the gay dude.

Maurice, another Black gay man on a predominantly white campus in the early 2000s, though

more expressive and easily identified as gay, said, "You're getting backlash from both sides. Our

culture, and also the white culture." Our culture, he clarified, being Black culture. For Maurice,

he had to fight, both physically and figuratively to be heard and respected. Varying degrees of

this feeling were expressed by many of the men in this study. Everyone knew that they were gay,

but whether they openly and outwardly expressed that was a different story. Similar to Thomas,

Maurice stratified his identities and ranked Black higher in salience than gay: "You start with a

man. The man is number one. Number two is Black. Number three is gay.

It is important to note that while this was the dominant narrative of the participants, not

everyone's identities were points of contention for them. Devin proudly identifies as a Black gay

clergyman and doctoral student who recently published a book that addresses the reconciliation

of his sexuality and spirituality. He may have had the traditional college student issues like

money shortage, but his sexuality was never really a problem. He showed up to his HBCU in the

south, coming from the north, and his approach was "Yeah, I'm gay, and I still love God, and

fuck y'all." It was this self-definition that drew his friend groups to him. Marco acknowledges

his experience as "different than what the literature suggests." For Marco, being a bit more

ethnically ambiguous, he recognized that "I may not get the same reaction as someone who they

can easily identify as a racial peer." He continues,

I'm not trying to get nerdy, but even looking at older studies that looked at the perception

of gays, you know, some Black women and Black men looked at being gay as a white

phenomenon. So, if you looked at the fact that because I exhibit a lot of non-Black

features and mostly European features or whatever, they may not necessarily give me the

treatment that they would someone who they closely identify with.

For that, he says, reiterating the point of some others, that his sexuality was more of a "by-

product" and not altogether salient. Even though people may have known his sexual orientation,

for Marco, it was not a big deal a did not impair his college engagement.

Patrick, a participant from Atlanta who attended an HBCU, but transferred and ultimately

graduated from a PWI in Atlanta said the intersection of his identities provided an experience as

if he attended two universities simultaneously Already being out at his university provided a

"cinderblock" of who he was:

I was in the University of Black Gay Life, and an educational institution. It was so much

more I had to build upon. How did I truly perceive myself? That was my college

experience. It was just being in two universities at the same time. One taught me life

skills. The other taught me how to be around different community members. Let me say

it that way- different types of community members, and understanding the different

occupations that one may have as a community member.

Participants consistently expressed evaluating the salience of their intersectional

identities. For most, Black always led the way that they identified, and being a Black man was

particularly important to them. To that, being gay was just another part, some even offered as

"secondary." I consistently heard, "I'm Black first because that's what you see. You can't miss

that." Others felt that they could not compartmentalize their identities and considered their gay

identity as part of the Black experience without separating the two. In total, whether all men felt

that gay was what presented, all acknowledge that their gay identity was present in tandem to

Blackness and made careful consideration to how that showed up.

4.3.1.1 Negotiations of Expectations of Performance

As the men reflected upon the ways that they considered their identities, they continued

to speak of how they were expected to perform as Black men, gay men, and the with both

identities in unison. Most participants recalled learning expectations of being- whether that was

manhood, specifically Black manhood, or perceptions of gay men, from family, media, their

academic institutions, or interactions with people with whom they knew that they did not want to

be associated.

Rodney, a participant who has earned his doctorate and works in higher education, refers

to his college experience as an age of discovery. Having pledged a fraternity, he vividly

describes his negotiation.

Examining what the ideology of being a member of a historically black organization and

masculinity, the definition of masculinity or the presumed definition of masculinity was.

It was a very awkward time for me in terms of trying to stay true to myself, but realizing

that I was conforming more and more to what the ideology of, again, manhood was.

He continues,

During my process it would be like, oh you know, when this one crosses he's gonna have

all the hoes 'cause he light skinned with good hair. Make sure you get these bitches. In

my mind, I was like, this is ... What am I doing? But like, I would tell myself, it's just one

more day. One more day. One more day. One more day. One more day. Until I crossed.

And then I didn't have to tell myself it was one more day anymore. But little did I know

that once I was initiated, it started a whole new type of, okay. One more day. One more

day. One more day.

Negative stereotypes of gay men were the most prevalent expectations of Black gay men and to

combat this, presenting as traditionally masculine was the way most negotiated expectations as

underscored in Thomas' statement:

I don't think people actually interacted with me as the gay student. And you also have to

remember, I was very masculine. So I wasn't your typical gay person. So for me, I

dressed like a guy, I did guy stuff. I hung out with straight guys back then, because I

didn't have any gay friends. So yeah, for me that was the masculine stuff that I did, and I

looked like a normal guy. Whereas some other gay people that I would see when I would

go to the club would be very in makeup, dressing in tight clothes, the flamboyant stuff

that you would see from the gay people that nobody wanted to be around or be seen with

in public. You know what I mean?

However, Douglas, who went to both an HBCU and PWI and is now a Doctor of Physical

Therapy counters that perception with his own experience.

Of course, you have the flamboyancy and the feminine guys. But then, you have those

that were alternately professional, who dressed in nice tailored suits, or drove really,

really nice cars, and they were always at brunch, always hanging out with their friends,

always had this sense of importance surrounding them, and that's what I thought I had to

fit in with. I saw the boujee behaviors. You know, I was supposed to have a nice car, or I

was supposed to be purchasing my house at this age, or I was supposed to have had this

degree or be in this profession, or I was supposed to dress this way, or I was supposed to

act this way.

He furthers this by saying,

> And that's, honestly, I guess that's what I can say what made me more resilient to
> completing my education because I saw that imagery, and that's what I thought that I
> have to live up to as a Black gay male.

> For others, such as Will, a current doctoral student there's just uncertainty, "You still

don't have that roadmap of how to navigate. You kinda have to come up with it as you go along." But he does add that after disclosing his identity to women there's an assumed immediate comfortability "thinking you liked to be called "girl" by them and that's it's okay, and you can tell them if their boyfriend is gay" which he finds problematic. Patrick concurs, "People think because you are, you express yourself as being a gay Black male, that you want to twerk to every song. Hold up; I'm not going to have a twerk contest with no girl. Not on this dance floor, and not with y'all. That serves me no purpose. My self-worth is more than that." The expectation of behaviors was often created by a combination of the men's own perception and reflection and what was present or absent in society, particularly media and the social responses of the communities in which they navigated. Ranging from the heteronormative performance as "normal" to knowing that they did not want to be considered feminine for fear of repercussion, the response of the men was to be sure to perform in the ways that would benefit them most. Several participants noted that there were successful Black gay men that were visible and that is who they decided to fashion themselves after. It is important to note that no matter how the men decided to negotiate expectations of performance, they acted upon their own agency in the ways they chose to present themselves.

4.3.1.2   Visibility and Surveillance

The combination of the ways that the participants considered their identities and negotiated the expectations of their performance allowed for a variety of responses in terms of their overall visibility on campus. For some like Marco and Langston, this appeared with regard to their academic recognition. Marco laughed as he shared that at his HBCU and within his fraternity, "there is this stereotype that Black gay men were always the smartest and the people that got shit done," which also diverges from literature largely suggests. Langston, a doctoral student, agrees, "Every time I saw somebody who was gay and Black, they were having the 3.8's." But, he did say he didn't feel particularly visible because he wasn't out like the guys in the gay organization on his campus. Part of this was because he was conservative and wanted to pledge a fraternity which brought about a different type of surveillance. This was also the case for Chuck and Will during their time at their undergraduate institutions. Worth noting here is that Langston, Chuck, and Will attended the same institution a few years apart.

The undergraduate freshman of my participants, Omar, provided an interesting perspective when we began to discuss how he felt that he was perceived. His response was consistent with Langston and several other respondents. He felt invisible, but for a different reason.

Because I don't fit the mold that gay society deems valuable. And that is a white guy with a six pack and blue eyes. Or for the Black men who are deemed attractive. They're overly muscular, body covered in tattoos, and that's just not me. And most of them are normally light skinned. I don't think I meet the criteria for light skin, but I definitely don't meet it for dark skin either. I'm just, in every situation I'm in, or every demographic I'm in, I'm in the middle. I'm not an extreme.

But for the participants that felt invisible because of not wanting to be, as one participant described, "out there," there was an equal amount that described feeling hypervisible or both at the same time depending on the context. Patrick called his hypervisibility like "being another token." He'd been used to show that a person he associated with was open and understanding. He often felt he was a target, but there were spaces that he thought he would be accepted but was not:

> Let's go to my own. If I was going to self-identify, or if I was going to an atmosphere where I felt it was conducive or acceptable or welcoming to be an openly Black gay male in all of your queerness and all of your Blackness and all of your masculinity, in those arenas, I felt invisible. I felt like you were just a check on a box. You were just a number to be counted for something monetary, or for something to meet a quota or something. I stopped going to those spaces.

James expressed that he

> Felt like it was hyper attention because you'd be sitting in class and have a discussion, and someone who senses that you're gay will challenge you and challenge your views, especially when you hit on them on their machismo, their masculinity, how they're being overly aggressive and stuff like that. Those conversations never went well. Or just walking down the campus and somebody feels like they want to make a joke you because you're gay.

For these same reasons, the blatant mocking, bullying, and ultimately the fights in which he participated, Douglas felt hypervisible because as he states, "I just thought I had to protect who I was, who I was comfortable with, which was me at that time." He endured that way through his freshman, sophomore, and junior years, and because of that finished his senior year online.

Devin chose visibility for a very specific reason. Where many of the participants vacillated between these moments of invisibility and hypervisibility, Devin chose to document his experiences and be visible, and frankly quite transparent, after what he calls his "assignment" from God to fulfill a specific purpose- to provide representation in ways for those that battled with sexuality and spiritual connection:

> I hope that it reaches a few audiences. One would be individuals who are extremely religious and do not understand and do not care to understand LGBTQ experiences and LGBTQ experiences along with God. Second one would be the LGBTQ persons, whether they are younger or older, that have them understand that God made no mistakes when God made them, and that God, you can still have a very lucrative relationship with God 'cause that's what God wants from you is fully you, not what you feel like you need to present based on how society has kind of tricked our community. Also, to individuals who are in the academy and in the church settings, and these religious institutions.

The first theme that materialized regarding the ways that the men's identities shaped their college experiences was Navigation of Identity. All participants suggested that they constructed their identities based on either the ways they thought society saw them or the ways they saw themselves in relation to their communities. This would determine how they chose to present themselves. It was often important to move and engage in ways that felt was to their benefit. This could mean psychologically in terms of performing in ways that made them feel valid, safe, or simply comfortable. Men also performed in ways that ensured that they were included, for example behaving in ways that did not cause marginalization from fraternity or friend groups or casting a spotlight on themselves to be ostracized. This does not mean that all mean hid their sexuality. For some, being Black and gay, and accepting that negotiation, was critical to them.

Considering their intersectional experiences, race, class, and gender were components that were all salient to the men's college experience and informed the ways that each performed and presented throughout their time.

4.3.2 *Insidious Trauma*

The second theme that emerged when reviewing the data were occurrences of insidious traumas that all of the participants described at some point or another during their college time. Though they did not describe them as such, all of these lower level identity-based traumas affected some element of their college opportunity in some way. The men indicated responding to them in three key ways- they internalized, normalized, or became desensitized to insidious traumas.

Omar referenced a friend group of which he is no longer a part after he noticed he was receiving different treatment than when the friendships started. After seemingly building a bond with two white males, one white female, and two other Black females, he noticed he was receiving different treatment, where he was ultimately excluded. I asked was there a hierarchy in the group dynamic.

> Yeah. The two straight boys, everybody wanted to fuck them so they were the top of the food chain. The white girl, she was like, she was the prettiest girl, so she was up there too. And then the rest of us were kind of like fodder because we fawned after them in a way. But then as soon as I stopped doing that it was like no one wanted me around. Like as soon as I stopped giving in the attention that they wanted, they didn't want me there.

Reflecting more, he gave an exasperated sigh and said, "Being basically like subtly being told that I'm not what other people want. And is it exhausting? Yes. But it's too deeply embedded in me at this point for me to really fight it, so I just try and work around it."

Another example of the results of internalized trauma in the form of internalized homophobia materialized when Rodney tearfully shared an experience with his twin brother who was coming to terms with his sexuality at the same time as he:

> I tried to be the popular kid, and my brother was himself. And I used to ostracize him for that. And that was a very painful experience for me as well because my brother means the world to me. And to look back and think about me trying to mask my sexuality so much so that I ostracized him, I still haven't forgiven myself for that and that was back in 1998, 1999. And to me, that just shows how pervasive the mentality is of having to feel like you have to fit a mold.

Others, like Chauncey and Keith, bore the traumas that they experienced and recognized that they understand that they are part of marginalized groups, but have come to normalize trauma so that in many ways they don't feel them directly though they know that happen consistently. Chauncey is a few weeks away from graduating with a Master of Public Health. He detailed how HIV being almost synonymous with Black gay men affects how and if he considers himself successful:

> Well, I think I battle with this understanding of what success is. I think that even though I accomplish all these milestones, I never really think that I'm really successful. So it's always one of us fighting the system, or fighting these narratives around HIV, or some comment to HIV, and to AIDS. I'm talking to some of my other friends, and we said it's shaped our outlook in how successful we believe we can become, because you automatically feel that at some point in time, you'll become HIV positive and die essentially.

In the same ways that Chauncey has difficulty accepting successes, James and Douglas have come to normalize not feeling protected or supported. Douglas brought up the fact that while he was in his doctoral program, the Freddie Gray incident occurred. He noticed the support around the Black Lives Matter Movement. While he appreciated the movement itself, he could not help but observe that there was not the same swell of support when Black gay men were bullied or maligned. "I didn't think Black gay lives mattered. I think it catered to everything but gay lives." After a situation escalated where he and several other gay students were verbally and physically assaulted on his undergraduate campus, the Dean of Students held an LGBTQ inclusion forum.

> When the Dean of Students did have those programs or seminars, it was enlightening to see that someone actually gave us value, but then again, I didn't truly care. Being raised in a very strict household, and being very Southern Baptist, it was like, 'Well, heck. I'm not even supposed to be who I am. So to even be in a situation where I'm able to go to school, and I'm accepted by some and not by all, it really didn't bother me at all.' And ultimately, no one is gonna listen to something that they don't have value for.

James reiterated this notion of value after an incident happened on his campus where a gay student was beaten with a baseball bat for allegedly looking at a fellow student in the dorm shower. After the incident, many students backed the aggressor, and the feeling was that the administration was that the image of the institution was more valued than the student who had been assaulted. When asked how that made him feel he said, "It didn't make you upset because, at that point, I expected that out of them. So, you don't get upset. You just expect it. So, like when Trump does something now, it's like, Oh, okay. That's the administration we got. You don't get surprised; you don't get shocked."

Insidious traumas were consistently reported by all fifteen men, but the responses to these incidents varied. Most internalized the traumas and in many ways normalized them to engage in a sense of self-protection. Some participants were keenly aware that they were occur, and continue to occur, but with each time become less and less sensitive to them. Many expressed knowing that they exist in a space of double othering, aware of the racial and sexuality implications of their identities, but recognized that "that is just the world that we live in," and decided not to let them keep them in a negative space. Not only have most become desensitized, but some participants acknowledged internalizing these traumas to the point that it affects how they have interacted with those close to them and the ways that they saw and continue to see themselves having a key effect on the outlook of other positive aspects of their lives and college experiences.

4.3.3 *Coping/Survival Strategies*

The final theme that I uncovered regarding the ways that their identities shaped the college experience in this group of Black gay men university students had to do with the ways that they navigated their social environments. Because of the previous themes, consideration of identities and the subsequent insidious traumas, the men developed coping or survival strategies to maneuver through their institutions. A preponderance of data indicated that the most common strategies employed were avoidance, codeswitching, and seeking spaces of affirmation in both people and physical space.

Avoidance of the conversations that directly addressed sexuality identities, as well as spaces that may place the individuals at harm or discomfort was hardly a new strategy that the men developed in college. Although all of the participants acknowledged their attraction to men through adolescent development, few were able to have these conversations. For some that did,

like James, Omar, and Devin, meaningful conversation was still avoided, and their experiences in college were often more of the same.

James expressed ways that he avoided the subject in general as he laughed about drawing attention to himself because of his 6'3 stature and lighter skin complexion. He revealed that in many ways the avoidance shaped who he was: "I'm not closeted; I don't talk about it. I'm not out; I don't talk about it." His stance at his college was, "Maybe if I just do what I do, everybody else will leave me alone." I asked what that could do for a person in the exploratory years of one's life, avoiding talking about or expressing elements of your identity. His response was another coping strategy:

> It meant having to grow up quicker. It meant having to learn things on my own. I feel like I would've had a better grasp of relationships and what to do in them if I felt like I could share those with my family members. In the gay world, you don't necessarily get to do that. And that makes you feel a little less valued.

Devin was a person who was open about his sexuality and did not hide that component of his life. He did not avoid it, but many of those around him did. Heavily involved in his church, he says his pastor and other members of the congregation knew that he was gay, but it was something unspoken. He recalled the specific way they would frame the conversation. "Nobody asked me, 'Oh, who are you dating, Devin?' Instead, the comment was, "Oh, when you get a wife." He would always respond with a quizzical but defiant gaze.

Langston expressed the ways that he avoided conversations in class and the students in his classes reciprocated, noting that it was taboo.

> I think people would avoid that question in class because we knew that on campus that was such a taboo topic that we even formed like sexuality dialogues. But I still think in a

way though, they alienating to the people who were actually like me, because those were

like kind of for the vocal queers. Whereas people like me, I'm not about to talk about my

experience publicly when I still have all these investments in passing.

Unlike the classroom, which is an unavoidable space in most cases while in college, your living

facility is more so not. Keith lived on a floor in his residential hall where the majority of the

residents were football players. After being questioned about why he never had women visitors

and being the subject of a joke or two, his response was not to be there: "It was an avoidance

tactic, but it was one that paid off because, I mean, it worked. I had the highest GPA, at my

undergrad my freshman year because I was never in my room. I was always in the library."

Codeswitching was another coping/survival strategy that the men in this study employed.

Langston spoke to "investments in passing." Several participants demonstrated this skill to

increase networks, avoid ostracism, or interest of their own self-care and mental health. In this

way, Omar feels sometimes it's easier to "not be himself." He prides himself on the ability to

switch his presentation to navigate his environment: "I'm a damn good actor. So being able to be

someone else for a time is nice. Not having to deal with my stresses is nice." Chauncey also

spoke to "playing a role" in his first few years in college. "I would play the straight role with

them from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., and then when club time started, they would not hear from me,

'cause then I would meet up with my gay friends and do my gay thing at nighttime." The next

morning, he would be back with his straight friends talking about females and playing the role.

Like Omar and Chauncey, Langston agrees and says

I got the trickster down. You know, most of us have that. But I'm talking about down to a

point of like you can get stuff and get stuff done. And I needed to be the Black trickster,

even in my Ph.D. program. Act like I like Ms. Charlotte. I don't give a fuck about Ms.

Charlotte, this white lady. I gotta be nice to you so you won't spread shit about me in the

program because I'm doing so well. It's a defensive mechanism.

Interestingly, Rodney and Keith spoke to engaging in this codeswitching impulsively.

Without actively thinking about it, some of his friends were what he described as a "subset of

friends" that were his gay friends. "My friends that I go out to the club with are different from

the friends that I'd say we have classes together and my parents meet on Parents Week."

Similarly, Rodney, who earlier described challenges for many Black gay men who are out, but in

each new environment, it is as if you have to come out again, remembered when he had moved

to a new state to take an elevated role in higher education administration. This role included

heightened visibility and access to a different professional network and privileges:

The current institution I'm at, I started hanging around the professional African American

men, and all of them are married or engaged to women. It's a group of six of us. And I'm

the gay one. For the longest, I had to catch myself, 'cause I started playing the game

again. I started acting like I was not who I was.

It was not until a close friend called Rodney out and brought it to his attention that he realized

that that was what he was doing.

With many of the men learning themselves and finding their places in the larger society

in general, and their college environments particularly, many, like Phillip and Chuck, regularly

ask themselves how should I be? With whom should I align to get the most of this experience

and build a network? Not only did they ask these questions, but they also sought affirmation

through people and spaces, both on and off campus. Some areas resulted in positive outcomes

such as James reaching out to organizations such as Youth Pride. Others presented additional

challenges, like Devin's experiences in dating. Previously, several respondents acknowledged

avoiding opportunities to have conversation or center their sexual identities, but it is important to note that that, again, may have been strategic in terms of survival. However, as Omar articulates, "No matter how much I don't care for people as a human being I still have that need to want to be around people, if that makes sense. I have faith in people, but at the same time, I'm suspicious." The others circumvented saying that they did not care for people, but they all indicated a need to cultivate relationships, and sought to do so through various avenues. Here, participants discuss their experiences seeking spaces of affirmation.

Keith and Chauncey previously mentioned having a set of friends with whom they would go to clubs. In terms of on-campus networks, their social interactions, and the expectation of those interactions were different. Keith mentioned feeling "marginalized" in college and admitted that "it made me suppress a lot of my socialization as a gay Black man." While he was a part of several organizations such as networks of honors societies and the Student Government Associations he says thinks if he was more open with his sexuality they may have been tolerant, but not accepting:

> So, what does it mean to be gay, especially when you're talking to Black people who are not gay, they only identify as who we have sex with? Not your experience, not your journey, not your truth, but who you have sex with.

Chauncey, the graduate student in a Public Health program, spoke on his experiences seeking affirmation at three different spaces. The first, a support group for individuals living with HIV, he attended at the invitation of a friend that was diagnosed while they were living in a homeless shelter: "It was there that we talked about being Black and gay, but where there's still this elitist system that we deal with, where white gay men tend to hold precedence." He felt

affirmed when the overarching message and mission of that organization was to debunk that narrative. At his undergraduate PWI, he also tried various outlets:

> I met a couple of gay guys there. Some through social media sites, like Jack'd, some through classes. But I think I tried to join the LGBTQ group on campus, but I just didn't have the time. In one of the meetings I attended, it was childish to me, because I'm older. 'Cause I guess my intention was to be a part of a group that was really looking to make change, and not just a social group, because I already had a social group outside of the school. But I realized for them this was a combination of things.

His graduate institution is a predominantly Black institution where he currently serves as the president of the LGBTQ Alliance Club. As president, he expressed, he has tried to do things on campus but has received no support and pushback from the administration. In consulting his advisor, she informed that this was not uncommon: "They say we're this all-inclusive school, but are we really? All-inclusive means LGBTQ can be here, but can you really be yourself? Or can you really represent who you are? There's this issue with really being open on campus. We're still fighting an uphill battle, to say the least."

Chauncey was the only participant that indicated that he participated in any on-campus LGBT centered group. The resounding sentiment was that those groups cater to non-Black experiences and they felt that in occupying that space they would become an object of fetishization. Patrick agreed, saying, "Nope. Sorry. Ain't gon' happen, baby. You already got me too uncomfortable because I'm the only Black person in this room. Then, on top of that, you want to sexualize me?" Most of the men felt like Chuck, "it wasn't who I was. That's not who I was at that moment. Was I gay? Yes. For myself. But I wasn't performing as gay so why would I join a gay group that was for people performing as gay, right?" For that reason, most men, both

those who wholly accepted themselves and those had not reached complete comfort, sought spaces of identity centered affirmation regarding their sexuality off campus.

Participants' responses in the ways that their identities shaped their college experiences maintained some variation, but there were even more commonalities in the emotions that they felt and the strategies they exercised to navigate their respective college programs. Our next area of conversation was to look at their experiences through a new lens. Despite what each of the men negatively experienced, they thrived, or continue to excel and push through in terms of resilience in life, and specifically regarding their educational pursuance. The second research question was "What effect do these identities have on resilience while engaged in college matriculation?" The next five themes highlight the ways that their identities contributed to their resilience. The items included persistence, self-efficacy fueling resistance, active creation of social support, the evolution of self-perception, and liberation.

4.3.4 *Persistence*

Despite internal factors or external perceptions that may have served to impede their academic progress, all of the men agreed that no matter what other opinions existed, they considered themselves resilient. One of the factors that contributed to their resiliency was the idea of persistence, the reality that despite the odds, they continued to move forward.

Phillip, Douglas, Maurice, and Devin, all from northern or midwestern blue-collar, inner-city home lives, attributed a portion of their persistence to one of the more substantial factors for them leaving home to go to college in the first place- their desire to leave their home situations and to change their circumstances. They each expressed a want for more. Phillip says,

> Everybody had a rough childhood, and all those things, and the places that my mom was able to afford for us to live, and the way I had to live growing up, made me want to make

sure that I didn't have to live that as an adult. Seeing all the destruction and all of the stuff around me, I had to not be a part of that. I couldn't continue that cycle.

Our freshman participant, Omar's perception, is a bit different. He says he attributes his no-nonsense attitude to his mom: "Education is a choice but it's a choice you have to make, and if you choose not to do it and any opportunity you may have gotten because you had an education is gone, and now you're struggling, but you don't want to go back to school. That's the choice you made, and I can't really feel bad for you." He said he always keeps the larger picture in mind when the going gets rough.

Devin and Douglas spoke more specifically to the traumas that they endured while in school. Some were identity-related, and some were not. At one point, Devin experienced homelessness. There were points that he had to sleep in his car or on the couch of a manager. Also during his undergraduate enrollment, his mother passed. Notably, that time, he recounted that "99.9% of him had died. I only had .1% left."

He continued,

> One thing about me, I always find a way to make it through stuff somehow, some way. I might not say that time is on my side, but I make time be on my side. So if that means staying up and trying to figure out how to, or enduring what I have to endure for the time; I have to endure it, but having a plan to get out of this, especially if it's not a good situation.

Douglas mentioned falling into the stereotypes of gay Black men when he went to jail for eighteen months for forgery. He said, it was what he saw peers doing for quick money, and he was in the same situation. After that, he said, "There were many times that I gave up. Many times that I didn't want to do it anymore and I just wanted to fall back on what I already had." At

that time, he had just completed his undergraduate degree and knew that he intended to continue to graduate school. He was determined to persist through college at a point where others counted him out. He continued, "success is more than just money; it's that educational wealth that you receive, the experiences that you gain empower you to be able to navigate through society." Patrick contributed:

> You have to understand how to build yourself from the ashes. No matter if your ash is you got a failing grade on a test, or your ash is that you got fired from your job and the rent is due next week. It's honestly understanding how all of these things can work for your benefit and push you.

Chuck agreed, speaking specifically from the lens of being Black and gay. "I'm still pushing. I'm still pushing because even though I live my more full truth, my more full truth is still challenged. And I think as any oppressed group, you're always gonna be challenged." Will reflected similar feeling, pointing to current media perceptions contributing to his motivation. "Just the importance and the danger of being a Black man. Like, the inability to give up. There's so much that's riding on your shoulders as a Black man and as a Black gay man." There was another point that both Will and Douglas expressed about reaching their goals that surfaced repeatedly. Douglas says, "I experienced the bullying in high school, so I kinda had tough skin at this point. There wasn't anything that would cause me not to achieve my academic goals. So, I just kept going."

In many ways, coming from marginalized backgrounds, in terms of being Black, or gay, or being from lower-income, working class familial backgrounds, or the coalescence of all of these propelled the participants of this study to persist. In many ways, though they experienced

traumas and challenging times, having had to negotiate these difficulties aided in the will to continue toward the larger goals the students established.

4.3.5 *Self-Efficacy Fueling Resistance*

Quare Theory suggests that the act of being present as a gay Black person is by itself, not merely an act of resilience, but resistance. The next theme gleaned from our interviews was that for many, their academic success is an act of resistance toward the dominant pathological ways that larger narratives frame gay Black men. This theme also speaks to a more significant point of agency, or taking action, to combat their situation. Marco says that his identities and resilience emphasize his resistance in that he wanted to be able to "shape a narrative." He specifically spoke to wanting to be a person who wants to use his agency to represent "what isn't stereotypical Black gayness, the negative aspects of stereotypical Black men." Likewise, James boldly states that in his undergraduate and doctoral programs, "All of those disdainful looks, all of those "You're not really supposed to be here, this is not for you," all of those looks helped me say, "I'm going to finish. I'm not going to be broken." This was also the stance that Douglas held, feeling that he always had to be better than his counterparts:

> "Yeah, I am this person, but guess what? I just graduated with a dual degree." Or, "Guess what? I'm in graduate school." Or, "Guess what? I got my doctorate now." So I had to overcompensate because of who I was. To be honest, I think that's what pushed me because it was me proving a point.

Maurice adds to his point by saying, "At some point, my back was up against the wall. I was always either trying to fight somebody or defend myself in some way, just to prove to them that I was no different."

Devin and Chuck spoke directly to the ways that their agency and resistance work together. In talking about his presence in spaces. He shared, "Now it's an act of defiance. It's like fuck the system, fuck what you think is normal. I'm good at what I'm good at, and I'm great at a lot of things that I focus on, and you're gonna appreciate my whole self in that." He followed that with "do know when I'm in a position that is not detrimental to me or those that will come after me, I shake the motherfucking table because I have a responsibility to." He notes that as a person who has been oppressed, if you do not have the feeling of responsibility to make sure others are not oppressed, that means "you don't love yourself." In a similar way, Devin admits that, at one point, it wasn't a specific statement that he overtly made, but it was a position that he firmly held. By the time he began his first master's degree, that point had started to be a part of his introduction. "Hello, I'm Devin. I'm an educator. I'm a gay man." I do that on purpose. I still do that now. Further, he says,

> I just love to watch their facial expressions. I always say that if I don't get the job, then that wasn't the job for me, 'cause there's no way I'm going to work at your establishment, or even attend your institution, and you're discriminatory. You can have it. You can find somebody else who can fit that mold, but it's not gonna be me. I'm too liberal and radical for traditional spaces, 'cause when I'm in there... I'm not going to say I'm too, 'cause I feel like, I feel like God places me there to disrupt their complacency, which is oftentimes what I do.

All of the participants evidenced possessing an acute sense of the negative perceptions of being Black gay men. They used that perception to firmly contest and resist those stereotypes. Although this occurred at various stages for some, they all considered their persistence resistance.

4.3.6 *Active Creation of Social Support*

In response to the first research question, the men demonstrated how they sought affirmation and support. All were successful in finding support systems, but the consequences of the spaces and/or people in which they located affirmation may not have fueled resistance directly, and instead navigated them away from their educational path. Because of this, a theme that arose was the active creation of social support. The efficacy utilized in fueling their resistance was the same driver in the creation of these resolutions where the men labored to forge community. James beamed with reflecting on his "strong circle of friends." Will conveyed that his core network was not simply important, but critical. He talked about creating more than one social network and that each served particular purposes. His core group has become more than friends, but family. Then, he mentions his academic support that consisted of not just these friends, but professors as well. And then he has more informal groups of friends that were there to party. Interestingly, he says, "But if I wanted to a gay party, or go to a gay club, I would reach out to people that I had just met away from campus or out and just through the different interactions of daily life outside of school or off campus."

James also mentioned having a strong "circle of friends." Unlike Will, these were people, other gay men, that he met in the beginning weeks at the beginning of his undergraduate program. This circle, with whom he is still close, he bonded with because they lived in the same dormitory. Also using the word "critical." He says, "if it weren't for my gay friends, I would have no friends, I would literally have nobody to talk to. So, it was everything for me. It was my family; it was my confidence; those people who I tripped with and laughed with, they made all the experiences just that much better." These friends were also important to him because sometimes it's not always about the formality. Especially at that point, in college, it's important

to have people to "hang out and chill." He also spoke about a group, Youth Pride, that was crucial for him. Youth Pride was an all Black gay men's group that "had a critical role in introducing us to other avenues to be around other gay men, other than just school or going to the club. And they just provided that community that you didn't get on campus." That group was important to him because of the positive representation that it provided of Black gay men in ways that he had not seen. He used Youth Pride as the model for an organization that he created to appeal to younger students that recognized from the club that went to his school. It was important to him to extend the opportunities to them that he longed for upon his arrival and his friends we able to forge. His organization not only helped students that come after him, but the purpose that the network fulfilled contributed to his own resilience: "I now had people watching me, and I couldn't let them down."

By that same logic, Devin became as his friends deemed him, the "mother" of his network:

> As I got older and met other people through my church community and stuff when I was in South Carolina, there were still other people who were gay or bisexual, but just so closeted as a result of religion and the discriminatory behaviors that happened here in the south. I didn't have a lot of mentors, though, unfortunately. Oftentimes within the Black queer community, especially as it relates to church or religion and spirituality, there aren't a lot of public mentors.

So, he says, "I became mother." The idea originated from the ballroom culture. Made popular in the late eighties, ballroom culture was created in the late sixties in New York City as an underground community because for Black and Hispanic youths that were shunned, ostracized, and marginalized from their own families and larger societies. Organized like families, "houses"

were led by parental figures, mothers and fathers, that stood in the stead of biological kin. When Devin got to campus, more assured in his identities he held that role for other gay students that he knew. I asked what it was like for him, who was a student as well, to take on the responsibility to maintain a community for others. He responded:

> Any time people live in truth, it comes with a responsibility. I took honor in the responsibility. It wasn't burdensome to me. It was something I enjoyed. I would say I enjoyed it, 'cause I've always kind of lived by the motto, 'If I can help somebody as I pass along then my living won't be in vain.'

Several students spoke about the isolation that they felt from administration and faculty members on their campuses. Alternatively, Will, Rodney, and Chuck have created support networks with professors and administrators to that were imperative to their time at their institutions. Rodney shared that they were crucial for him, especially in graduate school, because they helped navigate imposter syndrome and confirmed that he belonged in that space. Will's professors also validated his voice and scholarship: "They're asking me to speak and me to give my perspective on things. So I think that has also assisted with propelling me to want to continue in school because I feel secure. I feel safe in a classroom."

We saw previously that seeking affirmation was a coping/strategy employed by the men during their college experience. One of the ways that their identities affected their resilience was that being in many ways considered a part of an "outgroup" the men actively created their own support networks with whom they utilized to lean, engage, and commune. These social supports were reported by all of the participants to be a critical element of their resilience.

4.3.7 *Evolution of Self-Perception*

The tone of our conversations began to shift by the time we began to speak more about each man's experiences in resilience during their matriculation. Questions such as *What advice would you give to other Black gay men while pursuing a college education?* often caused participants to reflect on the ways that they navigated college in order to impart those lessons to others. In giving their assessment of their awareness of self at the time they entered college to the points where they currently stand as alumni, or having progressed further in their programs, working on advanced degrees, or completion of terminal degrees, each offered words that spoke to the evolution of their self-perception while they were enrolled that helped push them through.

Most notably Chuck and Patrick shared how the internalization of oppression affected their experiences in the beginning. Chuck reflects, "We always feel we're a little less than because we're gay. Because why? Society says to be gay is to be other. To be other is not a good thing, right? And so for me, that was, I was going through that battle." As an undergraduate student, he says that because of that, he didn't feel like he could be his full self and be successful. Patrick offered a similar reflection:

> Honestly, you get to a point where you're so used to being let down or disappointed or having hurt, that it becomes your standard. Because all these things that happened, the deaths and the setbacks and the failures that happened so much. I honestly got to the point where I thought of it like, this is just life.

Chuck attributes the change in consciousness to the full awareness and acceptance of self: "The primary evolution was me accepting my full self. Accepting that I can still be successful in being my full self. The acknowledgment of the totality of his full being fuels him through his life endeavors including his current master's program. Patrick, Will, and Devin spoke of their

evolution in metaphors. Patrick offered, "I really didn't see the pearl within my own pain." The "pearl" was the steps that he had to endure to reach self-actualization and self-fulfillment. For him, he says,

> It doesn't come from the degree or doesn't come from what you drive or what you own or what you may have, or even your appearance. It comes from you actually truly being content and one with yourself. I think that's what success means for me. It took me a long time, oh my gosh, it took me a long time to learn what some people may consider some bare essential lessons.

Rodney evolved from a man that "played the game" and at one point distanced himself from his brother to realizing

> You don't have to omit pieces of yourself for the comfort of others. This is the life that you live, and you need to live this life for yourself, and you can't expect people to, nor should you want people to, all the time, to approve of you all the time.

He says once he realized that he knew that his success, his destiny, and his resilience were in his own hands.

On the other hand, Devin and Will attribute their attitude to their faith. For Devin, being away from home and forging a relationship with God for himself was vital. "knowing that God has all things under control and just wants you to show up as your authentic self, and everything else will kind of fall into play from there" propelled him forward, but that was something that he had to grow into knowing. Will shared a similar sentiment,

> At 17 if you would've told me that this is who I would be, this is where I would be now, I don't think I would've believed you. And that's not to say that life has been a crystal stair because, by God, it has definitely not, but God is good.

He adds to this by offering that all of this, the experience, the resilience, his successes, are a part of a larger order: "I'm living this life so somebody else can be inspired so they can inspire others or whatever. It's a domino effect or whatever and when we really tap into who we are and what we're supposed to be and who we're supposed to be and just live that authentically, that's when you live your best life."

Lastly, Rodney reflects, "... I live my life by quotes. And one of my favorite quotes is 'if you live off a man's compliments, you'll die from his criticisms.' And that's real." To varying degrees, and at various points of their enrollment, all of the respondents mentioned evolving in the ways that they considered themselves for self and also in where they fit at their institutions. Where before, many maintained that they felt the need to hide or compartmentalize, identities, with time, all recognized the need to holistically accept themselves and this full acceptance encouraged their perseverance.

4.3.8 *Liberation*

The recognition of self and self-actualization to which participants spoke lend themselves to the final theme that the men alluded to, liberation. The journey that all of the participants spoke to led them to a point where they felt truly liberated, and that liberation was a large part of their college success. Phillip and Devin used similar expressions when affirming their self-actualization. Devin referenced it as being in a cave, grave, and box but the liberation came when he realized,

> Life is too short to stay living in somebody's box, a box that God never put you in. So, you gotta keep on pushing, living your authentic truth, show up in your truth every day, even when it pisses people off, and go to bed knowing that you have done a service by showing up in your truth, so somebody else can see your light.

Rodney's liberatory outlook assists in his perseverance because he recognized that for him, his liberation is contingent on his commitment to his responsibility to push. He says, the ability to know that there was something I had to offer. Whether it be to the world, or to somebody else. But I felt like, and still feel like, okay there's something important for me to give. To do that, I have to persevere.

What others such as Keith, Patrick, and Chuck called self-actualization James called "turning it!":

> I would say don't just keep pushing, turn it. Just really go out there and turn it. Still, if it's in your desire to go for class president or this and that, go out for it. If you feel the need to vocalize your sexuality and you feel like you need to be seen and heard, go do it. It's one thing to make it through, and it's one thing to make it through with good grades, but then it's another one to just really turn it and make a statement. So, I would tell them just turn it, turn it out.

In feeling liberated, many reflected on the feeling that they "could accomplish anything." In many cases, the feeling of liberation was the culmination of the participants' personal evolution and self-actualization.

4.4 Data Presentation and Analysis

The operational diagram (Figure 3) illustrates the ways the participants' identities shaped their college experiences as referenced in RQ 1*: What are the ways in which the specific intersectional identities of Black gay men shape their college?* There are several points of note in this diagram. First, responses were coded into three overarching themes- Navigation of Identities, Insidious Traumas, and Coping/Survival Strategies. Further analysis of the theme Navigation of Identities reveals two subthemes indicating that the navigation of identities was

done in two specific ways- the negotiation of expectations and engaging notions of visibility and surveillance. Through Emotion Coding, eleven subcodes- pride, questioning of value, pressure, confusion, paranoid, isolation, fear, doubt, detachment, seeking validation, and overcompensation- were created based on the emotions that the participants felt at different points. For example, while navigating identity, respondents felt a sense of pride and/or would question their value when confronted with the insidious traumas based on their sexual or ethnic minority position.

Even more importantly, the process by which these emotions and actions occurred was not, and is not, a continuous, uninterrupted cycle in one direction. The men's reflection and response patterns are ongoing, and each part is continuously and simultaneously affecting the other. That is to say that while navigating identity, there are moments of pride and questioning of value that lead to the creation of coping strategies, but also that same creation of coping strategies can influence the pride that the men take in themselves and their academic performance or takes into consideration the pressures to perform that instigate persistence. That persistence, therefore, inspires the more significant phenomenon in this study, resilience.
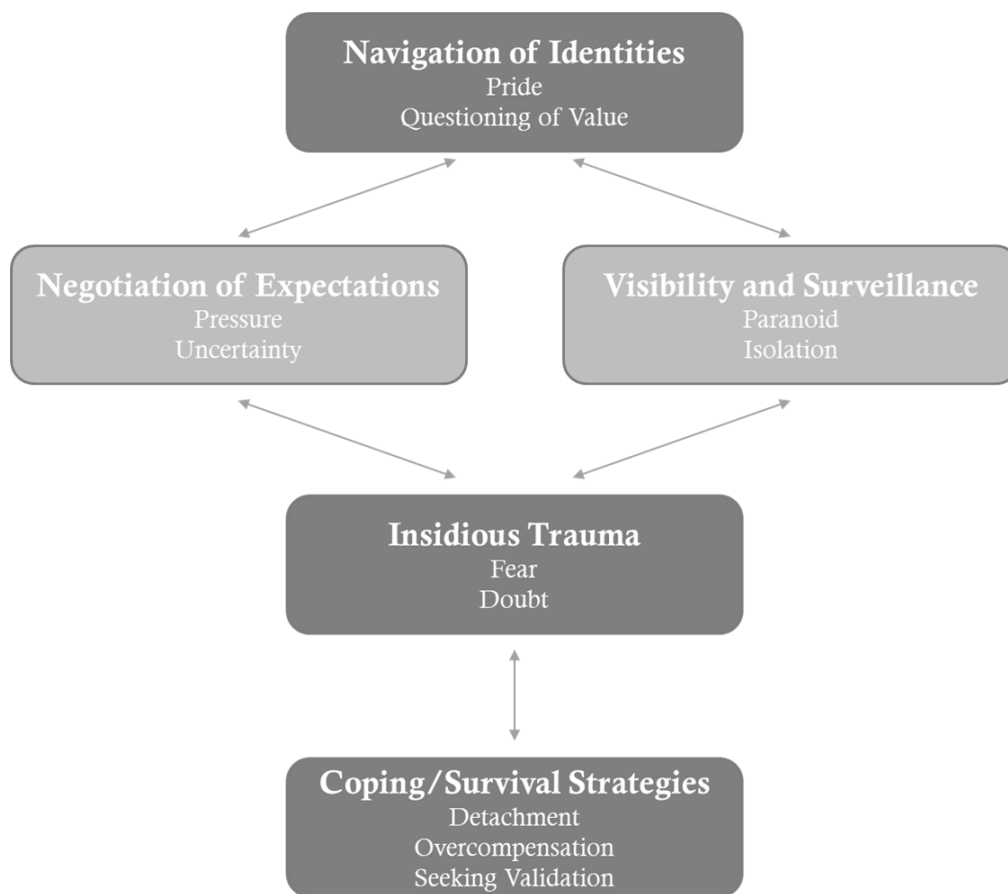
Figure 4. Effects of Identities on College Experience

Data collected from interviews is also represented in the presentation of themes on RQ 2: *What effect do these identities have on resilience while engaged in college matriculation?* (see Figure 4). Here, five themes emerged- Persistence, Self-Efficacy Fueling Resistance, Active Creation of Social Support, Evolution of Self-Perception, and Liberation. In the same way, an analysis was conducted to grasp how participants felt during these stages. Emotion Coding provided six subcodes- motivated, engaged, free, triumphant, enlightened, and steadfast. Again, also noted is the non-linear distribution of these actions and feelings. All themes affect resilience, and the resiliency works to fuel and mobilize the actions. For example, the engagement of creating social supports can boost resilience and promote liberation and evolution of one's self-

perception. Increased resiliency fosters a feeling of enlightenment that lends itself to self-actualization and liberation.
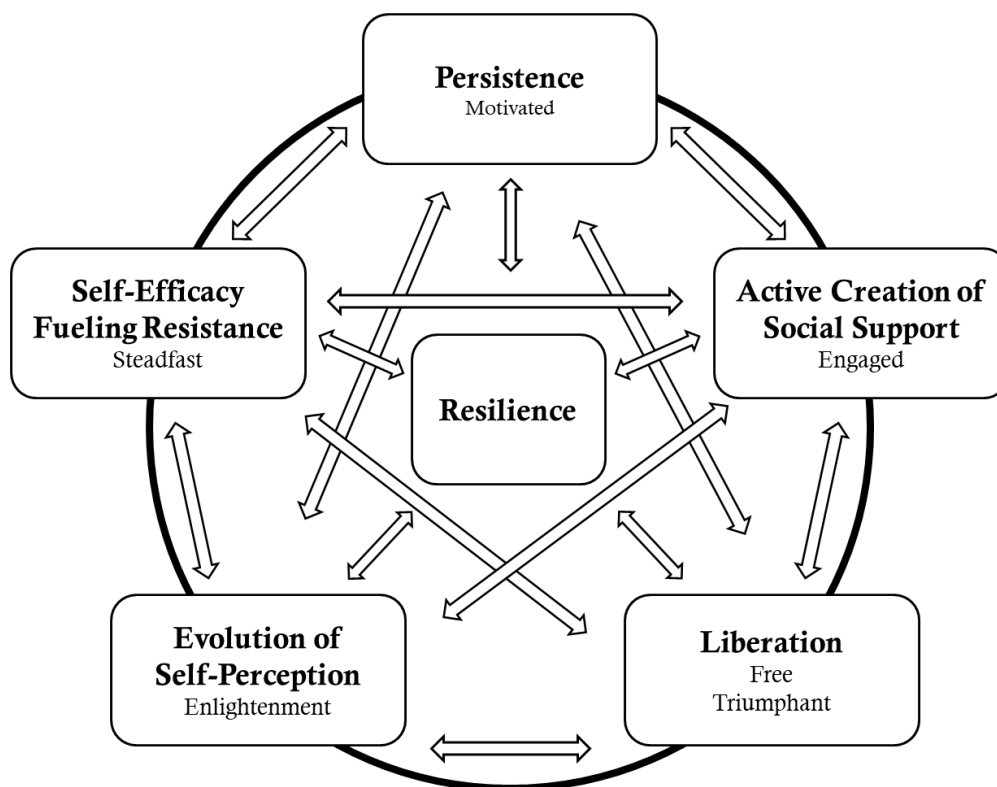

Figure 5. Effects of Identities on Resilience

5   DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1   Discussion

The intent of this work was to answer two specific research questions among a population of fifteen self-identified Black or African descended gay men who share the commonality of having engaged in college experiences in the United States. The descriptions, accounts, and reflection that these men shared suggested answers to the questions:

> (1) What are the ways in which the specific intersectional identities of Black gay men shape their college experiences and

(2) What effect do these identities have on resilience while engaged in college

matriculation?

Through an exploratory qualitative design, eight current students and seven alumni participated in semi-formal interviews that explored the phenomena of identity and resilience during their college matriculations.

From the emerging themes and patterns, the responses suggest that the human experience that is being a Black gay man significantly affected, and continues to influence, these men's college experiences. While this sample is certainly not large enough to generalize to all Black gay men, because of consistent emotion and actions reported by the men, one can assume that many other Black gay men in college face marginalization and oppression, as previous studies suggest. However, not only do they experience obstacles as a result of their identities, they negotiate those identities in a way that compels them to engage in self-actualization and resiliency processes that are similar to what has been presented in this study. This work suggests that the same identities that are often considered problematic or pathological also work to support these students to not only endure or persist through college, but to demonstrate self-efficacy and resiliency, the self-determined will to push through arduous situations. Here, we discuss the data collected from this group of men in relation to the research questions and current literature.

The concurrence of being Black and gay in college elicited several emotions within the context of these men's college experiences. The emotions would have significant effect on their epistemology, including the ways in which they view the world, the ways they would navigate their college interactions, and the ways that they saw themselves. The first theme that became immediately apparent was that Black gay men in college repeatedly and continually find ways to

navigate their intersectional identities as Black men and Black gay men. Consistent with the ways Strayhorn & Tillman-Kelly (2013) describe Black gay men's understanding of masculinity and the construction of manhood, I found that some of my participants accept, adhere to, and perform traditionally masculine behavior, while others intentionally challenge hegemonic notions of manhood in general, and Black manhood in particular. In most cases, men would oscillate between these behaviors, but in taking it a step beyond Strayhorn and Tillman-Kelly's findings, none of my participants rejected the notion of manhood, but resolved to create their own definitions and parameters of what acceptable men's behaviors were. Even in challenging notions of manhood, they did not reject Black manhood altogether, but redefined and self-defined how that manhood was expressed in their own terms. Their negotiation of behaviors was more aligned to the Multidimensional Identity Model utilized by Henry et al. (2011) which suggests that individuals assume the identity assigned by society, consciously chooses his/her identity, vacillates between identities depending on the environment, and embraces multiple identities simultaneously. Interviews provided rich examples of the men doing this both consciously and inadvertently.

Emotions such as questioning their self-worth and detachment not only served as a hindrance to personal and interpersonal growth in some instances, but also acted as a barrier that would challenge the ability to build critical relationships that could serve as a support system. For several of these men, the barriers ultimately delayed their matriculation and significantly affected the ways that they recognize and affirm their success. Wilson et al (2016) and Buttram (2015) assert that because of their multi-marginalized status, many Black gay men may find it difficult to integrate into Black communities, for instance, because of sexual identity and hegemonic society because of racism. They further defend that individuals are often forced to

choose between identities. While was the case for some participants, two participants felt either ultimately comfortable in their identities and immediately accepted themselves holistically, or never felt their gay identity, which could be seen as the more problematic identity, was so salient that they had to choose to identify more with their Blackness than their being gay.

All of the participants described several points of self-reflection and introspection throughout their time in their degree programs. To some extent, the position of being Black and gay and being subject to insidious traumas such as harassment, inflammatory comments, and threats also saw it necessary to develop strategic coping mechanisms to protect their mental well-being. Insidious traumas often resulted in different levels of visibility on campus. Most negotiated in one or a combination of three ways reported previously- the internalization, normalization, or desensitization of the traumas. Because of this, they are continually aware of the nature of visibility that they invite. What Mobley Jr. and Squire (2014) refer to as "invisible lives," (p.466) was only one way these men saw their lived experience while in college. Some felt invisible, while others felt hypervisible, but most felt one or both at the same time, at all times. This feeling is specifically what created and affects the insidious traumas that several men indicated internalizing, normalizing or becoming desensitized to. The participants shared several ways in which they found it appropriate to cope with negative treatment. Similar to the ways that Black men developed the "cool pose" behavior in response to oppression in hegemonic systems (Majors & Gordon, 1994), Black gay men also developed coping or survival strategies that assisted in the negation of oppression. Throughout this work, the word 'survival' was used interchangeably with 'coping' concerning the strategies the men developed to ensure their self-care and success throughout their college time. This was done intentionally as several men

conveyed that college was not an option, but a critical endeavor in shaping their futures and ensuring they increased their life chances, and in some cases, avoid physical altercations.

Exposure to insidious traumas, although unfortunate, was also seen to work in their favor as is evidenced by an examination of the second research question. Not all of the effects of the insidious traumas faced by the men interviewed in this study had solely negative impacts on their college experiences. In reflecting on their experiences, while often challenging, all expressed a sense of pride in who they were and the ways in which their specific identities enriched their lives. The salience of being Black and gay provided an opportunity to develop coping strategies with which to navigate obstacles, and persistence to overcome other challenges in their lives. The experience of 'pushing through' challenges as a result of being relegated to the margins because of race and/or sexual identity on their campuses prompted the ability to celebrate each win regardless of size. The push through reflects the core principles of Leckman's (2013) and Follins et al. (2014) definitions of resilience which include exposure to a threat or adversity and utilizing psychosocial, structural and cultural resources to build positive adaptation or resistance to that threat. That efficacy provided a brighter outlook and served as not just a mediator, but motivation to demonstrate resilience to the social and academic tasks of a collegiate program.

Again, it is necessary to acknowledge that all of the men in this study did not recognize facing hardships specific to their gay identities through their experiences in college. They all, conversely, encountered times where they were required to reflect on their Blackness and what that meant in terms of their social capital. They negotiated notions of value and who is valuable and who determines that value in communities. The findings from this study suggest that Black gay men in college constantly are aware of the ways that they must, and do, navigate their layered and interconnected identities. By doing so, they must negotiate the expectations of

performance whether this means conforming to or rejecting traditional conceptions of Black

manhood, academic performance, or gendered sexuality.

This study went further than many of the dominant narratives of Black men students, but

surely Black gay men students, to reveal the ways that their identities contributed to their success

and ultimate resilience to push past obstacles to achieve the goals that they set for themselves.

Wilson et al. (2016) highlight three fundamental components of resilience. These include self-

efficacy, hardiness (coping), and social support. Two of the themes in participants' responses,

Self-Efficacy Fueling Resistance and Active Creation of Social Support) spoke directly to these

elements. Key ways that participants' identities contributed to their resilience include motivating

their persistence and fostering their self-determined agency and efficacy to resist hegemonic and

disparaging perceptions cast upon them. Seeking affirmation of their identities often resulted in

the men creating their own form of social support networks, many of which developed from

friend groups to kin networks and chosen family. This finding, actively creating social support,

affirms Blockett's (2017) assertion that Black gay men on college campus labor to forge

counterspaces and communities on their campuses to combat marginalization. What I found that

diverges from Blockett, however, is more often than not, these men create more spaces,

communities, and networks outside of their campus to forge bonds, particularly around their gay

identities. This is notably important because it suggests that students are leaving campuses to

find community. In this study, one-third of the participants in creating community outside of

campus found spaces where they felt affirmed. The strategy was useful in that the men ultimately

continued to persist and complete their degrees, so the communities were valuable, for three, this

also delayed their matriculation.

Particularly because Quare Theory is the theoretical framework for this study, the idea of resistance is especially significant. In several instances, the men indicated that the implicit purpose of proving naysayers and oppressors wrong drove their resilience. They expressed it being critical to resist stereotypes and negative perceptions of Black gay men. Johnson's Quare Theory (2001) suggests that careful and specific attention be placed on the implications of racialized sexuality. This is demonstrated in the ways the participants articulated not feeling completely comfortable engaging in LGBT on-campus groups as the groups were seen as catering to a white experience and as one participant indicated, "We move differently." Quare Theory's three fundamental concepts- intersectionality, resistance and agency, and performativity- are highlighted throughout, and underscore the answers and narratives of the respondents. Through the Quare lens, participants' presence on campus, their engagement on campus, and their push to be resilient is a resistance act in the same way that this study is a resistance work. The culmination of these resistance efforts was an evolution of self-perception to self-actualization. This evolution, the men indicated, was the true liberation that propelled them forward in their resilience. From insecure, confused and doubtful marginalized students in a world that systemically counts them out, the men grew to college graduates, seekers of advanced degrees, and doctors. Arguably more important, they are self-actualized individuals that holistically accept themselves in the fullness of their truths.

Speaking with these men about their academic endeavors supports literature regarding resilience and the ever-present notions of hegemonic patriarchy and racial essentialism. Through a Quare Theory lens, the college campuses and environments were the sites of active resistance that these fifteen men- Patrick, Devin, Douglas, Will, Langston, Keith, James, Rodney, Maurice, Omar, Chauncey, Phillip, Marco, Chuck, and Thomas "kept pushin'."

5.2   Recommendations for Future Research

Future research might consider furthering this work in different ways depending on the lens of inquiry. Researchers and institutions each have a particular responsibility in reporting comprehensive and unbiased narratives and can take specific considerations to move campuses to more equitable and affirming learning spaces.

First, in the creation of new streams of knowledge researchers must be wary of the assumption of trauma in all gay men's experiences, whether college or otherwise. This assumption leads the researcher to center the pathology that has historically plagued the Black gay experience. This also contributes to negative perceptions that frame the experiences of this population in trauma, and exploits one component of a multi-layered, nuanced, intersectional complex human experience. To that, one of the more obvious implications of this research is the need to include an intersectionality framework into the investigation of subjects in general when dealing with people, but specifically when working with traditionally marginalized groups. This also necessitates the creation of culturally relevant assessments and data collection strategies. Future studies may benefit from targeting specific age groups, or enrollment levels that have historically been deemed problematic to report on resilience and success.

As institutions of progressive thought and establishments designed and aimed at the holistic development of the students for which they serve, future research provides significant implication to inform policy, programming, and support services for not only Black gay male students, but entire student bodies on college and university campuses. Colleges and universities must critically assess their student demographics. As suggested by several students in this study, cultural centers and spaces are often the hubs for underrepresented students. Often Black gay men do not feel comfortable in the traditionally LBGT meeting spaces because cultural

differences, particularly, but not limited to race, class, and varying sexualities present unique understandings of sexuality, disclosure, and cultural understandings. Administrations must continue to dialogue about these differences to ensure that they are engaging students appropriately, specifically when dealing with multiple marginalizations. This is not specific to Black gay students, and can be applied to diverse ethnic, racial, and cultural populations. The last recommendation to institutions is to provide visible representation of diverse faculty and administration. Research suggests, and my data confirmed the importance of support, particularly of gay student populations. A faculty or staff directory of diverse identity affinities that is made available to the student body would be an example of a viable resource provide representation as well as spaces of support and affirmation.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A- Informed Consent

Georgia State University

Department of African American Studies

Informed Consent

Title: I Kept Pushin': Exploring the Experiences of Gay Black Male University Students

Principal Investigator: Jonathan Gayles

Student Principal Investigator: Dante Studamire

     I.   Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to explore the ways that you see and feel about yourself, the ways that you feel you can change situations, and the effect that has on your college experience. You are invited to participate because you are a Black male who is born male, gay-identified, at least 18 years old, and are a current college student or have graduated from college. A total of 10-15 participants will be asked to participate in this study. Participation will take 45 minutes to 90 minutes of your time in one sitting.

     II.   Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire. You will not be directly identified in the work. You will be assigned an alias at the time of the interview. You will then be asked to participate in a one on one semi-formal interview with the researcher. The interview will take approximately 45-90 minutes to complete and will take place at a location and time of your convenience. All interviews will be audio recorded for transcription and accuracy by a recording device secured through a password to which only the

researchers will have access. You can request your recordings at any time. All questions will only proceed if signed in agreement to this Informed Consent.

III.   Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would on an average day of life.

IV.   Benefits:

Participation in this study may or may not benefit you personally. Participation in this study may not personally benefit you, although answers provided may offer a feeling of personal satisfaction and strength. Also, we hope to gain information to understand gay Black men's experiences in general, and in their academic experiences in particular. This information can add to existing data that considers Black male, and Black male student methods of overcoming challenges, to create more specific and supportive environments in higher education.

V.   Compensation:

You will receive your choice of a $10 Starbucks gift card or $10 Visa gift card for participating in this study.

VI.   Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

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

VII.   Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. The principal investigators will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared

with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). We will use an alias rather than your name on all study records. The information- audio and transcribed interviews you provide will be stored in a locked recording device, and password protected laptop to be kept in the possession of the researcher. Knowledge of the password of these devices is known solely by the researcher to protect privacy. None of the information provided and stored will be stored in a cloud or automatic storage device. Only the principal investigators will have access to your written and identifying information. After the qualitative data is transcribed using pseudonyms, audio recordings will be destroyed. Any other information that might serve as direct identifiers will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form.

      VIII.   Contact Persons:

      Contact the student principal investigator at (404) 935-8376 or via email: dstudamire1@gsu.edu. Please contact this researcher if you have any questions about this study. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Jonathan Gayles in the Department of African American Studies at (404) 413-5142 or email him at jgayles@gsu.edu. You can also call if you think you have been harmed by the study. Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team. You can talk about questions, concerns, offer input, obtain information, or suggestions about the study. You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this study.

IX.   Copy of Consent Form to Participant:

You will receive a copy of this consent form for your records.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio recorded, please sign below.

_____

Printed Name of Participant

_____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent   Date

Appendix B- Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

1. Can you tell me, in as much detail as possible, about your experiences being a Black gay man?

2. What concepts (media images, traditions, etc.) have shaped your ideas of what it means to be a Black gay man?

3. Do you consider yourself a person who see themselves in ways that one could consider unpopular?

   a. Does that affect you?

4. What role does the intersection of being Black and gay play in how you view yourself?

5. Share with me some of the college experiences you've encountered directly related to your sexuality and position as Black man?

6. Any other experiences you'd like to share?

7. How did those experiences make you feel?

8. How did you respond?

9. Why do you think you responded this way?

10. Is this how you typically respond?

11. What has been the importance of identity when negative instances arise?

12. What impact did those experiences have on your overall well-being and time while enrolled (for example: physical, psychological, interpersonal, spiritual)?

13. Describe your social network or networks?

    a. If more than one – how are they different from each other?

14. How important were your social networks while in college? - again, if in multiple networks, ask for responses for each

15. How did you find them?

16. Did you create them?

17. What effect has identifying yourself as a gay Black man had in your social networks?

18. What effect has identifying yourself as a gay Black man had in your social networks, particularly while in college?

19. To what extent do you feel you can control the things that happen around you and your response to those things?

20. To what would you attribute your persistence when things such as those that you mentioned earlier occur in your life?

21. What influenced your decision to go to college?

22. Taken into consideration the events that have occurred, how would you say your college experience has been thus far (or how was it overall)?

23. What motivates you?

24. Despite the things you have gone through (went through), you persisted. To what would you attribute your resilience?

25. What advice would you give to other Black gay men while pursuing a college education?

26. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

Appendix C- Recruitment Form

Human Subjects Protocol Recruitment Form

Greetings! My name is Dante Studamire. I am a graduate student at Georgia State University in the Department of African American Studies. I would like, and value, your input in my study entitled ": I Kept Pushin': Examining the Experiences of Gay Black Male University Students." The purpose of the study is to explore the ways that you see and feel about yourself, the ways that you feel you can change situations, and the effect that has on your college experience. Participation in this study may not personally benefit you, although answers provided may offer a feeling of personal satisfaction and strength. Also, we hope to gain information to understand gay Black men's experiences in general, and in their educational experiences in particular. This information can add to existing information that considers Black male, and Black male student methods of overcoming challenges, in order to create more specific and supportive environments in higher education.

To be a participant in this study you must:

- Be at least 18 years old
- Identify as Black or African-descended
- Identify as a man and have been assigned male at birth
- Identify as a member of the gay community
- Be currently enrolled in, or have graduated from a college or university

If you are interested in participating in this study:

- Choose an alias for the study
- Call me at (404) 935-8376
- Email me at dstudamire1@gsu.edu
- Identify yourself by the name you have chosen.
- Please include your alias, best number to reach you, best available times to call, and email address.

Appendix D- Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Questionnaire

Age: ____

Region were you raised _____

Level of Education Attained_____

College/University Description (HBCU, PWI, etc.)_____

College/University Region (South, Midwest, etc.) _____

Employed____ Unemployed____Self Employed____Student____Other (specify)____

Occupation (if employed)_____

Religious Membership_____

Sexual Identity_____

Ethnic/Racial Identification _____

Were you assigned male at birth? (please circle) **Y/N**

Do you identify as a man? (please circle) **Y/N**