

A Phenomenological Study: The Experiences of Quare Males Who Attend and/or Attended  
Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs)

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## **Abstract**

### **A Phenomenological Study: The Experiences of Quare Males Who Attend and/or Attended Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs)**

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This two- year phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of five Black gay (Quare) males who attended three different Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the South. This research project sought to gain an understanding of the experiences of five Quare males who attend or attended an HBCU and, contribute to the broader body of research that examines sexual minorities who intersection of identities were race, gender, and sexuality. By using a qualitative research approach to better understand human experiences, perceptions, motivations, intentions, and behaviors of Quare males, the study used Queer of Color theory with tenets from Queer theory and Black feminism to identify literature that addresses the constant shifting of gender, sexual identity, and issues of race. Data was collected through 60-minute semi-structured interviews with researcher reflections for each interview in the following areas: a biographical history, curriculum, and photo/artifact elicitation. Additionally, official school-related documents and materials pertaining to the experiences of the five Quare males, such as information from school websites, student handbooks, and general curricular maps, were used for analysis. Using intersectionality as an analytical tool, the data analyzed was open coded to arrive at deductive codes and then organized the codes to identify salient themes such as maleness, masculinity, hiding in plain sight and trauma.

Results from this study suggests that messages from family, community, and K-12 academic institutions impact the participants' lived experiences prior to attending college and those messages are reified through formal and informal curricula while attending their HBCUs. Specifically, this study drew attention to the idea that messages about maleness and masculinity have influenced the Quare males' ideologies around race, gender, and sexuality and, as a result, they have learned to hide in plain sight and navigate heteronormative spaces to gain access and privilege while on their perspective HBCU campuses. This study significant contributes to the limited research on Quare males at HBCUs, explores how social and academic institutions such family, community/ church and K-12 schools experiences influence their experiences prior to and during their time at HBCUs and offers recommendations to HBCUs such as restructuring curricula and teacher education programs and Quaring Racial Literacy while also suggesting to multiple stakeholders (Families, Church, etc.) ways in which familial and community engagement could meet the needs of an continually marginalized and underserved population.

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C. R. K.

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the Quare males who trusted me with their stories.

Thank you for sharing your lived experiences with me.

I also dedicate this work to the Quare males  
who continue to try to find their way through this thing called life.

I love you!

God loves you!

## Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

### **Preface**

A master's-level graduate student walked into his first day of graduate school at Teachers College at Columbia University, smiling ear to ear. As he looked through the clusters of new graduate students, he finally noticed a group of ladies and one gentleman who wore the same departmental identifying badge as he. He quickly joined the group introducing himself, and they proceeded to get to know each other. For that new graduate student, it was a new beginning in a big city, New York City, without the pressures of feeling the need to hide or officially come out of the closet about his sexuality to his family, community, fraternity, military organization, or church. His goal was to be 100% himself while earning an Ivy League degree. Although it was not his intent, he presented himself as a gender-conforming heterosexual male (i.e., his appearance, mannerisms, and performance of gender are only known through his sex assigned at birth) to his fellow cohort members (Butler, 2006). His appearance, mannerisms, and performance of gender, also known as discursive practices, were those that have been an integral part of his personality from his experiences with family, church, and living in the South. After a couple of hours in the conversation with cohort members and a couple of glasses of wine, he mentioned to the only other guy that he was gay. The cohort member laughed and asked why his disclosure was so important. That is when I told him that I felt it was important for me to finally be honest with others and myself about my identity. He mentioned that he had plenty of gay friends and it was not a big deal, but he admired me for being so outspoken about my identity.

Later, I realized after reading about the experiences of gay males that I have harbored "Gay Shame" for many years (Downs, 2012). Downs described "Gay Shame" as the personal knowledge of being different and the apprehension of disclosing or embracing one's identity for

fear of not being socially accepted. In his book *The Velvet Rage*, Downs argued that there are multiple levels of how the gay males' psyche negotiates their own "Gay Shame" from the need of constant validation to overachieving in social, academic, and professional environments. Although I feel that the experiences and discursive practices of Black gay males are more nuanced because of embedded racism in our social systems, I could understand some aspects of Downs' arguments about the need to overachieve to prove gay males' worth in a heteronormative society. After having a very successful career in the military and earning two graduate degrees, my "Gay Shame" brought me back to graduate school to prove that I could achieve something, but this time at an Ivy League institution.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Through this dissertation and my focus of study, I am not only exploring the experiences of others like me; this study is also emancipatory for me due to some of the "Gay Shame" embedded within me. Knowing that my story only offers some insights into the experiences of the intersectionality of race, gender and sexuality, I sought to gain through this research project an understanding of the experiences of other Black gay males who attend or attended an HBCU and, thus, contribute to the broader body of research that examines the identities of sexual minorities. Research has exposed that there is not a monolithic experience for all gay students. Beset by Gay Shame and inner conflict, gay males are unsure of their position in society (Gross & Woods, 1999). Often viewing sex and gender synonymously, western culture has been conditioned to the ideology that there are only two sexes (Fausto-Sterling, 1993). Formulated through religious systems of explanation of proper behavior, this ideology of binary category of sex is reified in most social and academic institutions. It was my goal to investigate the

phenomena of lived experiences of 10 Black gay males who attend and/or attended a Historically Black College or University (HBCU).

### **We Are Not Queer, We Are Quare**

Before going any further in this dissertation, I first must decenter my research from the use of the term “queer.” As a fixed object in the center of scholarship, queer or queerness has been used as a catch-all term not bounded to any particular identity (Johnson, 2001). Johnson (2001) contended the term “queer represents an aggressive impulse of generalization” (p. 4). He argued that queer, queer studies, and queer theory homogenize the gay community. Historically, these panacea-type discourses and experiences of exclusion have informed and influenced the framework through which marginal groups currently view themselves and other groups in matters of race, gender, sexuality, social class, and culture (Cohen, 1999).

As a catch-all term or false umbrella term, Johnson (2001) problematized the use of the word “queer” because he felt it has only promoted the agenda of the White middle class. He proposed that the term “Quare” is more appropriate for analysis of gay people of color because it has some historical context. He stated that Quare acknowledges differential experiences, such as schooling, family, and religion of gay people of color. He argued that literature and research should be Quared to problematize historically situated and materially conditioned ways of knowing suggested by queer theory. Additionally, he advocated that Quare offers a way to critique stable notions of identity while acknowledging racial, gendered, and class knowledges.

Rodriguez (2003) advised that centering identity in the analysis of gay students of color also places race in the center and privileges discussion on issues of colonization and cultural ideologies of gender and sexuality (Manalansan, 2003), and a way of producing and reproducing

the means of human existence through material conditions in society, or historical materialism<sup>1</sup> (Ferguson, 2004). Understanding the ontology that is associated with queer, I adopted the term *Quare* to represent intersectionality and how both racialized<sup>2</sup> bodies and sexuality are being emphasized for the remainder of this research study of Quare males<sup>3</sup> who attend and/or attended an HBCU.

### **Background of the Problem**

The lived experiences of Quare males who attend and/or attended HBCUs could be described as unique. As a Quare male who attended an HBCU, I would describe the experience as unique because it was the only academic environment, I have encountered that promoted cultural richness yet oppressed it at the same time. My HBCU provided a space where I could be proud of my Blackness and secure in my perceived culture, but it did not offer me any other forms of cultural growth in curriculum<sup>4</sup> due to attitudes about homosexuality. Specifically, my HBCU provided a space where racial and cultural affirmation was included in the curriculum and supported by faculty/staff, clubs, and organization, but had nothing associated with sexuality. Offering no to very few courses or organizations for Quare students, an intersection of my identity remained in isolation. I learned at that time to navigate life consciously, picking and choosing when I wanted to embrace my gayness. I chose to stay closeted<sup>5</sup> and only disclose my sexuality to close friends for fear of non-acceptance.

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<sup>1</sup> Historical materialism is a major tenet in Marxist thought that argues that material or economic things are the bases on which sociopolitical institutions and ideologies are built.

<sup>2</sup> *Radicalized* is a term used in sociology that refers to the process of ascribing racial and ethnicity to a group of people.

<sup>3</sup> Male is used in this study to emphasize biological sex organs.

<sup>4</sup> Curriculum is defined here as the totality of the student's experiences that occur in the academic process in a K-12 or postsecondary educational setting. This includes both the formal and informal curriculum, with courses offered, sports teams, school clubs and organizations, and fraternal Greek letter organizations.

<sup>5</sup> Closeted is a LGBT person who intentionally hides their true sexual orientation from the public and those around them.

Now during this progressive time in society, when more youth are exploring gender identity and/or sexuality, it is important that all schools (primary, secondary, and postsecondary) be well equipped to respond to student needs concerning sexual orientation and gender identity (Mayo, 2013). Research has proven that there are more disparities between Quare students within the academic environment, compared to their White gay and heterosexual peers (Interactive et al., 2005). Specifically, Quare students have lower academic scores and higher dropout rates due to harassment and discrimination. Given a hostile climate that often goes unchecked (or not addressed) by faculty, staff, or other students, Quare students are not likely to feel they belong to the school community, and these students are somehow easily dismissed.

In a recent study by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) of more than 2,100 gay teens (Interactive et al., 2005), about two-thirds of teens reported that they have been harassed verbally or physically due to perceived or actual appearance, sexual orientation, gender expression, race/ethnicity, disability, or religion (Interactive et al., 2005). Three-quarters of gay students feel unsafe in at least one place at school, such as changing rooms, washrooms, and hallways (Interactive et al., 2005). Half of straight students agreed that at least one part of their school is unsafe for gay students (Taylor et al., 2008, p. 47). “Nine in ten gay students have been verbally or physically harassed because of their physical appearance, race/ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation or gender expression” (Interactive et al., 2005, p. 4) and tend to drop out of high school at a rate of 26% each year (Frankfurt, 2000). Within those numbers, four in 10 of the incidents were of a homophobic nature (Interactive et al., 2005). GLSEN reported that more than a third of secondary school teachers overall (and 54% of senior high school teachers) know a student at their school who is gay. Those students found safe refuge with social networks, community centers, or organizations within the gay community



which has a long history of being resilient (Mayo, 2013). There is a direct relationship of oppression between the students' experiences with homophobia and both their community and academic environment (Brockenbrough, 2016).

There have been both overt and covert side effects of oppression and homophobia of Quare males. Social and cultural norms that sustain homophobia, racism, and oppression in the United States have and still exclude Quare male students who are gender non-conforming (Hopkins, 1997). The experiences of Quare males are important because they establish that the Gay Civil Rights Movement is not impacting gay students the same way. An example of this is the divisiveness that still exists in the gay community that queer and Quare persons do not celebrate as one community but celebrate gay pride separately. Research has exposed that there is not one monolithic experience for all gay students. Beset by Gay Shame and inner conflict, gay males are unsure of their position in society (Gross & Woods, 1999). Often viewing sex and gender synonymously, western culture has been conditioned to the ideology that there are only two sexes (Fausto-Sterling, 1993). Formulated through religious systems of explanation of proper behavior, this ideology of binary category of sex is reified in most social and government institutions, such as families, communities, faith-based organizations, and schools.

In recent years, activists and researchers have worked hard to disrupt dominant and hegemonic discourses, such as only having two sexes, by destabilizing fixed notions of identity, such as male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, and masculine/feminine, to name just a few (Johnson, 2001). That progress has led to debunking institutional structures to allow gay people the right to marry, access to the military, and the right to adopt. Knowing that those achievements have not been easy and without some consequences, some scholars suggested that one implication of the Gay Civil Rights Movement and political movements is that they have

focused too much on destabilizing the assumed categories and binaries of sexual identity and have served to reinforce simple dichotomies between heterosexual and everything queer (Cohen, 2005). For example, Cohen argued that this has shifted the dynamic of power to help privilege only the gay identity while marginalizing other identities such as race, class, and gender.

Theorizing how Black identity is formed within the western world, W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) offered scholarship and insight into Blacks navigating and fitting into dominant White Eurocentric systems through his notion of double consciousness. Double consciousness is described as the internal conflict of the multifaceted sense of self and identities that people of color have while navigating within a White-dominated oppressed society. Adding the intersection of queer, double consciousness extends the understanding of identity from a racial oppression perspective to include Black sexual oppression. Black sexual oppression is not addressed within the Gay Civil Rights Movement (Cohen, 2005). Often left out of gay or queer scholarship and politics, Quare males are still impacted by racial formation (Omi & Winant, 2014) and subject to White racial dominance. Their experiences are often impacted by sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or how they express themselves that may contribute to Gay Shame and feeling isolated or even helpless.

### **Rationale for the Study**

Thus, it is important to understand the multiplicity of experiences these youth have, both in their communities and in school, including how these experiences are shaped and may vary by personal characteristics, such as race, gender, and sexuality (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009). Some Quare students negotiate between racial/ethnic, gender, and sexual identities because of their experiences with family, school, and student organizations (McCready, 2009; Pasco, 2007).

Gender and sexuality are a part of social life (Foucault, 1990), and contemporary meanings of heterosexuality confer all sorts of citizenship rights (Pascoe, 2007). Through the social construction of gender and sexuality with the intersection of other identities, Quare male students choose one identity over others.

The limited research that does exist demonstrates that, in addition to challenges related to their sexual orientation or gender identity, Quare male students often face challenges that are related to their race and ethnicity, such as biased language and/or exclusion from curriculum that the vast majority of their White gay peers do not experience in the academic environment (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009). They are not only dealing with issues of violent or physical harassment, but some of their spirits are broken because they are not adequately represented or acknowledged in an academic environment. No recorded data have been found that addressed success in an academic environment for Quare male students who attend schools where they make up the majority of the student population, such as HBCUs (Russell & Truong, 2001). Additionally, there is a plethora of research in education on sexuality from a dominant White Eurocentric perspective that does not account for race and gender; there has been very little literature by persons of color that has focused on the lives of Quare youth (McCready, 2009). This impacts the perspective of the research by only offering an outsider's perspective. This study, then, highlights a gap in the literature that does not adequately address how social and academic institutions impact the experiences of Quare males.

### **Research Questions**

From the perspective of the researcher, administrator, or teacher, one should gain an understanding of Quare male students' experiences and how social and other institutions impact

those experiences in an educational setting that promotes cultural richness.<sup>6</sup> Those experiences are all-powerful determinants for creating an academically successful and safe environment for all students, regardless of race, gender, or sexuality. Since Crenshaw's (2005) coining of the term intersectionality of race and gender, it has become more apparent to researchers and anthropologists that a person's identity has many facets. Quare males in the gay community are no exception to this complex concept of intertwining or intersecting multiple forms of identity. Changes in cultural norms (in regard to race, sexuality, and gender) mean rethinking how we approach, educate, and challenge normalities, such as racialized and heteronormative curricula that are historically engrained in school culture (Mayo, 2013). In this study, I sought to explore the experiences of Quare male students in both social and academic environments, such as an HBCU. Due to the silence of Quare male voices within educational research, Brockenbrough (2016) suggested that knowledge of this undertheorized community could be taken from social settings and applied to the academic environment. Using a constructivist epistemological framework, I employed an interpretive approach to obtain data that could be theorized and lead to conversations at the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality that may cause any changes in the curriculum. Understanding that constructed counter-discourses have been used to maintain a sense of humanity of Blacks, I depended on both canonical and alternative or unofficial knowledge of Quare male experiences and racial formation for this study. Thus, I asked the following research questions:

- What are the academic and social experiences of Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCUs?

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<sup>6</sup> "Cultural richness includes diversity in anything that has to do with how people live: music, art, recreation, religion or beliefs, languages, dress, traditions, stories and folklore, ways of organization, ways of interacting with the environment, and attitudes toward other groups of people" (National Geographic, n.d.).

- How do Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCU interpret or understand their experiences with curriculum?

### **Significance of the Study**

*Pre-Brown v. Board of Education*, the U.S. higher education system made it difficult for Blacks to have advanced careers. Providing the only option of higher education for the freed slaves pre-*Brown v. Board of Education*, HBCUs were established in the 1800s to advance the Black community and provide opportunities to actualize social mobility while teaching racial tolerance and cultural pride (Anderson, 1988; Patton, 2014). Consisting of a little over 100 colleges and universities in the United States, HBCUs have conferred more than one-fifth of all undergraduate degrees to about 25,000 Black Americans every year (Danforth & Miller, 2018; Provasnik et al., 2004). Conferring bachelor's degrees for more than 21% of Black students, HBCUs have transitioned from industrial training institutions for freed slaves used for cheap labor to playing a crucial role in providing higher education for the Black community (Provasnik et al., 2004). HBCUs also reduce the achievement gap among Black and White Americans at the postgraduate level, inclusive of critical areas such as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). For example, about 300 Black doctoral recipients in science and engineering earned their undergraduate degrees from HBCUs each year from 1986 to 2006 (Burrelli & Rapoport, 2008). Using a highly conservative approach to education built on Christian beliefs and social justice, HBCUs have accomplished lessening the achievement gap by using curricula that focus on social responsibility and social development (Patterson et al., 2013; Swail et al., 2003).

## Why HBCUs?

In *The Souls of Black Folks*, Du Bois (1903) asked the question: “How does it feel to be a problem?” Contextualizing this study in an environment such as an HBCU provides the insight of the Quare males’ experiences in an environment that intends to promote cultural pride and awareness. I approached this research with the assumption that Quare male students are positioned as a problem at HBCUs (Du Bois, 1903). My rationale is that many HBCUs have failed to create an environment or safe space that gay students can negotiate without intolerance, harassment, or an unsupportive environment (Sanlo, 2004). While promoting racial and cultural awareness, the highly conservative Christian grounded approach to education has caused many HBCUs to establish a school environment that avoids challenging the status quo and suppresses expression, speech, and life choices of some students who are sexual minorities, such as Quare males (Patton, 2014). Being bastions of religious conservatism and cultural and racial essentialism, HBCUs have fostered attitudes that engage in the dominant heteronormative system that manifest implications for Quare students (Patton, 2014). One implication is the lack of policies and resources such as anti-gay harassment policies, student organizations, and support offices on 103 of the 106 HBCU campuses (McMurtie, 2013). Having only three HBCUs with resources for Quare students, some of the 103 HBCUs have justified that the lack of resources was due to the religious and cultural beliefs on which those colleges and universities were founded (McMurtie, 2013). Being positioned as a problem for a religious conservative all-male university, Quare males were part of a research study conducted on the dress code policies at Morehouse University, which situated academic success and masculinity as looking like the heterosexual White male in the dominant society (Patton, 2014). Patton argued that the policies had a monolithic view of race, gender, and sexuality. She mentioned that the policies lacked any

acknowledgment of the messages that dress can communicate and there are different definitions of success. Patton's study was one of the few pieces of scholarship that spoke to Quare experiences at an HBCU. Most research has focused instead on the HBCU experiences, the gay experiences at Predominately White Universities (PWIs), and the Quare experiences at PWIs. I feel this present study of the experiences of Quare males in an HBCU context may allow for an examination of social and academic experiences and achievement in a racialized (i.e., non-White) context.

### **Why Quare Males?**

When explored in scholarship, Black males in college are studied with the focus of student enrollment/retention, low achievement, and position within school organizations, such as a Greek fraternity. Scholars like Strayhorn et al. (2008) have used intersectionality as an epistemological framework and have coupled race and gender with sexuality. Focusing on the college-going decision-making process and retention of Quare males at PWIs, Strayhorn et al. (2008) began to extend our understanding of the racial and sexual heterogeneity of this undertheorized population. To expand on work that has been done on an undertheorized population, it is important to expand on the limited research of those and other experiences of Quare males in that context. Students who are college age represent the millennial age groups, a generation that was born in the late 1990s to the early 2000s. According to a Gallup (2017) survey, the millennial populations make up the highest and largest number of persons within the gay community, with more than a 7% disclosure rate, and 4% identified as persons of color. I feel preparing academic institutions, specifically HBCUs, to start conversations on the lived experiences of more encounters with students who identify as Quare males will help these institutions promote and/or address issues concerning this group. Hopefully, these conversations

will lead to safe spaces and resources that will assist with postsecondary enrollment rates that are currently at 34%, compared to 41% overall (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2014) and the high increase in retention rate of 65% at 4-year institutions (NCES, 2012).

Research has shown that Black males are less than one-third of the student population at HBCUs and rates of enrollment and retention are decreasing. Therefore, it is important to understand the roles, discourses, and experiences of Quare males in academic environments and the possible link to social institutions (Gasman, 2012; Jaschik, 2006). Strayhorn et al. (2008) mentioned that prior to the year 2000, little was known about experiences of Black males in college. Now, when explored in scholarship, Black males in college are receiving the focus of student enrollment/retention, low achievement, and membership in within-school organizations, such as a Greek fraternity. Other scholars have used intersectionality as an epistemological framework and coupled race and gender with sexuality. Focusing on the college-going decision-making process and retention of Black/gay men at PWIs, Strayhorn et al. (2008) has begun to extend our understanding of the racial and sexual heterogeneity of this undertheorized population.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In this study, I engaged in exploratory qualitative research on Quare males who attend and/or attended a HBCU. I was interested in understanding how research represents their experiences in social and academic environments. I utilized qualitative research because it provides an understanding of human experiences, perceptions, motivations, intentions, and behaviors based on description and observation. Additionally, it utilizes a naturalistic interpretative approach to a subject and its contextual setting. I chose qualitative research because its paradigms align with a phenomenological study on the experiences of Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCU (Hayes, 1997).



For this project, I found it was appropriate to use a critical inquiry lens through a Queer of Color epistemology. Framing the cause of the problems as societal and cultural, a critical theorist or social constructivist perspective to this research allowed me to focus on the interrelationships between society and its institutions, such as schools, as well as issues with race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality (Scheurich, 1997). Additionally, critical theorists analyze experiences where race has been gendered and sexualized, as well as the political and social consequences of injustice between historically marginalized persons of color and the dominant culture (Meyer & Carlson, 2014). Critical theory is used to frame the cause of the problems as societal and cultural.

Using facets or tenets from Queer theory and Black feminism, Queer of Color theory was used to identify literature that addresses the constant shifting of gender, sexual identity, and issues of race. By doing so, the unique experiences of Quare males were captured using the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, and sexuality. The intersectionality of the identities of sexual minorities, coupled with a history of oppression, led me to understanding that addressing the issue was multifaceted and there is no one “right solution” to support every Quare male. Historically, those experiences of exclusion inform and influence the framework through which marginal groups currently view themselves and other groups in matters of race, gender, sexuality, social class, and culture (Cohen, 1999).

### **Queer Theory**

Emerging from post-structural critical theory in the 1990s, Teresa de Lauretis introduced an epistemological lens of Queer theory to explore the experiences of persons who identify as gay (Jagose, 1996, 2009). Queer theory was inherently used in this research to frame sexuality and the multiple identities and experiences of Quare males (Pascoe, 2007). Queer theory speaks

to the voices of gay people who are often marginalized, oppressed, and silenced by social and academic institutions in society (Eng et al., 2005; Stein & Plummer, 2002). By disrupting and interrogating power in institutional systems, Queer theory challenges hegemonic Eurocentric male subjectivity in society (Pinar, 2014). Queer theory analysis is used to debunk the normative alignment of sex, gender, and sexuality (Valocchi, 2005). As a way of organizing knowledges, discourses, and social life, queer theory has been used to problematize systems of establishing and classifying by using binaries of sexual and regulating bodies (Corber, 2005; Segwick, 1991; Valocchi, 2005). The major contributions of scholars using Queer theory are ideologies of the fluidity of identity and how those identity chains connect within contexts or physical spaces (Munoz, 1999). While highlighting the ways in which ideology functions to oppress and prescribe ways of knowing, Queer scholars have used physical spaces as sites of knowledge production and not sociopolitical ideologies that impact the discursive practices of persons in those spaces (Hames-García, 2011; Johnson, 2001; Muñoz, 1999; Ross, 2007). Further, Hames-García (2011) contended that Queer theory or commentary seeks to separate sexuality from race, and that White narratives in White spaces dominate Queer studies, theory, and genealogies. He argued that Queer theorists and researchers have only used subjectivity when theorizing sexuality, and this have left identity unproblematized. Leaving identity unproblematized, those scholars have negated that race does matter in all spaces. As a result, when theorizing around discursive practices, Queer scholarship has centered and maintained Whiteness while keeping race on the margins.

### **Black Feminism**

Centering standpoints and subjectivities of Black women in the 1960s, Black feminist thought emerged as a response to the sexism of the Civil Rights Movement and racism of the

Feminist Movement (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000; Lorde, 1984). By exposing gender inequality, racism, and relationships of power, Black feminist thought built on the tenet that all women are oppressed, but oppression and experiences look different, depending on a woman's race, social class, and sexuality. Collins (2000) wrote that the experiences of Black women are situated in three mutually influencing oppressions: economic exploitations, political marginalization, and ideological manipulation through the use of power. Informed by notions of intersections of identities or intersectionality, Black feminism affords another way of looking at the world that is inclusive of multiple identities and their intersections. Understanding intersectionality allows Black women's standpoints to emerge by revealing the interplay of their various identities, and it empowers Queer males by giving new interpretations of familiar realities of their experiences at an HBCU (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991).

### **The Use of Queer Color Theory/Critique**

Reimagining the practice of knowledge production, Ferguson (2004) mentioned that using a Queer of Color critique extends Women of Color feminism by investigating how the intersection of racial, gender and sexual practices interrogates normative discursive practices of heteronormativity, hegemony, and historical materialism that are influenced by capitalism. Some scholars have suggested using different terminology to be more inclusive, some have suggested redefining how scholars use the term *identity*, some have recommended that scholars reassess the genealogy of the Queer Movement, and others have suggested dis-identifying in order to create counter-narratives.

Further, through a Queer of Color analysis, Hames-Garcia (2011) interrogated the impact of queer genealogies to the academic community and society. He contended that there have been some hurdles for scholars by people of color entering the academic community due to restricted

institutional access to publishing and higher education. Hames-Garcia argued when scholarship was produced, queer scholars constructed narratives or literature that omitted the experiences of people of color from their analysis. When literature was included, he added, it was included as an “add-on or a footnote.” Moreover, when White feminists were questioned about “adding color” to the master narrative, they continued to omit the powerful effect that race has on the construction and representation of gender and sexuality. Hames-Garcia (2011) pointed out that scholars should critique canonical literature on gay people using a more critical lens and recognize that there is canonical literature from scholars of color such as James Baldwin, Gloria Anzaldúa, and others who provide a more inclusive, multidimensional perspective of and insight into the Gay Movement and the experiences of gay people of color. For this study, I chose to focus on the experiences of Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCU.

Situating Queer of Color theory in educational research, scholars have argued for “centered queer of color epistemologies—or ways of knowing rooted in queer of color political struggles, cultural traditions, and lived experiences—as lenses for knowledge production” (Brockenbrough, 2013, p. 427). As an interdisciplinary corpus of scholarship, Queer of Color theory challenges other dominant scholarly and cultural narratives on power, identity, and belonging by bringing queer of color ontologies and epistemologies from margins to center, and by making them the source and site of anti-oppressive knowledge production.

Lastly, Muñoz (1990) added to the body of knowledge of self-analysis by dis-identification. He offered that dis-identification was a lens to use “by shuffling back and forth between reception and production” (p. 25) of identity. In other words, Muñoz suggested that we should constantly critique and problematize identities that resonate within us. An example Muñoz often used was the use and interrogation of her multiple identities of Drag Queen Vaginal

Davis to offer a political critique of mainstream society. Referring to herself as a drag queen, a hermaphrodite, and a sexual repulsive, Davis's performances critiqued the many contexts in which she was undesirable for mainstream society as well as alternate culture (i.e., the gay community). Taking up Crenshaw's (1994) theory of intersectionality, Muñoz contended that identities are fluid, and we take them up differently in different contexts. He argued that with multiple intersections of identities, there is always room for a critique of identities that are being marginalized while allowing other identities to be more dominant.

### **From Theoretical Framework to Analytical Tool**

Since the coining of the term *intersectionality* by Kimberlee Crenshaw (1994), it has been more apparent to some researchers and anthropologists that a person's identity has many facets. The experiences of Quare males in the gay community are no exception to this complex concept of identity. Using intersectionality as an analytical tool to acknowledge multiple identities, Ross (2007) contended that activists and researchers, who use queer studies and theory and only acknowledge identity and the body as a fixed subject, argued that racialized identities and bodies have been erased and/or marginalized in the grand narrative of queer theory. Ross stated that the homosexual subject was mostly theorized as the White subject. By omitting race and gender, Ross suggested that Foucault needed fixed identities to theorize sexuality because of the uneven discursive practices of race, gender, and sexuality. By studying systematic notions of differences that are interlinked with perceptions of race, gender, and sexuality, intersectionality as an analytical tool gives attention to how all these notions/perceptions connect while giving attention to the interrelation of one's identity (Crenshaw, 1994; Fotopoulou, 2012; Higgins, 2015). Introducing important problems associated with research on both queer and race, an intersectional lens helps me to gain better insight into the limitations of one-dimensional,

identity-based structures of inequality and oppression and the lived experiences of Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCU. An example of using intersectionality as an analytical tool is the use of the word *Quare* to recognize the racialized gay male and decenter the word *queer* in my study.

### Summary

Historically, Quare males have been positioned as a problem in both the Black and gay communities. However, traditionally, some of those Quare males have found a “safe space” within the Black community (Johnson, 2011). Often oppressed at PWIs and choosing to attend HBCUs, Quare males have found some comfort in an environment where they are not oppressed due to their race (Johnson, 2011; McMurtie, 2013; Strayhorn et al., 2008). If race and sexuality are socially constructed, I wondered how Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCU interpreted their experiences. Also, I was interested in how those experiences were influenced by curriculum in an environment that was established to promote cultural pride and social awareness.

The next chapter presents a review of the literature on the experiences of Quare males and attempts to link societal and cultural norms to academic environments. As mentioned earlier, scholars have suggested that knowledge should be taken from social settings and applied to academic environments (Brockenbrough, 2016). More specifically, I discuss how a history of slavery and oppression for Blacks has influenced how the Black community, including families and church, attempted to fit into the dominant White system and, in the process, oppressed sexual minorities such as Quare males. Understanding that Black social systems are not monolithic, I extended the conversation to include norms such as curricula in K-12 academic environments. Acknowledging the lack of literature on the experiences of Quare males who

attend and/or attended HBCUs, I attempted to link known knowledge by adding literature on the experiences of Quare males at PWIs and HBCUs.

## Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### “Just Fine”

So I like what I see when I'm looking at me  
When I'm walking past the mirror  
Don't stress through the night, at a time in my life  
Ain't worried about if you feel it  
Got my head on straight, I got my vibe right  
I ain't gonna let you kill it  
You see I wouldn't change my life, my life's just...  
Fine, fine, fine, fine, fine, fine, ooooh  
Fine, fine, fine, fine, fine, fine, ooooh  
Just fine, fine, fine, fine, fine, fine, ooooh  
You see I wouldn't change my life, my life's just fine.

I begin this section of my dissertation with a verse and chorus of the song “Just Fine” from one of my favorite singers, Mary J. Blige. Music has been an outlet for me all my life. During my undergraduate college days, “Just Fine” was a constant tune that danced in my head. The ego boost that the song gave me helped me persevere through my 4 years of undergraduate study at my HBCU. Although messages of heteronormativity were imbedded in my everyday life, the song made me rationalize that I was normal, even though I had desires of the flesh and mind for other men. At that time in my life, I could not read books that did not promote the dominant narratives of heterosexuality due to fear of being seen with the books. Additionally, no college courses were offered or school clubs were available at my HBCU at the time. For me, I probably would not have joined any organization that would have outed me (or disclosed my sexual identity) anyway. My only desire at that time was to suppress that part of me. Now almost 20 years later, my social identity (Ashford & Mael, 1989) has evolved from a gender-conforming closeted bisexual male to a gender-conforming gay male. My lifelong process is continually evolving and has been shaped by the interplay of social systems such as community and schools.



## Introduction

Like myself, Quare youth experience harassment and assault, social exclusion, and/or isolation in schools (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009). Quare students are a diverse population whose school experiences are often different than their heterosexual peers. Their schooling experiences are often impacted by their sexual orientation and gender identity, how they express themselves or how others perceive their sexual identities. Thus, it is important to understand the multiplicity of experiences youth have in school, including how these experiences are shaped and may vary by personal characteristics, such as race, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009). While there is a plethora of research in education from a dominant White Eurocentric perspective, there has been very little literature by persons of color that focuses on the experiences of Quare males (McCready, 2009) and only offers an outsider's perspective (Delgado-Bernal, 1998). In this section, I highlight literature that addresses how social institutions, such as community and faith-based organizations, impact academic environments and continue to marginalize and oppress Quare male students. More specifically, I discuss how a history of slavery and oppression for Blacks has influenced how the Black community, including community and church, attempts to fit into the dominant White system and, in the process, has oppressed sexual minorities such as Quare males. Thus, in this literature review, I focus on these distinct areas: (a) historical conceptions of Quare, (b) experiences of Quare youth in a K-12 setting, and (c) experiences of Quare males at both PWIs and HBCUs. These three areas provide a framework for the importance of conducting research on how curricula may impact the experiences of Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCU.

## **Community Full of Culture and Homophobia**

Social norms have influenced the Quare male experience. Living in a country like the United States that is as divided politically as it is racially, economically, culturally, and religiously, it is hard to make simple changes in policies on race, gender, and sexuality in schools due to cultural and personal biases (McCready, 2009). All of the most important quality-of-life indicators, such as socioeconomic status, mental and physical health, among others, suggest that Quare males are confronted by a wide variety of hardships, such as discrimination, harassment, and/or alienation (McCready, 2009). These hardships are caused by perceptions of Quare persons as being sexually deviant (Chan et al., 2001). These types of alienation sometimes lead to drug abuse, promiscuous sexual activities, and/or depression (Mayo, 2013). Over time, Black communities have developed a distinct culture of non-acceptance similar to the dominant White Eurocent social system that adopted Victorian thought and conservative moral views of people living during the time of Queen Victoria's reign from 1837-1901.

Informed by a history of slavery and oppression of Blacks and their daily experiences from the 1920s to 1970s to fit into the dominant White system, Quare males have navigated between Black Power and early Gay Liberation Movements. Quare males have created spaces and a subculture for themselves, both inside and outside the Black, gay, and heterosexual communities. Some of us have found racial solidarity in our Black communities. Prior to the 1970s, Quare males have been both praised and despised. During the Harlem Renaissance, "the working-class black culture was accepting and even celebratory of Black sexuality" (Sherouse, 2013, p. 7). Having vibrant Quare communities such as in Harlem, Quare men would congregate in commercial establishments like clubs, bars, and speakeasies for balls and drag shows (Chauncey, 1994; Sherouse, 2013). Working-class Blacks and Whites and Quare middle-class

writers and artists were privileged and participated in the continuing growing Quare subculture. But middle-class and elite Blacks scrutinized the subculture due to White dominant ideologies and beliefs of Victorian notions of gender and sexuality. Middle-class Blacks believed that the growing Quare subculture was sexually deviant and caused an obstacle in the true citizenship of Blacks in the United States. Sherouse (2013) argued that middle-class and elite Blacks felt that achieving respectability and racial progress was only palatable if Black culture mirrored White America. Through the use of hostility through media such as Black newspapers, the middle-class and elite promoted Victorian thought that challenged respectability and the health of those who identified as Quare. For example, the Black newspapers were used to label Quare men and women as perverts and persons affected with diseases such as mental illness and syphilis (Chauncey, 1994). Impacted by those Victorian notions of sexuality and regulation of the body, younger-generation closeted Quares such as Langston Hughes avoided coming out in public displays that challenged normative gender and sexual roles.

Not only was the message promoted in the local newspapers, but the non-acceptance of homosexuals was also promoted in the church. Although it is not the only source of non-acceptance in the Black community, the church plays a significant role in non-acceptance and homophobia, and it has been the focal point of the culture with the vast majority of Blacks identifying themselves as religious (Ward, 2005). In the United States, Black faith-based organizations are diverse in character and multidimensional, including theological tradition, style of worship, music, urban/rural location, and socioeconomic status (Ward, 2005). Church affiliation is strong among all socioeconomic levels of the Black community and is often a significant element of the social lives and networks of Blacks. According to Ward (2005), homophobia in some Black faith-based organizations is directly related to the perceived literal

interpretation of scripture and is present in all socioeconomic levels. However, Ward furthered that faith-based organizations use the Bible to condemn homosexuality as an acceptable practice in the context of the Black historical experience. Enslaved Blacks sought refuge and found freedom in the literal interpretation of Scripture. Today, all seven of the historically Black protestant denominations, such as Southern Baptist and the Baptist faith-based organizations, still view homosexuality as an abomination and do not see it as an acceptable lifestyle, mainly because of the label of being sexual deviants (Griffin, 2006).

Often labeled as sexual deviants, Quare males are at risk of being alienated due to cultural and religious beliefs (Chan et al., 2001). Quare students have related their experiences with community, family, and schools to their process of negotiating between racial/ethnic, gender, and sexual identities. Some Quare males may suppress their sexual identity to avoid alienation, while other Quare males may model their identity by exploring sexual, emotional, and social orientations (Meyer & Carlson, 2014). Those Quare males who choose to suppress their sexual identity de-emphasize their sexual orientation in the eyes of peers, family, and society as a whole (McCready, 2009). Thorne (1993) suggested that sexuality and gender negotiation are part of the students' experience. Some of those Quare males eventually deconstruct singular, imposed identities, and seek to affirm the intersection of identities with new environments (Kumashiro, 2001b). Singularly identifying may constrain the emotional growth of some sexual minorities, while Quare males who model their identity by exploring sexual, emotional, and social orientations are harassed or bullied in their community and schools.

### **K-12 Schools**

According to GLSEN, the school experiences of LGBT students often vary, depending on how the students choose to negotiate their identity and the characteristics of their school

communities (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Kumashiro, 2001b). Across all groups of Quare students, those in schools where they were in the racial/ethnic minority were more likely to feel unsafe because of their race or ethnicity and sexuality than other students (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009). Considering the data mentioned in Chapter 1 from 2001 and 2007, it is evident that school climate remains hostile for many LGBT students. For instance, in a 2007 GLSEN survey, more than 80% of the 2000 LGBT persons surveyed stated Quare LGBT students heard the words fag, gay, or queer used in negative ways often or frequently in school. The limited research that does exist has demonstrated that in addition to challenges related to their sexual orientation or gender identity, Quare male youth often face challenges that are related to their race and ethnicity, such as biased language and/or exclusion from curricula that the vast majority of their White queer peers do not experience in an academic environment (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009). They are not only dealing with issues of violent or physical harassment, but some of their spirits are broken because they are not adequately represented or acknowledged in an academic environment.

The findings suggested that sexual orientation and its meaning in any school environment from K-12 to postsecondary may be different for White queer youth. Unlike their Hispanic, Black, and Asian peers, White queer youth did not grow up experiencing cultural prejudice and discrimination either in or out of the academic environment. Further, they did not have families that prepared them for life as minorities (Kumashiro, 2001b). While queer youth may be a double minority, they do not have as many issues with academic performance as White sexual minorities do because of their racial/ethnic history of being oppressed or marginalized. This manifests itself in an in-school context. Many students of color experience high and severe harassment based on both their sexual orientation and race/ethnicity, and had significantly lower grade point averages (2.3 GPA versus 2.8 GPA of the majority race). However, no data are

available on Quare students who attend schools where they make up the majority of the student population (Russell & Truong, 2001).

### **Your Queered Curriculum, Not Mine**

Some scholars would argue that this hostile K-12 academic environment was created by social norms of homophobia that have been found in the Black community, namely, gender norms and bullying. Some schools have attempted to incorporate a LGBT curriculum to create less hostility, resist oppressive practices, and shift to a more inclusive LGBT environment. An LGBT curriculum from a multicultural approach was introduced to the New York City school system in 1985 (Humm, n.d., as cited in Mayo, 2013). This “Children of the Rainbow” curriculum was the first concerted effort to address issues that were related to sexual minorities by including gay and lesbian literature in the social studies curriculum. Later in 2011, California introduced reform that also promoted the use of LGBT course material in the classroom (Mayo, 2013). Unfortunately, there has been much opposition to these reforms, and their effectiveness has been minimal due to poor implementation as well as the biases and resistance of a heteronormative society (Humm, n.d., as cited in Mayo, 2013).

Additionally, other efforts have been made since the passing of the FAIR Education Act in January 2012. This law updated the California Education Code to require the inclusion of age-appropriate, factual, and relevant information about the roles and contributions of LGBT people and people with disabilities into history and social studies instruction. The FAIR Education Act was the first law to require LGBT-inclusive curriculum. The effort to make visible the lives of LGBT people in schools have been a long journey (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Snapp et al., 2015). But in a study conducted on 26 students’ perspectives of LGBT-inclusive curriculum on the FAIR Education Act, Snapp et al. (2015) found that LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum was being

used in social science classes where students discussed current events such as California's Proposition 8 bill, created to vote for LGBT marriage rights. While the curriculum offered some opportunities for reflection, the gay students were not clear about whether the curriculum went beyond basic inclusion to challenge norms (Schmidt, 2010; Shlasko, 2005; Snapp et al., 2015) and critique systems of oppression (Alsup & Miller, 2014; Miller & Kirkland, 2010).

### **What about Safe Spaces?**

In addition to incorporation of LGBT-inclusive curriculum, the ideal of safe spaces has been accepted in those school systems through informal curriculum such as Gay and Straight Alliances (McCready, 2009). Safe spaces became the dominant metaphor in education (Boostrom, 1998) after bullying, harassment, and antigay attitudes and actions of students and educators persisted (Kosciw, 2004). Safe spaces are defined as places where anyone can fully self-express, without fear of being made to feel uncomfortable, unwelcome, or unsafe on account of biological sex, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and cultural background. Safe spaces are often associated with positive student outcomes, such as a space that facilitates learning, exploration, and growth (Lesko & Talburt, 2012). Safe spaces provide a physical and emotional context for LGBT students to form personal, relational, and gendered stories focused on sexuality (Gilbert et al., 2018). Through representing and reflecting shared and implicit norms, ideas, and structures, safe spaces offer Queer students the opportunity and space for intimate possibilities, where they can share lived experiences and establish friendships (Gilbert et al., 2018). By offering shades of meaning and feeling through a safe space, stories in schools could foster a less hostile academic environment, prevent bullying, and/or promote tolerance (Gilbert et al., 2018; Lesko, 2010). Gilbert et al. (2018) used booths in the Beyond Bullying Project, a storytelling project where students, teachers, and community members

entered a private booth at three U.S. high schools and shared stories of LGBTQ sexuality and gender. Through their stories in the booths, students and teachers were provided the space in which they claimed identities or no identity at all that they may not have had in other spaces.

Unfortunately, in concept, these safe spaces work for some, but they are not appropriate for all LGBT students. In the Project 10 study of a Gay and Straight Alliance at a high school in the Bay Area of California, McCready (2009) examined how differently students negotiate the segregated structure of the school with social and cultural beliefs about gender and sexuality. He explored the experiences of two Black male students, David and Jamal. Both students had similar socioeconomic backgrounds, but their secondary education experiences were totally different. Jamal performed more hyper-masculine characteristics and assimilated more to the traditions of Black culture. David was openly Quare and displayed more feminine characteristics and embedded himself in the local LGBT community through LGBT friends and community center affiliation. Jamal was more accepted in the dominant heteronormative academic environment than David. Neither David nor Jamal participated in Project 10's safe space. Both Jamal and David considered those spaces for the privileged White student who identified as Quare, with which they had nothing in common. Other concerns of the Project 10 participants were the fear of social and community non-acceptance, bullying, and harassment for openly identifying as queer. This is just one example of the experiences of Quare males and safe spaces in a K-12 environment that is not a one-size-fits-all for students who are different. The inability to fit into these types of safe spaces has also caused Quare males to feel isolated in spaces that were not intended to be oppressive. Kumashiro (2000) mentioned that oppressed students have responded in a variety of ways to these oppressive treatments and dispositions. Some have "overcompensated" by hyper performing in academic, extracurricular, and social activities; some



have accommodated enough to succeed academically, but have maintained a sense of connection to their ethnic culture and community; some have resisted the dominant values and norms of school and society; some have experienced an array of “hidden injuries,” such as the psychological harm of internalizing or even resisting stereotypes; and some have endured depression and turned violence onto themselves by abusing drugs, starving, and scarring their bodies, even attempting or committing suicide.

### **Quares Attending a Predominantly White University (PWI)**

The Quare males who have managed to navigate and graduate successfully from the K-12 academic environment may apply to college and face similar types of oppression, depending on their more dominant identity. When choosing their sexual identity over their racial identity, some Quare males chose to attend a PWI due to fear of perceived homophobia at an HBCU and to explore their Quare identity (Strayhorn et al., 2008). In a study conducted on the experiences of Quare males at a PWI, Strayhorn et al. (2008) found that the participants experienced homophobia, racism, and social challenges. Some of the Quare males in that study reported that they experienced homophobia, harassment, and gay oppression with same-race peers who attended the PWI. These interactions prevented some of the Quare males from socializing with other same-race peers whom they assumed were heterosexual. Fearing stereotypes (Harris, 2003; Patton, 2011), some Quare males take exhausting measures to hide their sexual orientation identity from same-race peers to avoid being stereotyped by other same-race peers (Patton, 2011). Some of those Quare males have an underground subculture to meet other LGBT persons (Dilley, 2002; Marine, 2011). Literature has suggested that students are using various online social domains as safe spaces to seek out friendships, role models, sexual exploration, and alternative norms on social networking sites on the web (Crowley, n.d., as cited in Meyer &

Carlson, 2014). Crowley mentioned that MySpace and Facebook offer opportunities for LGBT students through discussion boards and/or groups with some anonymity. These students are getting insights into identity formation, status negotiations, and peer-to-peer sociality through social networks (Boyd, 2007), while heteronormative or heterosexual students are getting those experiences in the academic environment. Those Internet sites or cell phone applications such as Grindr,<sup>1</sup> Scruff,<sup>2</sup>, and Adam4Adam<sup>3</sup>all “provide additional insights into forms of race, gender and sexuality that might otherwise have not been encountered locally. Additionally, the experience of seeing the diversities of queer possibility also teaches them the limitations of mass culture and school-based representations of gayness” (Mayo, 2013, p. 108). Unfortunately, some forms of technology such as Grindr, Scruff, and Adam4Adam could subject those Quare males to negative role models and sexual predators. However, these students prefer some of these popular or commonly used spaces because some of the LGBT youth sites such as Facebook and Instagram, although informative, are limiting and close to normalized or heteronormative school-like messages (Mayo, 2013).

For some of the Quare males who attend or attended a PWI, they felt that race was the most salient identity (Strayhorn et al., 2008). Quare males at PWIs have reported that navigating institutional racism creates the biggest challenges for them (Fischer, 2007; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Strayhorn et al., 2008). Quare males experienced derogatory remarks from joking, name calling, or posters on other students’ walls (Strayhorn et al., 2008). Quare males also reported being under constant surveillance, feeling unwelcomed, feeling like they did not belong, and

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<sup>1</sup> Grindr is the largest and most popular all-male location-based social network with more than 5 million males in 192 countries around the world and approximately 10,000 more new users every day.

<sup>2</sup> Scruff, unlike Grindr, is a more extensive profile-building app with features that allow gay guys to communicate for just about any purpose from one-night stands to networking.

<sup>3</sup> Adam4Adam is a community for gay men looking for friendship, romance, dating, or sex.

being stereotyped as incapable of being educated (Smith et al., 2007; Strayhorn et al., 2008). Quare males have a lack of opportunities to engage with faculty members and limited access to positive Black role models (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Quare males mentioned that campus activities at PWIs were often geared towards White students, and they had limited supportive peer groups (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Finally, when included, Quare males were asked to represent or speak on behalf of the Black population (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002).

Additionally, in White LGBT campus organizations, some Quare males experience microaggressions, racism, and homophobia that impact their experience and sense of belonging at their PWI (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). This is often accomplished through social exclusion. Social exclusion of Quare males is one of the most common forms of racism practiced by the White LGBT community (Boykin, 1996). This causes a racial wedge within the LGBT community (McCready, 2004) because People of Color view or conceptualize equality differently. Similarly to David and Jamal (McCready, 2009), some Quare males are forced to navigate around attitudes on race and systems of racism in another “safe space” on a PWI campus that does not accept both their racial-ethnic and sexual orientation identities (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008).

### **Quares Males Attending an HBCU**

Research has shown that Black students academically perform best in settings that are built on their culture and promote their ethnic identities (Hanley & Noblit, 2009). Factors that contribute to success include influences of self-perception, affirmative support systems, social integration, and academic success. In a qualitative study of 76 Black men at 12 HBCUs, Harper and Gasman (2008) discovered that participants perceived the institutional climates of HBCUs to

be an unwelcoming environment. Specifically, the participants reported that conservative (religious and Victorian) beliefs were evident in expressions of sexuality and sexual orientation and ways in which faculty responded to students in the classroom. Harper and Gasman's findings challenged HBCUs to reassess their conservative practices and provide a more welcoming environment to diverse cultural groups, regardless of gender and sexuality within the Black population.

Often determined by the HBCU's role and purpose, many aspects of the lived experiences of Quare males differ from that of other queer males and their racial counterparts who attended a PWI. Founded on religious principles, HBCUs create environments where Quare males experience anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation that have been amplified by school norms and culture (Gonsiorek & Rudolph, 1991; Harper, 2008; Savin-Williams, 1994). The culture and norms of a school may cause isolation or harassment by other students while in college (Harris & Struve, 2009) and those Quare students struggle to fit into the college environment because of their multiple minority identities (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009). Quare males often experience homophobic remarks, bullying, violence, and discrimination while they are students in higher education (Dugan & Yurman, 2011). For example at Hampton University, Quare males have reported routine harassment by other students who has made homophobic comments in class that was not addressed by other students or instructors.

On another HBCU campus, Howard University, the harassment has progressed beyond verbal harassment to incidents of sexual harassment and physical violence against Quare male students or male students who are perceived to be gay. On one occasion in 2002, a gay male student was verbally harassed and physically attacked by several members of an extracurricular

student organization. After the gay male student accidentally bumped into a female member of the organization while trying to leave the fine arts building, other organization members began to shout homophobic slurs such as “faggot” before attacking him. These incidents of homophobia can make life at an HBCU challenging and uncomfortable for gay students. Reflecting beliefs and ideologies that are normalized in society, homophobia encompasses a belief system that supports negative attitudes, myths, or stereotypes about LGBT persons (Crisp, 2006).

Mainstream society has viewed the LGBT community not only as being different but also as having less value than heterosexuals (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997). Data indicated that gay men are frequently the victims of verbal and physical assaults, and the large majority of incidents are not reported to any college officials (D’Augelli, 1992; Hughes, 1991). According to D’Augelli (1992), gay men typically fear for their personal safety, and many report hiding their sexual orientation at times because of fear of rejection or abuse. In a study of gay faculty, staff, and students at 14 U.S. colleges or universities, Rankin (2006) found that more than half of the participants believed that gay people were likely to be victims of harassment on campus. Quare students, regardless of whether they are enrolled in PWIs or HBCUs, labor under the negative effects of stigmas and discrimination from within their own racial group as well as the majority gay community (Harris, 2003; Washington & Wall, 2010).

Although these issues of harassment and physical assault have happened on HBCU campuses and continue to take place, HBCUs have not been forward-thinking and progressive on policies, initiatives, and curricula that would support Quare males who attend and/or attended those types of colleges. From a curriculum perspective, with the exception of Morehouse College and Spelman College that offer an occasional LGBT course on Black Queer Studies, Mobley and Johnson (2015) argued that no HBCUs offer LGBT, Queer, or Gay Studies as an academic

major, minor, or certificate program. By not offering or omitting course offerings in LGBT, Queer, or Gay Studies, HBCUs limit academic opportunities for students to examine issues surrounding gender and sexuality that may apply to them and/or their friends. Although LGBT, Queer, or Gay Studies curricula have not been adopted at HBCUs, topics of gender and sexuality are being addressed in some courses through the inclusion of authors such as Langston Hughes, Audre Lorde, and James Baldwin (Mobley & Johnson, 2015).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, most HBCUs do not provide support through curricula for Quare males such as social clubs and organizations (Harper & Gasman, in Patton, 2014; Strayhorn et al., 2008). After the verbal harassment and physical assault on Hampton and Howard University campuses, only Howard University has established an on-campus LGBT support organization for its more than 10,000 students, of which only 40 students have been active members of the organization because other gay students feel that participation in this organization would hinder their chances of being involved in other organizations or public events at the institution. In an ethnographic study examining the experiences of gay college students who were involved in an LGBT on-campus support organization, Rhoads (1995, 1997) discovered that socialization play/ed an important role in the experiences of gay students and coming to terms with a gay identity is not only an individual process, but also a way to generate more awareness and political acceptance on a college campus. Savin-Williams (1996) suggested that non-participation in these organizations is due to Black culture and social norms. Akerlund and Cheung (2000) add/ed that Quare males face the unique challenge of integrating their two identities, one involving sexual orientation and the other involving race affiliation, into a society that continues to deny full acceptance of either one. Without oppressing their sexual identity at an HBCU, Quare males will not be able to participate in informal curricula such as band, sports,

or fraternal organizations. Savin-Williams (1996) mentioned that any tolerance of homosexuality in the Black community comes with an implicit restriction that individuals must not display or disclose any parts of their sexual orientation. These social and cultural norms often cause Quare males some difficulties for living dual identities (Rhoads, 1997). During the New Jim Crow era, Black Fraternal Organizations, as a way to provide social and academic support, were created to focus on community service, scholarship, and brotherhood to advance the race (Jenkins, 2010). However, the Black Fraternal Organizations developed a culture of Black masculinity through brotherhood. With Black masculinity embodied within Black Fraternity culture, Quare and gender non-conforming males are often rejected from these organizations during the interview or later initiation (pledging) process (Jenkins, 2010).

Fearing being “outed” and/or rejected from social organizations such as a Black Fraternity, Quare males have also created an underground culture of establishing friendships with other people who also identified as gay (Dilley, 2002; Marine, 2011). Scott (2011) defined friendship as the “ineffable relationship of family and sexuality” (Gilbert et al., 2017). Quare males approach potential friendships based on how they believe people will respond to their sexual orientation identity (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008). Patton (2011) showed that Quare male college students resisted being involved with LGBT student organizations because of the fear of being “outed.” Instead, Quare males turned to each other for support in their small support circles. Unfortunately, those Quare male college students have found it difficult to locate safe spaces on campus that have accepted both their racial-ethnic and sexual orientation identities (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008).

## Summary

This chapter presented a review of literature on the experiences of Quare males and attempt/ed to show the influence of societal and cultural norms on academic environments. As mentioned earlier, scholars have suggested that knowledge should be taken from social settings and applied to academic environments (Brockenbrough, 2016). More specifically, I discussed how a history of slavery and oppression for Blacks has influenced how the Black community, including community and church attempts to fit into the dominant White system, have in the process oppressed sexual minorities such as Quare males. Understanding that Black social systems are not monolithic, I extended the conversation to include norms such as curricula in K-12 academic environments. Acknowledging the lack of literature on the experiences of Quare males who attend and/or attended HBCUs, I attempted to connect links to available knowledge by adding literature about the experiences of Quare males at PWIs and HBCUs.



## Chapter 3: METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter focuses on the methodology that I employed to examine how curriculum has impacted the experiences of Quare males who attend or have attended an HBCU. To do so, I discuss the purpose of using a qualitative phenomenological research inquiry approach. I entered this area of research with a conviction about how society, including schools, produces knowledge through curriculum on heteronormative identity that influences lived experiences and marginalizes other identities, such as race, gender, and sexuality. When race, gender, and sexuality are used as forms of knowledge production, research has shown that the intersections of identities are often overlooked, and race has been used as an add-on concept or footnote (Hames-Garcia, 2011). Next, I explain my rationale for recruiting the participants using a convenient and snowball sampling model. Because the goal of this study was to gain an understanding of the experiences of Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCU, I developed the following research questions:

- What are the academic and social experiences of Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCU?
- How do Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCU interpret or understand their experiences with curriculum?

### **Previous Literature Review and Pilot Study**

Information from my previous literature review and pilot study supported the idea that both communities and schools have reproduced in reforms, policies, culture, and curricula the same inequities or oppressive behaviors that exist in society (Scheurich, 1997). As a master's student in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching, I conducted a literature review for my master's' project that focused on *Safe Spaces and the Factors That Impact the Academic*

*Environment of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBTQIA) Black and Latino Males.*

In that literature review, I argued that both communities and schools have reproduced within reforms, policies, and culture the same inequities or oppressive behaviors that exist in society (Scheurich, 1997). For instance, Kumashiro (2001b) argued that in some Black and Latino communities, identifying as Quare is not normalized. Blacks and Latinos have a very low disclosure rate of their sexual orientation (Russell & Truong, 2001). Most have grave concerns because of the lack of acceptance of this sexual minority. Historically, Black and Latino cultures have felt that homosexuality damages family values, it is secular and deviant behavior (Russell & Truong, 2001), and disclosure sometimes leads to a disassociation of those sexual minorities from the family. Thus, it is not an option to take a class on sexuality or join a school group or association that was formed to provide safe spaces and education for those sexual minorities was not typical for Quare males in the LGBT community. At the beginning opening of that project, I presented data that represented the hardships and struggles of Black and Latino males who identified as Quare. Additionally, I mentioned social areas such as faith-based organizations and schools where those students may experience some of those hardships. I then highlighted some of the oppressive behaviors of schools as an institution and introduced some anti-oppressive approaches to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.

Much of the literature review focused on the unique experiences of Quare (Black and Latino gay) males in their communities, homes, and schools. The literature review established that race plays an important part in the everyday lives of Quare males. The literature also made it apparent that some Quare (Black and Latino gay) male students share common experiences of racial oppression as well as other forms of oppression, such as sexism, heterosexism, and

classism, that significantly differentiate their identities and experiences (McCready, 1999).

Unfortunately, those experiences are often ignored or marginalized in academic environments.

Narrowing my focus as a doctoral student, I conducted a pilot study exploring the experiences of Quare males. During this pilot study, I conducted 60-minute interviews with three gay males who worked and reside in the northeast part of the United States. The three Black males included in that pilot study ranged in age from 32 to 47. Two had earned postsecondary degrees and have successfully established careers in nursing and finance. The other participant was a high school dropout and has a successful fitness/health business.

The findings from this pilot study reflected the stories of three diverse Quare males who managed to survive school and society. The findings cannot be totally generalized to all Quare males but offer transferable and confirmable insights into their lived experiences. The participants spoke with me about race and ethnic identity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and social class, and described to me the relationship each those identifiers have with the others. We explored the social and cultural implications of identifying in particular ways in places like home and school and how they negotiated their identities in these places. However, in this pilot study, all three participants recognized negative experiences with race in school, while only one acknowledged that he experienced issues associated with his sexuality. Those who did not experience issues associated with homophobia said that was because they had suppressed their sexual identity while in school. Kumashiro (2001a) mentioned that persons of color often choose one identity over others; in their case, those students chose their racial identities. Understanding that sexuality and gender negotiation is a part of the Quare males' experiences, two of the research participants eventually deconstructed the singular, imposed identities and sought to affirm the intersection of identities with new environments (Kumashiro, 2001a).

The literature review and the pilot study brought me to this current study, in which I explored the experience of Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCU. In the first two chapters of this project, I presented concepts to review that represent the hardships and struggles of Quare males. Additionally, I mentioned areas where those Quare males may experience some of those hardships. I then highlighted some of the oppressive behaviors of families, communities, and schools as institutions, and introduced some anti-oppressive approaches to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.

In Chapter 1, I mentioned that it was appropriate to use a critical inquiry lens such as Queer of Color theory that merges tenets of Queer theory to identify literature that addresses the constant shifting of gender and sexual identity and critical race theory to help focus on racialized experiences and challenge traditional paradigms. By using those lenses coupled with Black feminism, I felt the lived experiences of Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCU could be examined using the intersectionality of race, gender, and sexuality. The intersectionality of the identities of sexual minorities coupled with a history of oppression led me to the understanding that addressing the issue was multifaceted, and there was no panacea of experiences for every Quare male, regardless of the academic level researched. Although there is a need for this type of study at every academic level due to lack of literature in the academy, I am particularly interested in understanding how family and community inform curriculum and how curriculum influences the experiences of Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCU.

In Chapter 2, I approached this qualitative exploratory study with a commitment to situate the experiences of Quare males through a literature review of research presented within the academy (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I discussed how a history of slavery, discrimination,

and oppression has influenced Black family, church, and school ideology of race, gender, and sexuality. Using academic literature from history, sociology, and education, I argued that social institutions such as communities, family, faith-based organizations, and academic environments impact Quare males' experiences.

### **Research Design**

Qualitative research methods were used to examine the experiences of Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCU. Not assuming I would know the lived experiences of the participants, I used a phenomenological approach to answer in-depth questions that may not be adequately answered by a positivist approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). A phenomenological approach allowed me to view Quare males as whole beings, complete with past racialized and Quared experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and values who live in a world with academic, cultural, and social influences during this research project (Johnson, 2001; Willis, 2001). With the phenomenological method, one can understand the core of a person by describing experiences with family, community, and schools. Specifically for this study, it was my intention to understand how those experiences are influenced by curriculum to which Quare males are exposed while attending an HBCU. This methodology allowed unexpected meanings to emerge about being a student at an HBCU, thus creating a link between a phenomenon and a participant (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Gertz, 1973). Using an intersectionality methodology through the theoretical lens of Queer of Color theory, my goal was to gain an understanding of the influence of curriculum on the identity of those participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Gertz, 1973).

### **Recruitment of the Sample and the Sample**

Convenient and snowball sampling were the primary methods used to recruit participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). As a member of the Quare community, I used social, academic, and

personal relationships with friends, colleagues, fraternity brothers, and peers to recruit. Because the study was targeted to focus on a population that is often closeted, convenience sampling was initially used and provided a recruitment method for those persons who may be concerned with anonymity. In addition to convenience sampling, I employed snowball sampling. Convenience sampling, coupled with snowball sampling, provided the opportunity to use personal connections to other Quare males who would not normally be reached through convenient sampling alone. Snowballing sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) was used by asking potential participants to inform friends of the study through word of mouth and other platforms, such as social media, flyers, and emails. Within those media, I included the purpose of the study, target population, methods of data collection, and the researcher's name and contact information.

Focusing on details of access and contact before the interviewing process begins, I as a qualitative researcher felt that the sample size should be small for this study. According to Seidman (2006), the goal of an in-depth interview study is to understand the experiences of the research participants and not try to predict or control the experience. He added that a research study should provide sufficient numbers to reflect the range of participants and sites that make up the population, so that others outside the sample might have a chance to connect to the experiences of attending HBCUs, most of which are located in the South. For this reason, I was able to achieve my goal and had a sample size of five Quare males who ranged in the age from 18 to 40 years old. This sample size and age range allowed me time to focus on the research participants' questions and needs prior to starting the process as well as attain diversity among the participants. Additionally, I chose not to have a requirement of being out or closeted for this study. Although some of the mainstream population has become more accepting of homosexuality and public expression of same-sex affection, many Quare males are choosing to

stay closeted in some environments. For example, while serving in the military, I chose to stay closeted after the repeal of the “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy that prohibited military personnel from being openly Quare. Although I commend President Barack Obama’s administration for allowing openly gay men and women to serve in the armed forces, I felt the implications of coming out were too great to disclose my sexuality in my work environment for fear of harassment and non-promotion. Similar to my approach to this policy, other gay persons often choose to not disclose their sexuality. Historically, non-disclosure has been the norm because gay culture has been essentially hidden in the larger community due to fear of being ostracized from those whom they trust the most, such as family, church, coworkers, and friends, because homosexual behavior is still being stigmatized as unacceptable (Sanlo, 2004).

Although it is not the only source of homophobia in the Black community, the church plays a significant role in the production of homophobia. Blacks are believed to have less social tolerance of homosexuality than racial communities, and this different condemnation is thought to provide the basis for a disproportionate number of closet Quares in the Black community. As a Quare male in the Black gay community, I know that being out or closeted means different things, depending on the social context and dominant identities. For me, the quality of the experiences of Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCU matters more than the quantity of participants involved. However, my goal was to yield up to six participants in my recruitment efforts. If there had been more interest than anticipated, I would have considered extending the number of participants for the study. Initially, I recruited seven Quare males, but two participants chose to discontinue their involvement due to other personal and professional obligations. The five Quare males in this study met the following criteria to participate:

1. at least 18 years to 40 years of age;
2. self-identified as a Black man, a man of African descent, or mixed race with African descent;
3. self-identified as homosexual, gay, queer or questioning; and
4. attendee of an HBCU, an alumnus of an HBCU, or someone who spent at least 2 years at an HBCU in the South.

It was my goal to share the lived experiences of Quare males and increase awareness of the influence of curriculum on their lived experiences, specifically in the first two core curriculum years at an HBCU. In the limited research that has been conducted, some scholars have argued that the Quare males' first years of college experiences are complicated (Higgins, 2015; Strayhorn et al., 2008). Often, as first-generation college students, researchers have argued that they are often faced with a curriculum that does not fit their academic, social, and cultural needs. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, most research has focused on graduation rates, harassment and bullying, safe spaces, or sexually transmitted diseases, but the experiences of Quare males at HBCUs have been undertheorized (Davis, 2008).

Due to issues of disclosure, concerns of anonymity, and blatant homophobia, I decided that this study will not specifically disclose research sites or HBCUs associated with the identity or interviews of the potential participants. As mentioned in Chapter 1, many Quare males find solidarity within the Black community. Even if suspected, some Quare males often choose not to disclose their sexual identity because it does not impact citizenship within the Black community or on HBCU campuses (Johnson, 2011; Patton & Simmons, 2008). The HBCU experience was used as a criterion for recruiting the research study participants.



Understanding that most HBCUs were established and reside in the South, all participants were recruited from the South and no other contextual identifiers were mentioned. To ensure confidentiality, I provided a fictitious geographic location when referring to the participants. By focusing on the experiences of Quare men at these colleges and universities in the South, this study should make visible the experiences of these college students and add new knowledge and genealogies to the academic community without compromising the participants' identity.

**The Quare Males in This Study**

There were five participants in this study: Paul, Nigel, Xavier, Lauren, and DaQuan. Although they had similar reasons that led them to attend an HBCU, each of the five Quare males followed very different paths that led them to who and where they are today. Representing three of the 106 HBCUs, three of the Quare males attended an all-male HBCU, two attended a small Christian HBCU, and one attended an urban HBCU in a major metropolitan area. One of these three Quare males transferred from the Christian HBCU to the all-male HBCU.

To clearly represent the participants' perspective, I include a table and some demographic information about each of the Quare males.

Table 1. *Demographic of Research Participants*

Pseudonym	Age	Type of HBCU- Major	Geography of Birthplace	Profession	Highest Degree
Nigel	Late 30s	Christian and All-Male—Sociology	Southern U.S.	Education	MS
Lauren	Early 30s	Christian—Psychology	Southern U.S.	Education	MS
Xavier	Early 30s	All-Male—Psychology	Northeast U.S.	Business Owner/Caterer	BS
Paul	Late 30s	All-Male—Business	Southern U.S.	Psychologist	PhD
Daquan	Early 30s	Metropolitan—Education	Northeast U.S.	Education	MA

### ***Nigel***

I met Nigel while teaching science in the Bronx. At the time, Nigel was a permanent substitute teacher at my charter school. He later secured an education policy job working for a nonprofit. Nigel is a cisgender Quare male identifying as male, who grew up in southern Louisiana with both parents and two sibling brothers. He attended a Christian HBCU, then transferred to an all-male HBCU after a hurricane disrupted his education. His undergraduate degree earned at the all-male HBCU was in Sociology.

### ***Lauren***

Lauren and I also met while teaching at a charter school in the Bronx. Lauren is an educator who has been teaching since he graduated college. He and six siblings were raised by his mother in southeast Texas. He identifies as gender-fluid and Quare male. He attended the same Christian HBCU that Nigel attended. Lauren majored in Psychology.

### ***Xavier***

Xavier was referred to me by a fellow doctoral student as a research participant. He was primarily raised as an only child by a single mother and his grandmother until he went off to college. Xavier attended the same all-male HBCU as Nigel and majored in Psychology. Unfortunately, after 2 years, he left the all-male HBCU and later earned his degree from a PWI. He is currently a business owner, designing clothing and accessories. He also is a caterer.

### ***Paul***

Knowing that he identified as a cisgender Quare male, I asked Paul to participate in this study at a fraternity meeting. Paul is cisgender and a practicing psychologist in New York City. I felt he was an ideal candidate since he attended the same all-male HBCU that both Xavier and Nigel attended. He majored in Business Management at this all-male HBCU.

## *DaQuan*

Last but not least, DaQuan was recommended for the study by a friend. DaQuan is a cisgender, bisexual male. He was raised by his mom and stepdad with several brothers and sisters in the Northeast. DaQuan attended an HBCU in a metropolitan area and grew up non-protestant. He majored in Education.

The goal of each interview was to facilitate conditions for each participant to reflect on his life as a Quare male. Alongside their experiences at an HBCU, each of the five Quare males reflected on his journey, from childhood with their family, community, and church, to their experiences at an HBCU, to their present lives in New York City. These participants attended one or two out of three HBCUs, all in the South. Through these individual descriptions, one may better understand the HBCU experiences of the men in this study. Each participant and I created a space in which the participant was free to speak candidly and unreservedly about his experiences. Each participant offered both anecdotal and descriptive information on his own experiences as a Quare male at an HBCU. In order to understand the depth of each male's experiences at an HBCU, it was important to understand their experiences prior to arriving at the colleges.

## **COVID-19 Pandemic Impact on Data Collection**

As a qualitative researcher, it is important that I mention the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the data collection and data of this study. All of the Quare males and I were impacted by COVID-19. Although some were infected and others affected by COVID-19, all the Quare males articulated how their isolation had made them more reflective of life choices due to lack of social interactions with peers. Acknowledging that it was tough to be single during the pandemic, the Quare males all questioned if they would have embraced their sexual identity

earlier in their life had they been alone during such a hard time in our society. Prolonging this study, a year, the Quare males had more time to reflect on their life choices to include those at an HBCU. In doing so, the Quare males were able to amplify previous data with rich details. Additionally, I as the researcher was able to spend more time with the data that I collected in the first two interviews and take my time coding to produce more thick rich description of the phenomena of the five Quare males' lived experiences.

### **Informed Consent**

Research participants were required to sign the informed consent form before participating in the study. All participants received the informed consent form by email in advance of the scheduled interview. The consent form contained an explanation of the role of the study as part of a doctoral program and the study's purpose, which was to understand the experiences of Quare males who attend/attended an HBCU. The consent form included a statement for participants to sign indicating that the research participants are at least 18 years old and not part of a protected class. The consent form included that involvement in the study was voluntary and there were no direct benefits to the participants. Participants learned from the consent form that all three of the one-on-one interviews would last about 1 hour, and they would be asked to review a transcript of each interview to affirm its accuracy.

The consent form included a discussion of how participant anonymity and individual data would be protected. Completed informed consent forms were collected prior to the first interview. The five Quare males were notified that the forms would be stored in a locked cabinet in my home for 3 years, after which time I will destroy the forms and all other research data. The consent form also included assurances that any risk associated with the study was minimal and participants could choose to withdraw from the research at any time.

## **Data Collection and the Role of the Researcher**

Serving as an instrument (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), a researcher's primary focus is to collect data. I used several qualitative data collection methods: written document collection, interviews, and photo elicitation. I served as the sole interviewer and answered all questions to help maintain overall consistency and ensure that leading questions would be avoided. My researcher's field notes and audiotapes were transcribed verbatim after each interview. Interviews took place over a 2-year timeframe. Field notes, interviews, photos, artifacts, and memos therefore comprised the sum of empirical data for this project.

### ***Interviews***

Using information from my pilot study and literature review, I conducted a total of semi-structured interviews. Using Seidman's (2006) interviewing method, I carried out two 1-hour open-ended interviews to gain the past and present experiences of each participant (followed by a third interview using photo elicitation that is discussed in the next section). This 2-year study was conducted from December 2018 to December 2020. Using a three-sequence interview process which included a photo elicitation interview, consent was obtained to conduct the first round of interviews beginning December 2018. Two 60-minute semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2006) were conducted with five Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCU, and they were transcribed immediately following the interview by an outside source. These interviews were semi-structured in the following areas: a biographical history, curriculum, and photo/artifact elicitation. I began with general questions for all participants and then moved into more specific questions based on observations of each particular student and his work. Interviews contributed descriptive data in the subjects' own words (Bogden & Biklen, 2007) and allowed the participants to decide what was most important to talk about. I mostly allowed the

participants to guide the conversations in a friendly and casual manner. By conducting the interviews in safe spaces that they often chose, the Quare males were able to open up about their lived experiences. For purposes of planning with the five Quare male participants, I allowed time for interstate and air travel, reflection, and coding for each interview. There was at least a 4-week gap between each interview. This timeframe allowed me to ask follow-up questions and to be iterative in the process. I also added additional comments to my interview field notes and did an audio-recorded researcher's reflection at the end of each interview. These reflections were included in the research data, with some specifically excerpted in the next chapter. During the final phase, each participant informally met with me to examine how both they and I constructed meaning of their Quare-male experiences at an HBCU in the South.

### ***Photo Elicitation/Artifacts***

Although oral interviews produced rich and thick data on the experiences of Quare males who attend or attended an HBCU, I chose to conduct a third interview where I asked the five Quare males to bring a minimum of two photos and/or artifacts that represented how they were experiencing college during the first couple of years at an HBCU to discuss during this last interview. Now widely used in qualitative research, photo elicitation is a technique that involves using one or more visual images in an interview and then asking participants to comment on them (Bigante, 2010). As a way to overcome difficulties that may be posed to some participants by in-depth interviews due to stress, issues of disclosure, and comfort level with the interviewer, photo elicitation generates verbal discussion that may produce a different kind of information evoking feelings, memories, and information (Harper, 2002; Thomas, 2009). According to Harper (2002), the participants' shared photos not only added to the validity and reality of the

study, but also allowed for a deeper understanding of the experiences of Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCU during the interview process.

As an option for the study participants, the Quare males brought an artifact instead of a photo from their time at an HBCU that represented how they were experiencing college from the first couple of years at an HBCU to discuss at their third interview. Pahl (2012) argued that multimodal choice helps study participants express particular ideas about their experiences which enhance the meaning-making process. Over time, Pahl (2002, 2012) stated that the process of meaning making unfolds and is associated with the process rather than the product. Drawing on multimodal modes of analysis, such as interviews with photos and artifacts together, I used close textual analysis of Quare males' interviews to explore how the relation of space and time may or may not have shaped their experiences during their tenure at an HBCU. For example, scholars have often used cultural artifacts in identity work, such as the crucifix adopted by the Catholic Church and the image of the rainbow for the queer community, that ascribe to social structures impacting the identity formation and experiences of their research participants (Bartlett, 2004). Using artifacts and cultural artifacts to elicit senses, Roswell (2011) conducted a study in which participants brought items such as a bracelet, a necklace, and a jersey that made meaning of familial bonds, cultural heritage, and other subjectivities that would never have been explored using only audiotaped interviews. The data analysis of all interviews, including the photo elicitation/cultural artifact interviews, is discussed later in this chapter.

### ***Document Analysis***

Based on the HBCUs that the participants attend and/or attended, I obtained official documents that I included in the analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). These documents included school-related materials that pertained to the experiences of the participants, such as information

from school websites, student handbooks, and first-/second-year general curricular maps (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, when provided by the participants, I collected a copy of archival documents that corresponded to the students' experience and would be part of their college memorabilia.

### **Data Analysis**

One of the most important steps in a research project, but also one of the most difficult, is reducing, then analyzing and interpreting the data from the interviews (Wolcott, 1994, cited in Seidman, 2006). Through semi-structured and photo elicitation interviews, the experiences of the five Quare males were collected, then coded and analyzed for recurring themes (see Appendix B). Once the interviews were transcribed, I read the interviews carefully and organized interviews by research questions, interview questions, and participant names. For this project, the first stage of analysis began with multiple iterations of open coding. Seidman (2006) defined coding as the process of noting what is interesting, labeling it, and putting it into appropriate files. Using Seidman's (2006/2013) data analysis approach, I read all interview transcripts multiple times after each interview, highlighting paragraphs or sections that addressed each research question. Then, I culled the data and engaged in open-coding, reading over the highlighted paragraphs and sections, developing initial, low-inference codes which were grounded in my QOC analysis framework. I labeled blocks of text with deductive codes based on interview questions and the theoretical framework and highlighted depending on the related identity markers (Seidman, 2006). For example, I created one-to-two-word codes (phrases) such as *too gay*, *closeted* or *hiding*, *traumatized*, *masculine*, etc. based on direct responses to the interview questions and/or connections to theory and color-coded using the identities of race - yellow, gender-blue, and sexuality-pink (Creswell, 2009; Seidman, 2006). During the coding



process of the data analysis, artifact and photo elicitation items were not used for illustrative representation or purpose but for the discussion around memorable times in the lives of the Quare males. Each response to every question was evaluated and coded for every Quare male in this study which includes my reflection after every interview (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2009/2017; Merriam, 2009). I then combined similar codes throughout the information and later re-read the transcriptions to organize the data. This process continued until the information was concise. I organized the data into chunks or segments such as its alignment to literature, theoretical perspective and anticipated and unanticipated data (Creswell, 2007/2017).

Seidman (2006) mentioned that having a rich and thick description helps paint a portrait for the reader and brings the themes to life with real-life application through the stories of the participants. This description contains all the dimensions of the participants' lived experiences. To complete this process, I used the open coded interview transcripts to arrive at deductive codes and organized codes to identify salient themes (Creswell, 2007/2017). I structured my thematic analysis such that I used words found within the data to group together like-terms. For example, I used words such as *too gay*, *closeted*, *non-disclosure*, *only gay outside of school or with friends*, and *hiding in plain sight* in groupings under discursive practices and spaces using a Queer theory lens. When grouped together, the theme *hiding in plain sight* emerged. The coded data within *hiding in plain sight* then were re-analyzed to understand how gender, race, and curriculum related to that theme. I denoted whether each was an example that affirmed or rejected the aforementioned construct. The rich description was achieved by incorporating emergent themes, subthemes, and formulated meanings into the description to create its overall structure. This strategy was used to ensure that the description contained all of the elements of the five Quare

males' experiences using a Queer of Color theoretical lens. The emergent themes are included in Appendix B.

### **Positionality**

As a self-identified Quare man and a researcher who conducts research drawing on the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality, I explored and problematized my own positionality and how it became central to the research process. I acknowledged that my race is fundamental to the way I view the world and interpret meanings of racial differences (Omi & Winant, 1986). For me, my race (Black or African American) is my dominant identity that has been oppressed, marginalized, and discriminated against and is the only identity that remains present in any environment. Because my race is a non-negotiable identity due to my beautiful dark skin, I know that race does matter as a researcher. On the other hand, my sexuality is the identity for which I often negotiate its presence, depending on the context or environment in which I am. Although not always my dominant identity, I understand that my sexuality positions me to continually question the naturalness and normalcy of both heterosexuality and homosexuality. By living on the intersections of both race and sexuality and attending an HBCU, I feel I am positioned to recognize easily both the privileges and the oppression associated with Quare male experiences who attend and/or attended an HBCU from both a race and sexuality perspective. I am a Quare male who has been sometimes ashamed of who I am because my ways of being (a Quare male) do not match my ways of knowing (a hypermasculine Southern Black male). Specifically, the person I am with my multiple identities is not stable but is consistently shifting according to context. Like many Quare males, I negotiate when I embrace my multiple identities due to discrimination, oppression, marginalization, and sometimes Gay Shame. Knowing that the intersections of identity are always present, I recognized that my positionality or systems of

being and knowing are always present as a researcher. Despite conflicting interpretations between a researcher's system of being and knowing, I am positioned as an insider who can better understand the research participants' ways of being and knowing, which can be an asset (Milner, 2007).

As an insider, I feel I have the advantage of a cultural intuition of Quare males in how to deal with the intersections of being Black, queer, and male. Delgado-Bernal (1998) argued in support of "cultural intuition" that draws heavily on the unique perspectives of women of color. Like Delgado-Bernal, I am not advocating for essentializing the experiences of researchers who are Quare; but rather relying on this intuition to help produce emergent thinking and privilege new perspectives on historical problems such as racism and homophobia. As one who has been colonized at similar intersections of identity, my race and sexuality allow for insight into those who has been colonized (Villenas, 1996) and may grant an "insider status" with my research participants to gain adequate knowledge of the experiences of Quare males. Still, it is necessary to problematize this cultural intuition because as an overreliance on this can lead to overemphasizing the disparity between how researchers believe themselves to be seen by others and how participants actually see them. I understand that in order to be effective in my research practices, I must shuffle back and forth between reception and production (Muñoz, 1999). In other words, Muñoz suggested we should constantly critique and problematize identities that resonate within us.

Thus, I understand that as a researcher, I also serve as a colonizer. As a colonizer, I understand I am not immune to imperialist discourses inherent in some research practices and, thus, in using these practices, I consequently "other" and further colonize the subjects of my research (Villenas, 1996). As one who also has been colonized, my race, gender, and sexuality

allow for insight into others who has been colonized and may grant me “insider status” with my research participants, but my institutional affiliation (and my profession as a teacher) complicates this insider standing because of the imperialist approach or dominant systems of power I have used as a researcher.

### **Reliability and Validity**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to provide general insight into the experiences of Quare men who attend/attended an HBCU (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

Although I am implicated by the content of this study, it was my intention to adhere to the qualities of credible, trustworthy research, including rigorous analysis of data through detailed description of interviews and field notes, thoughtful analysis of text, photo images and artifacts, and a clear articulation of the process used to analyze the data when reporting findings (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Using Queer of Color as a theoretical framework and intersectionality as an analytical tool, my goal for this work was to conduct a deep exploration of the experiences of a minimum of participants and produce knowledge that may impact future research. Although I have intersectional identities similar to those with whom I was conducting the research study, I intended make a conscious effort to allow for the voices of Quare males who attend/attended an HBCU to be present throughout the study. Specifically, Seidman (2006) argued that the researcher is an integral participant of an interview. However, Seidman also mentioned that if the researcher acknowledges that positionality and uses appropriate interview skills, minimal distortion by the interview will occur in interview process.

In processing all the data, I was able to triangulate successfully (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 2011) different sources to create a more in-depth and reliable understanding of participants’ experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005)

through multiple kinds of information. Drawing on different sources and kinds of information provided a fuller vision of reality. By presenting readers with various sources of information, they are allowed to infer validation on their own. I present these sources in order to paint a clearer picture of how the Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCU came to understand their experiences and how those experiences may be influenced by both formal and informal curricula.

In terms of validity, Seidman (2006) posited that the interview technique used in this study contributes to a heightened level of validity and authenticity for the participants' responses in a given context. Participants will be asked to reflect on their past and present experiences and how those experiences were impacted by family/community, church, and schooling (specifically curriculum) over the course of two interviews and a photo elicitation interview. Through those interviews, I was able to construct narratives of five Quare males as whole beings, complete with past racialized, gendered, and queered experiences. My thoughts during the interviews and data collection were captured and documented through interpretative memos that served several purposes (Seidman, 2006), including the generation of data analysis, the synthesis of my own experiences, and the interpretation of meaning making of the interviews, document analysis, and photo elicitation. The process of navigating and naming my own experiences alongside the participants was important in the data collection and analysis phases of my work because it provided a tool for reflexivity and a means of processing the data collected (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

### **Summary**

For this study, I used a phenomenological, qualitative approach to explore the experiences of Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCU. I used a qualitative approach

which aided in the exploration of how social and academic systems influence the experiences of Quare males in an environment that is intended to be a safe space promoting racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity. The phenomenological design for this study allowed for better reporting of the lived experiences of Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCU without imposing my assumptions as a researcher due to my own experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

## Chapter 4: DATA—MALENESS, MASCULINITY, AND MANHOOD

### “Sexuality” by Love

My sexuality is more fluid than water  
And cannot be defined  
By simple textbook definition terms  
Created by man to force me into a mold  
And put me in the freezer  
To stay there frozen forever  
As if I was water  
My sexuality is not me  
But it is part of me  
And did I not just say  
My sexuality is more fluid than water.

I chose Love’s poem on sexuality to introduce this chapter because it makes me think about how sexuality has been constructed over time. Recognizing sexual and gender identities as social, multiple, variable, shifting, and fluid, queer theorists and others have argued that masculinity and manhood are not a homogeneous category that any boy possesses by virtue of being male (Blackman et al., 2015; Britzman, 1997; Pascoe, 2011). Typically, being reduced to the biological make-up of the male body, masculinity and manhood are constructed and categorized in the ways in which gendered practices and norms are being performed, promoted, challenged, or reinforced in given social situations with family, community, and church (Pascoe, 2011). The disruptions of norms or standards of proper or acceptable behavior are a key factor in understanding the experiences of Quare males who attend/attended HBCUs. Through messages of appropriate norms of maleness and masculinity from family, communities, and faith-based organizations, the five Quare males in this research study have developed discourses that were addressed in this chapter. This chapter presents the first set of research findings or themes such as maleness and masculinity of five Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCU. This chapter also addresses the first research question of this study:

What are the social experiences of Quare males prior to attending an HBCU?

In exploring this research question, the five Quare male participants of this study explained their experiences and how they negotiated these experiences and identity formation in both social and academic settings before attending an HBCU. While telling their narratives, the five Quare males implicitly and explicitly explained how they received messages of hegemonic masculinity and how they negotiated identity in social environments. In doing so, the Quare males related their experiences with family and community to their process of negotiating between racial/ethnic, gender, and sexual identities.

Through three 60-minute semi-structured interviews, the goal of each interview was to facilitate conditions for each participant to reflect on his life as a Quare male. Alongside their experiences at an HBCU, each of the five Quare males reflected on his journey, from childhood with their family, community, and church, to their experiences at an HBCU, to their present lives in New York City. These participants attended one or two of three HBCUs, all in the South. Through these individual descriptions, one may better understand the HBCU experiences of the men in this study. Each participant and I created a space in which the participant was free to speak candidly and unreservedly about his experiences. Each participant offered both anecdotal and descriptive information about his own experiences as a Quare male at an HBCU. In order to understand the depth of each male's experience at an HBCU, it was important to understand their experiences prior to arriving at the colleges.

### **Patriarchal Masculinity in Black Families and Communities**

Indebted to the power structures in place during slavery, Black men were denied the freedom to act as men. During that time, Black men were "socialized by white folks to believe that they should endeavor to become patriarchs by seeking to attain the freedom to provide and protect for Black women, to be benevolent patriarchs" (hooks, 2003, p. 3), and later embraced



and performed when slavery ended. Patriarchal masculinity had become an accepted ideology for most Black men, an ideal that would be reinforced by 20th-century norms in familial relationships and child-rearing. In a culture of domination where patriarchal thinking prevailed, Black males were raised with patriarchal ideologies and practices. One characteristic was the need for hypermasculinity among Black males. Similar to Latin males, masculine practices among Black men have focused on machismo and were equated with behaviors attributed to racial, social, cultural, and identity markers (Ramirez, 1999; Sherouse, 2013). It is no secret that gender is a social construct performance of gender, without critically thinking about it. Black males, like other ethnic groups, display hypermasculinity demeanor and mannerisms as a form of social power in a heteronormative society (Foucault, 1990; Pascoe, 2007). Those socially constructed performed acts of gender or sexuality are also behaved without critically thinking about them (Richardson, 2012). Slavery and racial integration have had a profound impact on Black gender roles. They have helped to promote a climate wherein most Black women and men accept sexist notions of gender roles and homophobic implications in the Black community (hooks, 2003). Some of those implications are addressed in this chapter through the experiences of Paul, Xavier, and DaQuan.

### **Paul**

For the five Quare males in this study, those negotiations of identity were determined by previous experiences with their family. In my first interview with Paul, he stated how there were many conversations about race, civil rights movements, and so on. Specifically, when asked about conversations about race, he stated:

I think my family, again I am in terms of race, I think my family makes me feel proud about my race. My mother was a strong civil rights-type person. She was one of the first Black women to enter her [PWI] university in the South. And my father had a leadership position in the local NAACP chapter. So, we talked about race all the time. We lived in a

Black community, went to a Black church, and I attended a Black school. My upbringing was filled with Black culture and conversations.

However, there were never any specific conversations about gender or sexuality. Paul spoke about how his family was very involved in the community, while his father served as a minister at the local church. Paul had no recollection of his father ever condemning homosexuality from the pulpit, but he did recall messages and attitudes of how to be more masculine and prepare for manhood. For example, in Paul stated:

There was a time when I felt like I had to be forced to like to get up and cut the yard or something like this, and somebody said something about like stop being so soft or don't start being a sissy or something like that. And I was just like, Oh ouch. 'Cause I think my mom might've said it and my dad.... I knew that it wasn't something he accepted. I'm trying to recall him ever saying anything about it other than I felt like his kind of covert attempt to toughen me up.

It wasn't even about sports 'cause my dad wasn't a sportsman, but it was like come cut this yard, come, come do this or come with me to run this errand or like fix or come crawl under this car with me. What are some other things he would do? Or one time he would be like shoot a gun, which terrified me.

While interviewing Paul, I interpreted that his family intended for him to perform gendered roles through masculine activities or chores. Although many researchers have attributed Black masculinity through physical characteristics and material possession, Paul's father was associating masculinity more in intrinsic qualities, such as being able to repair a car or shoot a gun (Richardson, 2012; Washington & Wall, 2010; Wise, 2000). Since slavery for Black families, masculinities of their male children have and will always remain a function of their sociohistorical context (Travers, 2019). Directly linked to gendered racism and negative stereotypes, the identity of Black males is linked to being hypersexual, hypermasculine, and heterosexual. These notions of the masculinity of maleness often produce messages of anti-femininity and homophobia that are internalized in Quare males, such as Paul. Messages such as "stop being soft or don't start being a sissy" from his parents were internalized by Paul. Pascoe

(2007) mentioned that the performance of non-hypermasculine qualities or marginalized masculinity is powerful when deconstructing the male/female binary but not in terms of race or class. Paul furthered those overt conversations were totally avoided by both him and his parents, as he stated:

We didn't talk about it [sexuality]. They didn't, I didn't feel like dealing with it. The only thing they would have done is made me feel bad and ashamed. I would say to myself; I don't want to talk to you about it because I don't want to deal with whatever you have to say about it. The rejection or those types of feelings or who I just, I really didn't care to hear it because they would not change that [his sexual identity], that I knew that in my head I was like, you can say what you want. Plus, I was like, oh shit, it's not gonna change my sexuality.

Mora (2013) mentioned that homosexuality is viewed as a choice and reiterated heteronormativity or dominant-gender practices for communities of color such as the reproduction of children. As a result of slavery, many patriarchal ideologies have been embedded in Black culture. For example during the many years of being enslaved, slave masters objectified Black men because of their bodies and referred to them as big strong stupid animals (Collins, 2005). The slave masters treated Black men as property that was only good for manual labor and the reproduction of children to serve as slaves on plantations of which impacts Black families and reified in messages that are passed on to their children, today (Collins, 2005, Ferber, 2007). In this case, Paul's construction of how he saw himself as a male was largely influenced by patriarchal messages from his family and influenced how he chose to perform maleness and masculinity in heteronormative spaces. His comments also offered some insight into the agency that many Quare students have not disclose some aspects of their identity and allow them to sustain their membership in communities of color (Boykin, 2005; Brockenborough, 2012; Phillips, 2005; Wilson, 2004).

Paul further confirmed his agency and why he felt he had negotiated his sexuality identity and masculinity in heteronormative spaces *during his photo/artifact elicitation interview* where

he presented a book, *A New Psychology of Men*, by Ronald Levant and William Pollack. Paul spoke to the impact of the book on him after reading it when he was in college. While reflecting, Paul reverted to how he was impacted by messaging from his family and community and how they impacted his identity formation throughout his life. Understanding that gender and sexuality is constructed through race, Paul knew early on that by being a Black man that certain masculine discourses had to be performed (Ferber, 2007). He stated:

We quickly learn that there's a certain finesse that you have in the real world. For example, you might need to tone that down [display of sexuality] a little bit, like while you're with family or in school. And if you didn't, you probably weren't having a good experience or excelling very well. There is always someone overtly telling you that, or covertly telling you that through their actions, that you, you bring certain parts of yourself into certain situations, and you leave the rest of it at the door. And so, it is contextual. It depends on what context you're in.

Through the messages, Paul was exposed to hypermasculine attitudes and homophobia that have been normalized and embedded in U.S. value systems (Ward, 2005). By referring back to ideas discussed in previous interviews in the artifact interview, Paul provided insight into how some messages are internalized by Queer males and are continually reflected on throughout their lives. Understanding discourses about homophobia and masculinity and fearing harassment and discrimination, Paul carefully calculated how forthcoming he could be about their sexual identity in various contexts such as home, community, and educational environments (Connell, 2016). Using Black churches as conduits of White exploitation of Black sexuality, Ward (2005) argued that promoting debilitating stereotypes that aligned with Victorian ideologies influenced those messages and race survival consciousness for Black families and communities. Providing a space where Black male dominance was allowed, church-related homophobia influenced conceptions of what it is to be a Black male, thereby influencing behaviors about gender, sexuality, and hypermasculinity and the lives of Black males such as Paul.

## **Xavier**

In Chapter 2, I mentioned that a history of slavery and oppression for Blacks has influenced how the Black community, including families, community, and church, attempted to fit into the dominant White system and, in the process, oppressed sexual minorities such as Quare males. Thus, Black males expected to adhere to certain levels of masculinity and shy away from any displays of what may be perceived as femininity (McQueen & Barnes, 2017). Through experiences, such as the ones Xavier had, Quare males are taught masculine behaviors such as no display of emotion outside of anger to avoid being called girly, fag, or sissy (Wallace, 2007). In his interview, Xavier stated that messages of maleness and masculinity were often relayed to him during interactions with females of his family, such as his mother, grandmother, and aunts. He stated:

I was raised that Black males are supposed to fix, build, and take care of things, handle stuff. And there was something less than if you were gay. They didn't necessarily specifically say stuff. They would make jokes about people being feminine or whatever and call them all kinds of names.

But there were people who talked about things around people being feminine or being gay that were less than. If you're too sensitive, that's some bitch shit and faggots do that kind of shit.

Research has shown that Quare men frequently find themselves participating in a world of perpetual conflict and negotiation of identity due to negative and hostile views of gayness by the Black community (Clarke, 1983). Although there is no one view of the performance of maleness or masculinity, Black males are socialized according to gender in a different way (Collins, 1999). In his interview, Xavier mentioned:

A lot of them [family members] are very, very heteronormative, and they're very, very traditional, very regular. They felt that I should play sports growing up. But I like art. I like going to museums. My male cousins and I had to play sports like basketball. I hated basketball. Matter of fact, I hate all sports to this day.

Xavier's family's perspective of sports was that he had no option but to play sports because of his gender. In many communities of color, women are taught to be emotional and caregivers, while males are taught to be aggressive and providers of goods (hooks, 2003; Wallace, 2007). The expectation of Black males is to be inherently masculine. Travers (2019) argued that women are expected to grow into womanhood while men are born into manhood.

In another context with male family members and community friends, Xavier's experiences were associated with gender roles and the ideology that women and their bodies were objects. For example, Xavier stated:

I was always in the house. And other males would ask, "Why are you always in the house with your grandmother? You should be outside with the boys." I was like, "I don't do that shit."

Also, [when I hung with the males outside], I watched men consume women in interesting ways. I watched men talk about women's bodies and talk about having women like they were trophies to be won.

Xavier's experience offered an analysis of how discourses are perceived when Black males routinely navigate in or occupy what is perceived by the Black community as gender spaces such as the home and masculine discourses such as objectifying the female body. Xavier's experience with family, friends, and community offered importance within a context, in terms of how Black males experience heterosexualized and normatively gendered spaces. Although masculinity and femininity are not fixed properties, cultural norms have situated the spaces of the house and outside of the house as binaries to represent fixed spaces of femininity and masculinity. Moreover, the meanings and expectations of being male or female are performed or expected to be performed in those particular spaces. For example, Xavier was taunted for staying in the house because he was not adhering to social norms and male socialization standards. Conceptualizing his experiences from a patriarchal perspective, Xavier was perceived as weak or soft (Bambara, 1970; hooks, 2004; Travers, 2019; Westbrook & Schilt, 2009) because he chose

to stay inside the house and help his grandmother cook and clean. Xavier later mentioned in his photo/ artifact elicitation interview that “I am mad!” He was mad because “black maleness, patriarchy, and straightness have created a community and a home that he could not be affirmed,” if he chose to engage in his love of cooking. After inquiring more in his photo/artifact elicitation interview, Xavier mentioned that he did not feel accepted at times because he did not engage in male dominance or masculine discourses. In her work on the meaning of motherhood in Black culture, Hill (1987) pointed out that one father in her study found it problematic if his son cooked and cleaned. He felt that his son would be perceived as soft and less of a man. These lessons from parents and community are for men to engage in dominance or masculine discourse, such as showing physical strength, assertiveness, and toughness (hooks, 2004; Travers, 2019; Wallace, 2007).

Another key aspect of masculinity that I drew on from Xavier’s experiences is the need to objectify women, as in Xavier’s exposure to the objectification of women as a part of the socialization of Black males. hooks (2004) argued that the discourse of the objectification of women links masculinity, sexuality, and manhood. She furthered that the objectification of women by Black men sends messages of affirmation that sex with women is condoned. Reflecting patriarchal ideologies, Black males are taught that sex with women is a rite of passage into manhood that will eventually lead to being the head of a household and procreating children (Collins, 2004; hooks, 2004; Wallace, 2007).

### **Quareness vs. Manhood**

In Chapter 2 of this study, I implied that sexuality and gender negotiation are a part of the Quare male experience (Thorne, 1993). I mentioned that some Quare males chose to suppress their sexual identity and de-emphasize their sexual orientation with peers, family, and society as a whole (McCready, 2009). Through their experiences, Paul and Xavier received messages that

in their families and in some Black communities, identification as Quare was not normalized (Kumashiro, 2001b). Quare males have a very low rate of disclosure of their sexual orientation (Russell & Truong, 2001). Most have grave concerns about the lack of acceptance of this sexual minority. Historically, Black cultures have felt that homosexuality damages family values and is secular and deviant behavior (Russell & Truong, 2001); moreover, disclosure sometimes leads to the disassociation of those sexual minorities from the family. Obtaining knowledge of how maleness, masculinity, and manhood plays out with family and community, Paul and Xavier quickly learned the behaviors and expressions they needed to navigate their circumstances. In negotiating spaces, they learned when, where, and how to display intrinsic qualities of masculinity and manhood. In addition, they have learned how to navigate non-inclusive spaces, such as Jamal did in the Project 10 study, as mentioned in Chapter 2.

### **Paul**

In his interview, Paul stated:

...we [his brothers and father] didn't talk a lot about emotions or feelings or things like that. The funny thing is it wasn't an emotionless household because it was very warm, but we just didn't sit down and have these conversations about that.

Paul furthered:

But there was never a conversation about being gay or straight or sexual orientation, really. Not just the expressiveness of it, but just like having a sexual orientation. It was presumed that you would be straight.

Although it was a comfortable and warm environment, Paul's experiences taught him that he did not live in a household where he could be emotionally open about his sexuality or sexual feelings. During his interview, he mentioned that he did not feel comfortable disclosing his feelings about boys. When he was questioning and wanted to know answers about his desires around age 12 or 13, Paul referred to encyclopedias. He assumed that he was going through a phase and it was normal. He then stated:



But then I had no one to ask questions to. So, because I never asked my parents any of these questions. And so, I just dipped and dodged and did my things behind closed doors, which I was fairly crafty and getting away with what I wanted to get away with.

So actually, I just knew where to go and what to do if I wanted to do some dirt and just knew where to go and how not to get caught.

Paul continued:

I had other spaces that I did this “dirt.”

When asked about what he meant about the term *dirt*, he stated:

You know, places [safe spaces] I found out about homosexuality and actually had my first sexual encounter in the ninth grade.

Paul’s experience is common among most Quare males who are exploring their sexual desires (Brockenborough, 2011; Cohen, 1999). Being defined as a place where anyone can fully self-express without fear of being made to feel uncomfortable, unwelcome, or unsafe on account of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and cultural background, safe spaces are often associated with positive student outcomes, such as a space that facilitates learning, exploration, and growth (Lesko & Talburt, 2012). Paul sought to find this informal space and stated that he did so with a group of friends, but he was not comfortable considering home a safe space. Safe spaces are often sought after when Quare males are not comfortable in the spaces in their home. In a study of Black and Latino queer youth at the Midtown Aids Center, Brockenbrough (2016) found that many Quare males would find refuge in LGBT community centers. Brockenbrough asserted that through cultural practices, peer support, and other experiences in safe spaces, Quare males are able to combat issues of racism and homophobia that they experienced daily. Unfortunately, ready access to these types of facilities is not feasible in southern states where most of my research participants were raised due to southern discourses and funding (Deschamps & Singer, 2017; Johnson, 2011). According to Deschamps and Singer (2017), approximately 200

community centers in over 45 states (including Puerto Rico and District of Columbia) serve 39,000 LGBT youth, with a disproportionate number being Quare male.

### **Xavier**

By contrast, Xavier's experience with a safe space with family was totally different. In his interview, Xavier mentioned that homophobic messages were explicitly verbalized with his family and his community. He stated:

So, there were small things that I saw, but it wasn't something that I cognitively thought, like, is there something wrong? I shouldn't be doing things like acting out various gendered male and female led scenes from the movie Friday.

He furthered

Also, I grew up in the hood, so the people who were gay in the hood, who were effeminate, always fought. So, people talked shit about them all the time or teased them.

Offering a different insight into how messages impact Quare males, Xavier experienced very clear messages of socially constructed norms of masculinity and manhood to which Black males should adhere. When those social norms of masculinity or manhood were disrupted, Xavier said, "You had to fight or develop thick skin for the name calling." Deflecting insults, abuse, or rejection, Xavier mentioned that he "learned to negotiate his myriad identities in both heteronormative and homosexual spaces." Adhering to these normative expectations for males that maintain gender inequality and homophobic attitudes, Xavier avoided bullying and harassment in those spaces (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Xavier found solace with his high school guidance counselor until he connected with other Quare friends. However, he did suffer from depression while in high school. The impact of this is further discussed in the next chapter.

### **Non-Disclosure? But I Already Know!**

As I reflected on the experiences of the research participants during the preliminary interviews on biographic experiences, I noticed some commonalities between their experiences

and my own. For example, the five Quare males and I expressed strong religious affiliations and great pride in our race and culture, yet we struggled with sexual identity in our formative years.

In my reflection<sup>1</sup> after the first interviews, I mentioned that the

*...participants' experiences relate back to a lot of my experiences growing up in the South. How we identify, how we look at sexual identity and how we perceive it has been based on our experiences with family and community.*

My experiences in the South growing up with my parents sent confusing messages of who I should be but confirmed how I should be.

*I am reminded of when my mom and dad telling me that I should play football because baseball was a soft sport or telling me that I should not hang out with the girls so much. I would think, if I like the sport or those friends, why is it a problem? I remember my mom literally coming outside to pull me away from the girls who were playing jacks to walk me and my brothers to football practice in the big field behind our apartment building.*

Similar to the parents of Paul and Xavier, my parents already had notions of who I should be and ideas of how they planned to support me in my manhood. Like many other Quare males, my parents had expectations of me as a Black boy. By closely monitoring and controlling my actions and thinking through associations (friendships) and sports, my parents attempted to ensure that I connected to my birth-giving rights of manhood by performing masculinity that allows power and privilege in the dominant society (Butler, 1993; Halberstam, 1998). Black boys are taught to aspire to be more masculine while owning their Blackness at an early age through messaging from family and their community (Halberstam, 1998).

During this process, I am reminded of experiences of hearing messages such as

*“Stop crying and go out there and tackle the other player (while playing football). You are acting like a little girl” or “Take that switch out of your walk, you look like a sissy.”*

I am reminded of being so frustrated with my family and community members when receiving these messages of homophobia. I would always ask myself why my family and community

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<sup>1</sup> Researcher's reflections of interviews are noted in italics throughout the study.

would call me those names.... I did not desire to wear a dress or be a girl. I remember on Sunday afternoon, my family made so much fun of me that my granddad started calling me “Senorita.” That nickname has stuck with me ever since. After that day, I remember making conscientious efforts with my routines to be more masculine in heteronormative spaces by repeated performances of masculinity and manhood through my mannerisms, such as the way I walked, talked, and managed facial expression (Butler, 1993). Although the data presented in this chapter mainly focused on Xavier and Paul, all the participants (Nigel, Daquan, and Lauren) had similar experiences of messages of homophobia, masculinities, and maleness in their environments—for example, messages that males “can’t have long hair or shaved sides or wear paint on their nails” and “date girls, have girlfriends and eventually marry them.” These messages force Quare males to choose either to come out or learn to negotiate heteronormative spaces.

### **Come Out for What?**

The process of navigating heteronormative spaces is something that all Quare males face, including my research participants and myself. In the book *Dude, You’re a Fag*, Pascoe (2012) suggested boys are forced to hide their true characteristics of identity because of messages from family, community, and media based on fear of rejection. Expanding on his point, Arnold et al. (2014) explained that physical and emotional forms of rejection occur within families and communities; in one study they conducted, they found that over half of their research participants discussed non-disclosure of sexual identity due to fear of rejection from immediate family and community. This disclosure process is often defined as coming out, “a complex process by which individuals with same-sex attractions come to conceive and present themselves as LGBT to oneself and coming out to others” (Coleman, 1982; Diamond, 2006; Pasco, 2012).

### **Lauren**

The participants had one of three choices, which included coming out, suicide due to having Gay Shame, or staying in the closet (Coleman, 1982; Downs, 2012). They all chose the last option. Understanding and navigating through intersecting identities is a fact of life for Quare males such as Xavier, Paul, myself, and the other participants in this study. Although the data in this chapter mostly focused on Xavier and Paul, the other participants (Nigel, Daquan, and Lauren) had similar experiences with messages of homophobia, masculinities, and maleness in their environments. In his initial interview, Lauren spoke of a situation in which he could have come out after his mom found one of his porn tapes, but he chose to be dishonest and blame a friend. He stated:

And my mother found a tape and I was like, it's not mine. It's a friend. She was freaking out. She was like, I'm keeping this, I'm not giving this back to you or I'm going to call their parents. I was like, don't do that. Their parents don't know.

He furthered:

At the time I would never come out to her [his mother]. She is very religious and Southern. And the town I grow up in was very heteronormative and not queer-friendly. So, I knew I couldn't come out and stay in it. Like if I was going to stay in my Southern Texas town, then I definitely couldn't express myself the way I'm expressing myself.

As a gender-fluid person, Lauren chose to reify biologized categories of male or maleness; he did not come out until he left his small town. However, he mentioned that he regretted not coming out when asked the question, "What would you tell your younger self?" after he presented a photo from his graduation day during his last interview. He simply stated, "*I would tell him, be yourself, don't be afraid.*"

Coming out to others, or disclosing, is a milestone event for those who identify as LGBT or Quare. Quare males often choose not to come out due to fear that the reaction from family, community, and church would be negative (Kahn, 1991; McCready, 2002). Quare males fear non-acceptance by society, especially as family, community, and church present a very strict

binary of what it means to be Black and gay (Collins, 2005). This binary includes how Black males show character, experience, and display emotions, engage in sexual acts, and perform gender (Blackburn et al., 2015). By understanding various environments, including home and community, Quare males are forced to consider the potential gains and losses of disclosing or coming out. The research participants in this study did not see any benefits and felt that it was not worth the risk of rejection.

### **Figuring Out and Negotiating Spaces**

Fearing rejection, negotiating identity, and performing heteronormativity, Quare males choose to suppress their sexual identity and de-emphasize their sexual orientation with peers, family, and society, as a whole (McCready, 2009). DaQuan spoke along these lines in his interview.

#### **DaQuan**

In his interview, DaQuan mentioned that he started having behavior problems and became very aggressive with and bullied other Quare males:

I bullied the shit out of every openly gay kid in middle and high school. I remember putting kids in lockers. I remember beating kids up. I remember throwing kids down the steps. I remember, I was that guy! And that's also one of the reasons why I love what I do now for kids that I work with because I really understand what it means to be confused and then take that confusion and turn it into hatred. So, I was always getting suspended. I was always getting kicked out of school. I went to six different high schools in a matter of three and a half years.

He also stated:

I was a bully and I beat up gay kids and I beat up girls and I beat up kids and people just allow me to do it. And I, and I used to call kids the F words and all kinds of stuff. And I remember putting a kid in a locker and like slamming it. And I just remember stomping the locker itself and I, and like thinking about it now, and definitely on therapy, it's like maybe that locker was my identity that I just wanted to like cast out. So, there were moments where it was like me trying to figure it out, but there were also moments of me like on the periphery of it, enough to like to engage with it but still like, I don't

know. And technically my first sexual experience with a man didn't come for years after that.

DaQuan's behavior towards other Quare males was due to a negative self-image and having feelings of guilt, shame, and failure of maleness or manhood (Coleman, 1982; Savin-Williams, 2004). Suppressing a Quare identity, DaQuan adopted a hypermasculinity discourse to assert the power of the person he sees he is becoming. It is important to emphasize that gender and sexuality matter in the lives of Black and Quare boys, and it is experienced in ways that intermingle with other relations of power (Connell 2005). Moreover, through bullying and harassment of unaccepted social norms learned through messages from family, community, and church, DaQuan essentially took on a bully narrative to show that he could display more maleness, masculinity, and manhood than his Quare peers.

This narrative of gender performance creates a hierarchical system in which LGBT and Quare males are turned against each other in a battle for position on the hierarchy of masculinity and do so by enacting hegemonically masculine roles at the expense of Quareness in themselves and the safety of other Quare males (Messner 1997; Nardi, 2000). Through the lens of shame or failure of maleness, DaQuan took on a heteronormative discourse of hypermasculinity, such as bullying to navigate heteronormative spaces. Taking on heteronormative discourses of bullying LGBT and Quare students, DaQuan became an active agent in the reproduction of gender norms and gender inequalities in his community and academic environments (Thorne, 1993).

### **Hiding in Plain Sight**

By non-disclosing and reifying the reproduction of gender norms and sexuality, Paul, Xavier, and DaQuan provided some key examples of the experiences of Quare males. Messages that these participants received forced them toward gender and sexual norms when in gender spaces or heteronormative, non-safe spaces. For example, Paul and Xavier learned to perform

masculinity, such as pretending to enjoy building, fixing, shooting things, or hanging out with male friends in outdoor space while objectifying women, while DaQuan learned to show a hypermasculine discourse that targeted gay and Quare males.

## **Nigel**

As the opposite of Daquan, Nigel chose to lead with his intellect. He chose to hide behind his academics to not be noticed or identified as a Quare male. In his interview, Nigel explained:

I had two other brothers who were very good-looking and had already had reputations of being ladies' men. So, it was like I already had that reputation to ride. What I chose to do because I didn't want to be a ladies' man was to hide behind academics. So just be the smart brother. You know, every now and then somebody be like, yeah, he's a smart, good-looking brother.

Choosing a different identity or discourse than his siblings, Nigel focused his energy on how he performed academics and acted out intelligence. He participated in many school and church organizations. Once in his interview, he even stated that "everyone in my community saw me as the quiet nerdy guy." Choosing to display a privilege identity such as whiteness, heterosexuality, and intellect, Nigel created a narrative that aligned his identity to navigate easily in heteronormative spaces without coming out of the closet (Bowleg, 2013; Collins, 1991).

While analyzing Nigel's narrative along with those of the other participants, I thought of how Quares' navigating heteronormative spaces as a process relates to natural selection. Natural selection is a scientific term that refers to the process of living species adapting to their environment in order to survive.

*I thought about this scientific idea of natural selection. So, survival of the fittest, as in like you can survive, like in order for you to survive as being a gay man, you had to make choices to be able to, um, to grow as a person. You had to make choices to grow personally and academically. You had to make choices sometimes just to get out of your parents' house, to get out of their church or to get out of their community.*

By adopting the scientific term *natural selection*, I offer the notion that Quare males are trying to survive in family and community environments. Moreover, in learning to negotiate



those spaces, Quare males learn to “hide in plain sight.” Similar to being closeted, “hiding in plain sight” offers a lens to understanding the experiences of Quare males without labels of Down-low or Closeted. The Quare males chose to investigate their sexual desire and disclose to persons with whom they felt safe in safe spaces. Hiding in Plain Sight offers a way to think about choice and desire. For the Quare males in this study, they felt that even though they had same-sex attractions, they did not have any choice because they were expected to show masculinities and be introduced to manhood. Being categorized or labeled as Down-low or Closeted would imply that they were deceitful or sexually deviant when, in reality, they were taught through messaging what is expected for passage into manhood (Collins, 2005). At some point in their interviews, Paul, Xavier, and DaQuan acknowledged that they undoubtedly knew they were Quare prior to attending an HBCU, but chose to continue the present as heterosexual, or “hide in plain sight,” in environments that were associated with family and community members because of the messages they received from family and community.

### **Conclusion**

In sum, this chapter offered an analysis of the narratives of Quare males who received messages from family and community on how they should perform masculinity and manhood. Through those messages, the Quare males learned acceptable and non-acceptable behavior in the dominant society. Choosing not to come out, the Quare males experienced non-performance of their Quare identity and hiding in plain when in heteronormative spaces.

Understanding their experiences and how they negotiated their identity, the Quare males provided more insight into how they experienced the curriculum at an HBCU and negotiated those spaces. The idea of hiding in plain sight is addressed further in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5: DATA—ACCESS, PRIVILEGE, AND TRAUMA

“The Mask”  
by Kathy Russell

Who am I?  
You think you know...  
Behind this mask of a  
smile is a desperate heart  
hiding tears flowing, slamming  
against the walls of my heart  
like the rising waterscapes on a stormy day.  
You think you see me for who I am,  
but I allow you only to see who I wish I were.

Many Quare males wear several different masks or identities in their performances of manhood and maleness in heteronormative spaces. In the poem “The Mask,” Kathy Russell shared with her audience the psyche of some who identify as LGBT—and, specifically, I think of the Quare males in this study in heteronormative spaces. For Quare males, masculinity and maleness are things we always think about. We feel that everyone else is thinking about these things and assume that others are judging how successfully we are performing masculinity (Butch Factor, 2009). For the Quare males in this study who learned to hide in plain sight, the notion of others truly knowing their Quare identity would mean that they have not earned the legitimacy of being masculine or male enough. Therefore, for the persons in this study, sexual anonymity was the ultimate goal when they attended their HBCU, which is considered another heteronormative space for them. The ways in which the Quare males in this study navigated those heteronormative spaces are key to understanding their HBCU experiences. For this data chapter, I explore the following research question:

How do Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCU interpret or understand their experiences with curriculum?

## Understanding Quare Males in HBCU Spaces

Quare males who hide in plain sight and follow gender norms offer a different perspective to heterosexual male privilege and access in an HBCU context. The Quare males in this study found that they had more legitimacy in their family and community by being more masculine and cisgender male. This was important because it allowed the Quare males heterosexual privilege in their Black families and communities, including their HBCUs. Understanding through messages that Black male heterosexuality is closer to White male heterosexual normalcy and normativity than is Black gay sexuality (Johnson, 2005, 2008), the Quare males are aware that heterosexual privilege is one of the few privileges that Black men have (Johnson, 2005). Although heterosexual Black males are still viewed or seen as sexually deviant (overly sexed/potential racists) and sexually irresponsible (jobless baby daddies), the heterosexual male identity is better than that of the Quare male identity (Johnson, 2005). Thus, for the Quare males in this study, they hide in plain sight to embody the ideal of maleness and masculinity and to have more social power and privilege at their HBCUs (Collins, 2015).

As I kept in mind the above research question during the data analysis, I saw a number of themes emerge as central to the experiences of the Quare males in this study. The themes that are presented in this chapter focus on access, privilege, and trauma within the context of the informal and formal curricula. For the purpose of this study, the informal curriculum consists of campus- or student-focused co-curricular activities such as clubs, as well as organizations which include sports, student government, fraternities and sororities, and school newspapers. These activities usually happen outside of a classroom environment but can still help in developing soft skills and enhancing the content of the formal curriculum. Access and participation in these co-curricular activities often help Quare males understand unwritten norms and the culture of their HBCUs.

## **Quare Males' Access to the Informal Curriculum**

Entering college for most young people is a stressful situation. The process of changing environments, with the added stress of learning to navigate new social and academic spaces at their HBCUs, could be overwhelming (Adams, 2011; Lewis & Ericksen, 2016; Mobley & Johnson, 2015). In this study, all the Quare males were both excited and nervous about attending their HBCUs prior to arriving. They all expressed excitement about being nurtured as a Black man on their college campuses. But that excitement also came with concern for fitting in and learning how to hide in plain sight in their new environments because none of them had any desire to come out.

Exploring the experiences of Lauren, Nigel, and DaQuan, I have been able to understand how they adjusted to and navigated the informal curriculum. In this study, the Quare males understood the importance of the informal curriculum to enhance their college educational experiences. All choosing to hide in plain sight and not disclose their Quare identification, they were able to serve as class president, lead the school newspaper, and/or pledge a fraternity. However, doing so did not come without a cost for them, from both a social and an academic perspective. By choosing social and academic acceptance and inclusion on campus, we did not truly develop our Quare identity while in college, and we still struggle with it today.

### **Lauren**

As an illustration of this struggle, I asked Lauren if he felt prior to attending an HBCU that his college would provide a nurturing environment from both a racial and sexuality perspective. He said, "Hell no!" but then continued:

Well, not that I didn't know that it would be nurtured. I just knew that I would be in a new place. I don't have to identify whether I'm gay or not gay or questioning or anything. I'm here for school. So regardless of my experiences from home, I'm about to be around

a bunch of people of color and predominantly Black and to add it's a Historically Black Catholic College and University. So, there being this religious aspect to it kind of already had me a little bit nervous and scared coming in. Like, No! I kind of want to be out of the closet knowing I want to start to explore myself more as a young adult, but I had a little trepidation about that. I didn't! But at the same time, I was really excited to go move to a city like New Orleans, filled with great food culture and go to a school with such a strong message of building Black people and People of Color in general.

Although Lauren was nervous about attending the HBCU he chose, he felt that this college represented an opportunity and a vehicle to become more culturally and racially aware while earning a degree because the HBCU was known for having a culturally rich and racially validating environment. Understanding that the educational environment is a context of fear and harassment for Quare youth (Blackburn & Pascoe, 2015), Lauren had added concerns of safety and acclimation, compared to heterosexual peers. Considering he was attending an Historically Black Catholic College and University, Lauren also stressed about the religious messages of homophobia that would be the norm on campus. If he came out as an authentic self, he was concerned about the social and academic consequences that Quare students have experienced in HBCU settings (Gavin et al., 2019; Johnson, 2005; Riggs, 1995). Specifically, he added:

I was slightly concerned about not being nurtured, like as a gay or a Black gay man. Because I hadn't reached the point where I would self-identify as being "Quare" and being more open to different subcultures within the gay community or the LGBTQ community. But being there, there's a strong church element like the faith-based organizations on the campus and there are nuns on the campus. And so, I don't think you can already have an accepting community of people of color, specifically Black people from what I had learned. I just knew religious Black people like from home have a bit of a small mind. I decided that I would just butch it up while on campus and explore in other ways. I did a great job balancing personal and academic life until I joined the drama club and became a Resident Assistant. You know, there were a lot of gays in the drama club and in my dormitory.

As a result, Lauren chose initially to stay in the closet to avoid dissonance from his peers. Some scholars offered that Quare males use three strategies to manage navigating in heteronormative and religious spaces and reduce dissonance, such as behavior or attitude changes, avoid the

spaces, or take on new belief systems. Lauren aligned with the first strategy and continued to perform a masculinity and maleness behavior and attitude (Festinger, 1957; Pitt, 2010), which allowed him the privilege of being active on campus with student government, residence assistance, drama, and other clubs without dissonance or isolation.

## **Nigel**

Comparably, Nigel suppressed his Quare identity in ways which gave him access to resources on campus, which he acknowledged were not ideal in fostering his Quare identity. He stated:

That only recently have I started to acknowledge it and acknowledge the impact that institutions like my HBCU and the Black Catholic church that I grew up in have had upon that identity. And I can say that the way in which I experienced my HBCU and the Black Catholic church were not ways that really fostered my identity as a gay Black male.

The first thing that comes to mind is pledging fraternities. So, with them if you were seen or perceived as effeminate or gay on my HBCU's campus, then you are not the candidate of their choice. Like you wouldn't even get any interest or any response back from them. Other instances of not being included or accessibility to other organizations might've been who were your friends and how you presented on the yard. So, for example, when it comes to student government...no openly gay students were obviously running to become SGA president nor would they probably get support for it. You know, so it was just the way you had to navigate it to be able to succeed and negotiate and to some degree minimize your sexual identity.

What I'm saying is there was no high level of tolerance for gay or effeminate males. No, open arms! But I'm also not saying that that was the sole factor of why one might not be chosen. It's dealing with the nuances in terms of who you are, how you position yourself, and how you navigate it. I know this because I have shown interest and engaged with one of the fraternities on campus. I am just saying you get to navigate it differently with the right friends and associations.

You have to also make yourself visible through key clubs and organizations. So, I worked on a student newspaper for three years and eventually became one of its leaders. I was involved in SGA; I was involved in new student orientation. I was a commencement usher. So that's a big deal to be selected. But it's a certain way I navigated those; you know.

Understanding the benefit of joining a Black fraternity because of its rich history of service, activism, and leadership training (Chambers, 2014), Nigel believed that affiliation to an organization would mean displaying patriarchal masculinities qualities. This was important to know because Black males are socialized from birth to embrace and claim patriarchal manhood qualities, some of which mean providing, protecting, and uplifting their families and communities—this is the foundation purpose of fraternities (Chambers, 2014; Jenkins, 2010). Additionally, Black fraternities have also served as a symbol of Black assimilation into a White tradition and culture. During the initiation process of pledging a fraternity, forms of masculinity such as toughness, strength, emotionless, and physical endurance are tested and praised (Jenkins, 2010). Those qualities are often expected and sought in potential members. So Nigel was very aware of those expectations and made it his goal to ensure he aligned with those expectations and qualities. Nigel added:

Because I just had a strong commitment to the school. I knew I wanted to be a part of it. And it also boosts your profile because you are on high display during certain times of the school year.

You know...the student newspaper is one of the most prominent student organizations on campus. Like if you're not Greek, but you want to become Greek, like being a part of SGA, leading the school newspaper, all of those things will give you great visibility and respectability to someone in those organizations. Ideally, they often want to respond to dominate those organizations because they want to show they run the yard. So, if you're a part of it and they see a trajectory, like yeah, he's going to become SGA president, he's good enough to become the lead of the paper. Then they want that. Because when your senior class, when your pledge class becomes the seniors, then you guys are dominating the yard,<sup>1</sup> so to speak, you know. So, I think you should pay attention to your surroundings and learn about what's acceptable, like how you dress, how you speak, those types of things. You just pay attention to what's cool and conform to what is acceptable. I was the quiet nerdy guy that was involved.

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<sup>1</sup> Yard refers to a common meeting place or quad on an HBCU campus. It is typically a place where fraternities and sororities and other campus organizations would perform fraternity/sorority Greek shows, have activities, and so on. It also can be a metaphor for informal campus life.

Although acknowledging that he did not take up Quare discourse which he felt hindered his growth as a Quare male, Nigel approached his HBCU experience by reinventing himself as an academic and school leader for acceptance among peers. He developed friendships and joined organizations to help with his quest to be accepted in a fraternity and be associated with the dominant discourse at his HBCU. Embracing and claiming the notion of patriarchal manhood, Black Greek fraternities have elevated and educated the masses in the Black community in order to advance the race socially and economically (Du Bois, 1904; Jenkins, 2012). For Nigel, the notion of brotherhood through fraternal membership was key for him to continue perform masculinity and maleness while at his HBCU.

### **DaQuan**

Similar to Lauren and Nigel, DaQuan chose to perform masculine behavior and maleness. But he also chose not to spend much time socializing on campus. He removed himself from the spaces on the yard as often as possible. When asked about his experiences DaQuan mentioned:

I wasn't exploring my sexual identity. I wasn't exploring my sexual identity because it was repressed at the school. I explored my sexual proclivities more than my sexual identity, or more than my sexual orientation. But my sexual identity at the time was at my HBCU situated in the binary of "try all and exist in all spaces."

He added:

I knew my HBCU was a place that would have different types of people. I love my Black people. But I knew my HBCU was not a safe space for LGBTQ students and never will be. I shouldn't say never will be...it wasn't when I was there. However, the way I constructed my identities in certain social spaces allowed me to still create those late-night and evening experiences with men who were on campus, around campus, or went to school without associating with them on the yard. I was a part of the problem. I wouldn't speak to you if I had sex if I saw you in a daytime. And I actually got into a fight with somebody about that once.

So, to answer your question, I wasn't out. But I had a lot of sex. I wasn't waving a flag. I wasn't saying like, "Hey, I'm gay!" I was having you and your girlfriend at the same time. I was having a lot of relations with both men and women. Okay. So, me being gay was not something that I spoke about publicly until 2015 and we're talking 2007 to



2010 is when I was in college. I've never publicly stated that I was gay when I was in high school or college.

I remember that there was a trans woman that was going through the transition at school that was constantly singled out while attending. And it was a very public conversation about what she wore to school, what she wore to school or how she dressed in class. I remember that they put her in an upperclassman all-male dorm as a freshman. That dorm was informally known as the gay dorm. Conveniently, all the out gay males were assigned to that dorm. I presented as cisgender and maintained my place in the Honors Dorm.

I did not socialize on campus nor join any clubs or organizations. I spent a lot of time working and doing things around the city. I didn't want my reputation at the school at the time to be associated with my sexual orientation because I had not made that public knowledge.

Recognizing the symbolic and material value of hegemonic identities such as heterosexuality, DaQuan felt his HBCU was not a safe space so he chose to not disclose his Quare identity. His view offer/ed insight that despite the predominant view that HBCUs are safe havens for diversity of thought and lived experiences, the notion that such institutions are automatically considered safe spaces must be reconsidered (Cubbage, 2015). Understanding that safe spaces are constituted by comfort, DaQuan did not feel that the campus was a place where he could relax and not worry about being judged, marginalized, or stigmatized (Adams, 2016; Shapiro, 2016). Thus, he chose to engage minimally in those spaces and organizations and would limit his association or socialization with the people that felt uncomfortable around. He was able to find comfort in Quare spaces outside of school. DaQuan mentioned that he explored his sexual desires by meeting other Quare males through social media and gay bars.

In DaQuan's photo/artifact elicitation interview, where he provided a photo of a memorable jacket that made him feel good (masculine and accomplished), he mentioned that although he did not socialize on his yard and found refuge on social media and at gay bars and clubs, he was unhappy at that moment of his life. Specifically, he mentioned:

I talked a lot about feeling like I was alone or feeling like I was not supported. I even used a lot of language about how I almost got there by myself. There wasn't these tangible moments of assistance [by navigating the HBCU spaces alone]. And what I'm realizing is that this might be different from others, but my sexuality has not barred me from achieving my dreams and goals this yet.

Hopeless! Um, it [his HBCU] made me feel like I couldn't be me. Um, it made me question what was authentic. And at times I wonder why I move in certain spaces the way I do. But I think, however, I'm glad that I had other support systems, that were rooted in more authentic relationships, allow me to recognize the difference.

DaQuan's experience is common among some Quare males at HBCUs. Avoiding experiences of marginalization due to openly expressing Quareness, Mobley and Hall (2020) argued that Quare males, like DaQuan, embodied homophobic "performances" as a strategy to be accepted socially (Ford, 2015; Strayhorn & Scott, 2012). Displaying toxic masculinity and embracing traditional and gender roles allowed DaQuan to be rewarded with academic success (Mobley & Hall, 2020). However, he was left with feelings of seclusion and inauthenticity. Feeling that Blackness and Quareness could not coexist and are incongruent, DaQuan acknowledged that he had long-term trauma from the ways in which he navigated HBCU spaces (Mobley & Hall, 2020). In both his curriculum interview and a casual conversation, DaQuan spoke to how he worked through his trauma, as an educator, through his relationship with his students by encouraging them to acknowledge their Quare and gender identities and encouraging them to navigate heteronormative spaces in ways which do not cause long-term trauma.

All the Quare males had to learn the art of being flexible and performing various types of masculinity and maleness for access into organizations, such as fraternities, student government, school newspaper, and other clubs. After the interviews on curricula with the Quare males, I noted my experiences as a Quare male who pledged a fraternity and thought about how I had to navigate spaces to be accepted and joined my organization, and still I had a hard time convincing others that I did not have a Quare identity. It was a struggle.

*It was tough hiding my identity and how I navigated spaces. The ways in which I perceived myself and others perceived me was totally different. I was only fooling myself. When I went through the application process to pledge with the top-ranking application, I was red-flagged in the interview by one of the interviewees. He told the interviewees that I felt I was gay. He told them some of my friends and club affiliations. Luckily, I had someone I knew in the interview who disclosed to me what was said. I approached the advisor, and the decision was reversed. But that was after much denial and a made-up girlfriend, who was a fellow cheerleader.*

My situation was very nuanced and unheard of for membership into a fraternity. But it did not come without other costs. I was demeaned and ridiculed during the pledging process. I was referred to as the gay cheerleader. Routinely, I was told to tumble, chant, and cheer. Although I was accepted and finished the process, I had many more inquiries from other fraternity brothers about my social and romantic circumstances.

### **Standoff with the Formal Curriculum**

Understanding that some Quare males have become very visible at HBCUs, it is important to gain an understanding of their experiences with both informal and formal curricula.<sup>2</sup> Knowing that they chose an HBCU as their college, the Quare males were very aware that they would experience racial and culturally rich experiences with curricula to include conversations about race, gender, and religion. However, as mentioned in the informal curriculum section of this chapter, these Quare males did not expect their culturally rich experiences to address or nurture their sexual identities. Understanding that HBCU students must conform to conventional gender norms in most educational spaces on campus and in the dominant world in order to succeed, the Quare males were asked about the formal curriculum, i.e., core and elective courses that included sexuality. Of the three HBCUs that were represented in this study, not one school had a Gender and/or Queer Studies Department nor did any offer a major or minor in Gender or

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<sup>2</sup> The formal curriculum is the planned curriculum, programs of study, and/or ways of learning that include objectives, content, learning experiences, and assessments offered by a school.

Queer Studies. When a course was offered, however, some of the Quare males in this study did take it.

## **Paul**

When Paul was asked about curriculum at his HBCU, he stated that his Department of Business had some opportunity for electives, and he did take some courses related to race and sexual identity. Specifically, he stated:

I would say the formal curriculum at my HBCU mainly focused on race and gender since it was an all-Black, all male institution. For example, the courses typically came from the standpoint of a Black man in society. And so, everything gets filtered through that lens in the curriculum versus like, you know, you might go to a majority institution and the example might not always be about you. You can't relate to it. But that I would say was emphasized in the curriculum. Like the history class would an Afrocentric twist to them.

You know, the idea of being a Black man was infused into the curriculum. We were always the centerpiece because again, the institution is trying to create Black men and all these different industries through all these different majors. So, I think the spotlight was always on us and trying to get us to understand what the world could look like beyond the walls of Morehouse College, because this would probably be most people's last experiences of being in the majority at work or at school outside of an HBCU.

So, I think the spotlight was always on us and trying to get us to understand what the world could look like beyond the walls of my all-male HBCU. So, I think there was a strength and, you know, focusing on the Black experiences, Black experience weaknesses, I can't really think the formal curriculum could have done better.

Paul's recollection of the focus of most of the courses at his HBCU emphasized the value that is placed on race and gender. His HBCU provided a space where Black culture could define and help redefine by affirming Black male students' history and culture. For example, through an other mothering approach, HBCUs provide learning environments that nurture, support, and are family-oriented in ways that provide spaces that embraces their cultural and racial identities (Bonner, 2003; Collins, 1990; Goings, 2021; Jett, 2013; Maramba et al., 2010). Knowing he would not have the same experience at an PWI, Paul mentioned that an HBCU was where he felt he received rich racial affirmation because an Afrocentric lens was filtered through the

curriculum at his HBCU. By focusing on race and gender, research has shown that HBCUs provide better learning environments that nurture and support Black males, compared to PWIs (Palmer et al., 2010).

Paul mentioned that he took some courses that his HBCU offered in the Afro-American Studies Department as electives that he really enjoyed. Another elective he took was in the English Department that focused on race and gender. Paul mentioned:

I'm trying to remember the name of that course. I took it in the English Department as an elective, and I don't recall what the name of it was, but it was the only course I took that was not required. I think we were looking at Black people in history through literature, but it was also the only course. I remember reading one piece on a queer individual with queer storyline and, and it was very interesting to watch and try to see people's reactions to that content. And I don't even remember what, what it is what we read, but it definitely sparked a lot of conversation in the class. And so yeah.

So, I watched how people were during the discussion. It was a bunch of nineteen, twenty-year-olds in the class, and there's always this kind of tension, you know, when people think of an all-male institution, oftentimes people assume that there must be so many gay men there. While others assume that there is not because it is superseded by the fact that this is a Black institution that by and large holds a lot of the values of the Black community where homosexuality or queerness is not acceptable.

Based on his experiences at his HBCU, Paul felt he was not surprised by some of the negative attitudes about certain content of the course by some students at his HBCU. Given the current and historical ties that HBCUs have to the Black church, scholars have argued that traditional attitudes concerning gender roles and sexuality persist across many of the 106 HBCUs and impact curricula at those academic institutions (Bonner, 2002; Harper & Gasman, 2008; Johnson, 2017). Understanding that HBCUs provide an accepting environment for African Americans who choose to attend, Paul also knew that most would not be accepting of conversation about gender and sexuality, and that students who openly shared their non-heteronormative sexuality may be met with fear, suspicion, and distrust, as he observed and displayed in his course (Johnson, 2017; Rhoads, 1994). Paul explained:

So, I looked at the other students in the room from various locations in the South and economic backgrounds at all male institution discussing a queer narrative and I wanted to know who would say what. Just to see how they discuss that content, like some were like blatantly negative responses to the content of that piece or that book or that article we read. I think if I recall correctly, they couldn't understand why the professor would put that in the curriculum when it is a part of the conversation, right? Oh, I think the name of the course was Black Masculinities. Yeah, that's what it was called. That was the name of the course. And so, you know, when you think of masculinity, do you think of queerness?

Paul implicitly pointed out that there were very little opportunities for conversations about how gender norms influence sexuality or sexual identity in classroom spaces. The 19- and 20-year-old males who took the Black Masculinities elective course assumed that a course about masculinity would only address issues of masculinity, manhood, or patriarchy in the Black community without discussing gender fluidity of sexuality. By including LGBT literature and opting not to disregard the possible presence of Quare males in the classroom, the instructor provided a space where students could make the connections that exist between racial, gender, and sexual identity through discussion and think beyond messages that they have heard from families, communities, and academic institutions. Scholars have suggested that HBCUs must intentionally structure conversations and provide forums where individuals from diverse communities can learn from their differences to build mutually respectful interactions (Mobley & Johnson, 2015). As for those persons in the Black Masculinities course, it provided a space where those discussions allowed the voices of students who self-identified as Quare male to be heard, if they so desired to disclose. The nuances of the discussion stuck with Paul and caused him to self-reflect about how performance of masculinities looks different for various peers. He mentioned:

Not necessarily all the time, but I think that course helped to shape people's understanding, like this idea of Black masculinity and masculinities is varying and queerness should be discussed.

Right? And you start to notice and understand some things clearly. Like, the football player might not look the same as the band person. It might not look the same as the debate team or the student government association people. Yeah, you get to see masculinity on its stage. And sometimes that can be super aggressive and homophobic

and a lot of other things, it can be a lot of different things. Like all the qualities, like there are so many varying qualities of masculinity that you would see kind of played out on a daily basis.

Paul's interview highlighted how conservative attitudes at HBCUs are perceived by Quare males in the academic environment. In a study of 300 heterosexual college students, Browlee et al. (2005) found that more than 50% of students had homophobic attitudes towards LGBT students. These attitudes have made it challenging for Quare males to reconcile their sexual identities in academic environments and could hinder the coming-out process (Garvey et al., 2019; Kirby, 2011). Knowing that oppressions are intersected and intertwined, those attitudes towards Quare students sometimes prevent what could be valued discussions of understanding gender and sexuality through a racial lens (Higginbotham, 1992; Kumashiro, 2001a). Paul later explained the weaknesses, such as the lack of intersectional conversations about race, gender, and sexuality, and the strengths, such as the rich discussions about race that he perceived in the formal curriculum. Having discussions on the socially constructed phenomena of manhood and masculinities, Quare males and their heterosexual peers would be able to deconstruct the sociohistorical and cultural influences and how social identities play an instrumental role in the construction of manhood (Dancy, 2012; Higginbotham, 1992; hooks, 2004; Travers; 2018). For example, by having discussions about how enslavement shaped Black masculinity with labels such as boy or uncle as an oppressive tool because of the perceived sexual and social threat to the dominant White culture allows space to deconstruct and better understand why masculinity is performed in such a way in the Black community (Collins, 2005; Connell, 1995; Higginbotham, 1992; hooks, 2004). Through alignment, aggression, and religious practices in a safe space for enslaved Blacks, religion has been used to reinforce patriarchal masculinity and homophobia through interactions and sermons and continues to this day.

Understanding that formal curriculum impacts the experiences of the Quare males, it is

essential that curricula and courses that are offered address issues of race, gender, and sexuality and deconstruct messages received by Queer males and other students. This was apparent to Paul when discussing how masculinity was performed by persons from different geographical areas and various social associations, such as athletes, band members, and the like, as he learned in the Black Masculinities class. Then Paul continued to provide examples of that same formal curriculum that was offered by his HBCU. He mentioned the following:

So, the weaknesses of the formal curriculum in terms of sexuality...hmmmm. Specifically, for the Black Masculinities course, it had us understanding how masculinity looks when you add sexual orientation in the discussion. But I don't think it was infused enough into the conversation because it was and remains a very taboo subject which I don't think it has to be. Cause it's all about understanding other human beings and not learning about something does not make you something. Which I think is a flaw sometimes in formal curriculum and particularly at my HBCU.

You know, there were no gender or queer studies departments, but there were some electives. Luckily, my degree plan left room for choice, like the liberal arts part of the curriculum that you kind of take in, like you're primarily taking your first two years or so leaves you some room to, like, have some elective courses. And that's when I elected to take Black Masculinities, even though it wasn't a part of a Gender Studies curriculum, it was in the English Department. There were a few classes on sexuality scattered throughout the curriculum, but more were available at a neighboring all female HBCU. If I had more flexibility of electives and time, I think I would have taken one of them at the all-female HBCU.

Paul's discussion of the courses that were offered and conversations around sexuality provides insight into the lack of access to courses and lack of dialogue around sexuality at his HBCU. By not having a Queer Studies Department and only offering a few courses on sexuality, Paul's HBCU failed to create inclusive intellectual spaces and expand on course curricula that could engage students on pertinent issues that should be addressed about race, gender, and sexuality (Mobley & Johnson, 2015). Adopting literature from authors such as James Baldwin, Langston Hughes, and Audre Lorde would provide some spaces that challenge and renegotiate heteronormative notions of masculinity, sexuality, and race, as well as open dialogue on conservation of what it means to be a Queer male in the broader context (Mobley & Johnson,



2015).

### **Your Messages, My Gay Trauma**

However, some Quare males were not ready or able to have open conversations about masculinity, sexuality, and race. Nigel's discourse was no surprise to me because Quare males regularly hear offensive comments and experience unfair treatment (Garvey et al., 2019; Gortmaker & Brown, 2006). Garvey et al. (2019) suggested that Quare students, like Nigel, often render themselves invisible within HBCU spaces instead of coming out, which could cause more viability as well as vulnerability. In an attempt to seek acceptance while evading harm, stereotypes, and negative messages about his Quare identity, Nigel disclosed during his interviews that he did not care about combating homophobia or learning more about his sexuality in an academic setting because of the conservative heteronormative classroom spaces.

#### **Nigel**

To illustrate this point, Nigel felt that he was not in space to receive or offer his perspective on the matter. When asked, he said:

I had courses that talked about identity and sexual orientation, but again, at the time I wasn't being rude with myself. So even when those topics were represented in the curriculum, I didn't engage with them. I sat quietly in class. I didn't pay attention to it and I was like, no. I thought one or two things are going to happen. Either if I speak out on it, I would automatically be identified because I wasn't going to speak against myself. So, then I would have to speak in favor of what the topic might have been an offering to gather insight about. So, like I just sat quietly, I didn't talk much about it.

Well, I think with the racial identity and prepared me with the sensitivities and awareness of being a Black male in America, whereas, again, because I didn't engage in investing, that's not saying that my HBCU really every gave me the opportunity to, I just never engage in investing in the few courses or opportunities that talked about sexuality. So, although it might've been present and available in certain ways at times, I never fully engaged. But I think even outside of that, the immediate offerings of my HBCU, of what they gave in terms of the coursework, I did not think the college created an environment that was welcoming of various sexual identities.

Nigel's perspective gave me an opportunity to interrogate how other Quare males

internalize homophobic messages and their experiences and continue to hide in plain sight, even though space have been created for inclusivity and dialogue around sexuality. I believe that some of Nigel's fear was not only associated with disclosing his Quare identity, but also concerned about being outed by others. Earlier in this chapter, Nigel mentioned that the ways in which one is perceived on HBCU campuses is key to accessing resources, such as memberships to clubs and organizations, including fraternities. Understanding that disclosure is a personal process that shapes external context, Nigel felt being out was not a privilege or an attainable outcome for him. Staying in the closet, Nigel knew that he would not situate himself outside the dominant cultural "codes of heteronormativity or disrupt the binaries of normalcy in social institutions and structures" at his HBCU and jeopardize his opportunity to access those academic spaces associated with the informal curriculum (Butler, 2004; Dilley, 2005; Johnson & Henderson, Luhmann, 1998; Means & Jaeger, 2013; Morris, 1998; Terney & Dilley, 1998). Acknowledging that his HBCU sometimes provided formal curriculum spaces that have conversations about race, gender, and sexuality intersectionality, Nigel was very aware of the social conservatism existing on both of the HBCU campuses that he attended and the other HBCUs, and that conservatism is usually accompanied by social practices that attempt to regulate performance of gender and sexuality and eradicate sexual diversity (Coleman, 2016).

In understanding messages from family, community, and academic environment, Nigel felt that his academic environment reflected the larger Black community as a whole, from which some conversations about gender and sexuality were not normalized. He then reflected on being closeted and how conversations about sexuality made him feel:

So, you have young kids now like in their teens "who are doing coming-out videos or YouTube." That was not the way back in 2010 when I was in college. Guys are more open about it, now. And on the opposite side of that, that people are more fluid, that you can say your gay girls, may still be interested. So, it's just, it's a different context now where it's like, you know, people might, especially in the Black community where I think

there is a certain type of code of behavior that they look for it and whether you're straight or gay, you follow that code of behavior. It gets you respect and things you need. You know what I'm saying? So, it's like, where it's like I'm talking about the lines of masculinity and how you represent yourself. Right? Like what are those terms they often say off to say, like she's female-presenting, male-presenting, or cis-presenting and, yeah, I think that's real, I think it's the way you presented and represent yourself. So that was, to some degree, that you were accepted or gave you different ways to navigate the space.

For Nigel, the HBCU environment, and the messages transmitted through its members and family and community, influenced his performance of gender and sexual behaviors on campus (D'Urso et al., 2007; Ferguson et al., 2006; Johnson, 2017). Nigel assumed that visibility of his sexual identity would lead to vulnerability for breaking the codes of behavior.

Moradi et al. (2010) posited that Quare males experience tension with identity disclosure and reverence to their culture, family, and community connections due to social norms or codes of behavior. Villana et al. (2016) contended that identity disclosure affected the experiences of Quare males due to their cultural values of community inclusion, which likely necessitates nuanced constructions of masculinity and privilege on college campuses. Prioritizing his racial and gender identities, Nigel was able to assimilate into his academic environment and gained social and academic acceptance. By choosing social and academic acceptance and inclusion on campus, Nigel did not truly develop his Quare identity while in college and still struggles with it today.

Nigel associated his experiences at an HBCU to being depressing, lonely, and traumatizing. In the next excerpt from his interview, Nigel acknowledged some of the implications of hiding in plain sight during his tenure at his HBCUs. When reflecting on some of his experiences at his HBCUs, Nigel regrettably stated:

I think it didn't help me in a moment because if anything it was the climate that made me suppress it more. Although the topic was available, it was my perception of the climate that it wasn't okay to talk freely. It wasn't appropriate for me to engage in that way without me being connected to the conversation in a way that would then draw negative attention to myself.

And I'm saying that to say in moments when I might've been talking about sexuality, I had opportunities to talk about sexuality. And of course, that might've been primarily focused on it. It was my perception that they didn't have the tools or space. Like it wasn't safe, I didn't perceive it to be safe for me. Like really, I am just learning at the age of thirty-four what it means to be vulnerable. So, imagine having someone who was not comfortable with their identity and didn't know how to be vulnerable and having to navigate a space. Because when you talk about issues like that, you have to be willing to reveal, to take a stand under the light for people to see everything, the blemishes, all of it. You know what I'm saying? And it takes a great deal of courage.

This is trauma! You know! Trauma is not always caused by beating you upside your head. Sometimes psychological abuse is verbal and other times itself inflected for fear of being rejected or not accepted by someone. I mean I am Black and gay. And when someone you hear people talk negatively about gays and gay bash. It was hard to digest. That's psychological abuse caused by others and caused by yourself. You know, you're trying, you're trying to fake it with a particular person or others. But then at the same time, you are fallen apart inside and then you go home and I feel terrible because someone's been sitting next to you just bashing you. And it's supposed to be your best friend.

Nigel's perspective of his experiences brought me back to the preface to this study, where I wrote that Gay Shame was the "apprehension of disclosing or embracing your identity for fear of not being socially accepted." By avoiding or not engaging in conversation about sexuality, Nigel attempted to avoid feeling shame about his Quare identity. He internalized his Gay Shame to the point that he has been traumatized by messages of homophobia, fear of rejections, and/ or physical harm. Moreover, at age 34, he is still implicated by those messages of homophobia, masculinity, and maleness. Like myself, Nigel's goal has been to cope by achieving in social and academic environments. For Nigel, achieving access to heteronormative spaces, clubs, and organizations would be a form of dealing with his Gay Shame and the trauma caused by messages received from family and community.

### **Conclusion**

Taking on the experiences of the Quare males during the interview process was very difficult without rehashing some of my own. After one interview when I completed my

reflection, I almost had a breakdown. Like the Quare males in this study, I realized that my Gay Shame has also caused trauma for me. The themes of access and trauma have been key factors in how we navigate academic spaces. Our experiences were promulgated by who we wanted to be or expected to be, instead of who we actually were. We missed opportunities to develop organic relationships with our peers and others in an informal educational setting. We internalized messages of homophobia, masculinity, and maleness to the degree that we hid in plain sight to obtain heteronormative privileges such as access to positions of power. However, peer mentoring opportunities from other out Quare males, whether other students, faculty, or staff, were missed, and then we were sent out into the world to figure it out on our own. When we internalized those messages repeatedly, they tell us that it is deviant, unnatural, or unsafe to explore or speak about our Quare identity. In addition, those conversations and exploration of the Quare identity were not superficial or surface level, even when prompted. The data from this chapter are discussed in more detail in the final chapter.

## Chapter 6: IMPLICATIONS, REFLECTION, AND CONCLUSION

### **Introduction**

As HBCUs continue to shape the lives of our Black youth through rich Black cultural experiences and academia, this study's focus on exploring the experiences prior to and in those HBCUs spaces provides educators, administrators, and staff with some insight into the challenges that some students feel while attending. Historically, HBCUs have been on "the forefront of prominently championing controversial issues in black communities and within American society" as a whole (Mobley & Johnson, 2015, p. 79). However, recently, Quare students have been faced with many challenges at HBCUs due to non-acceptance, conservative religious affiliations, and beliefs and homophobic attitudes that exist in those spaces. By exploring the experiences and challenges, this study examined the intersection and overlapping of identity categories to reveal complex, subtle, and diffuse ways in which access, privilege, and power operate to render Quare males silenced and invisible at HBCU (Tomlinson, 2013)—and this may impact academic success and cause long-term trauma. I posit that the experiences of Quare males are best understood within the context of the power dynamics embedded in different social identity categories such as Black, male, and gay.

To understand power dynamics accurately, I drew from Queer of Color epistemologies that addressed the shifting and performance of gender, sexual identity, and race, and used findings from the interviews of the five Quare males to explore their experiences prior to and while attending an HBCU. By focusing on the commonality of a lived experience and describing the nature of the particular phenomenon of their experiences (Creswell, 2013), I was able to answer the two following research questions for this study:

- What are the academic and social experiences of Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCUs?
- How do Quare males who attend and/or attended an HBCU interpret or understand their experiences with curriculum?

In exploring those research questions, I found that several themes emerged from the data.

Some of those major themes were as follows (also see Appendix B):

- Importance of Parental and Community Messages,
- Gender Performance,
- Hiding in Plain Sight,
- Access and Privilege, and
- Trauma.

### **Further Discussion about the Data**

In this study, I found that all of the Quare males learned how to navigate in heteronormative spaces, regardless of the space. This navigation of spaces I referred to as hiding in plain sight. I intentionally used the term *hiding in plain sight* because the metaphor “in the closet” does not properly represent how the participants saw themselves. Ross (2007) argued that “in the closet” applies when there is no acknowledgment of sexual identity. However, all the Quare males felt there no need for private acknowledgment from their family because some Southern Black people do not have open conversations about sexuality (Johnson, 2001, 2005, 2009; Omi & Winant; 2014). As Paul mentioned in his interview, “we just don’t have those conversations.” As I reflected on Paul’s interviews, I thought about when I disclosed my sexuality to mom. She simply stated, “*I always knew!*” I was so annoyed because I had internalized homophobic messages from my family for over 25 years at that point and carried

around so much self-hate and shame. Some of the comments about me and the names that I was called were, at times, belittling, debilitating, and traumatizing. I felt as if I had wasted too many years hiding in plain sight and negotiating my identity when it was obvious that some of my family and community were aware of my sexual identity and had already nonverbally accepted me as Quare.

Presenting primarily their racial and gender identities, the Quare males in this study, like myself, have internalized messages about homophobia, such as it is deviant and an unacceptable identity marker that has caused them often to dissociate with their Quare identity (Johnson, 2005). Additionally, by employing their racial identity and performing maleness and masculinity, the Quare males were able to internalize the Quare identity as a defense mechanism to receive acceptance and access to heteronormative spaces (Ford, 2007). For example, Nigel and Lauren were able to access the informal curriculum and join school organizations such as Student Government Associations (SGA) and school newspapers, while I was able to join a fraternity. Although some queer scholars would argue that being out is more beneficial to Quare males due to less stress (Downs, 2012), the Quare males minimized stress, harassment, and bullying by the ways in which they navigated spaces and were allowed heterosexual privilege. By hiding in plain sight with this heterosexual privilege, the Quare males' identity was not assumed as the only aspect of their lives; they did not have to worry about coming out or choose between their Quare or racial identity (Johnson, 2005). Quare males, such as those in this study, managed to negotiate heteronormative spaces successfully and were able to be affirmed in their community, schools, and religious spaces simply by hiding in plain sight. Building on the body of knowledge of how Quares from the South navigate heteronormative spaces, this study adds that HBCUs spaces are not exempt from other spaces in the South. Some Quare males have some of the same challenges



in those spaces that they had in their communities; other Quare males are successfully navigating those spaces by learning to hide in plain sight (Bartone, 2017).

Hiding in plain sight offers a viable option instead of coming out as well as opportunities for access for Quare males/ It teaches them about their heteronormative privilege at HBCUs and in the Black community, and how it is used to achieve social and academic success. Offering a different way of experiencing the world, the Quare males in this study were sexually ambiguous<sup>1</sup> in heteronormative spaces. A concept that is similar to racially ambiguous, sexually ambiguous is the idea that a person's sexual identity is not evident or recognizable when in heteronormative spaces. I specify in heteronormative spaces because this study was limited to that scope of HBCUs which I argue is a heteronormative space (Garvey et al., 2018; Lewis & Ericksen, 2016).

The analysis of the data in this study also suggest/ed that we should rethink what we consider trauma from Quare males. Most research on gay trauma has focused on how physical violence or verbal harassment have traumatized Quare males and others in the LGBT community (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009). However, the data suggested that homophobic messages from family, community, and academic environments such as HBCUs are just as impactful and, although subtle, have inflicted trauma on Quare males. During the development phase of our lives when we start having same-sex desires, Quare males routinely received messages that being Quare is unacceptable and deviant behavior, particularly for Black males. As Quare males, it is common during that phase of becoming and knowing ourselves that we deny our attraction to the same sex and attempt to convince ourselves and others that we are heterosexual (Downs, 2012). Coping in silence and hiding in plain sight with Gay Shame were common themes for the males in this

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<sup>1</sup> Racially ambiguous means that one's race is unidentifiable and hard to define.

study and myself. Although we have been silent, we have manifested our issues with our Quare identity in various ways as follows:

- DaQuan, who chose to bully other Quare males and avoided spaces where his sexuality would be found out.
- Paul and Nigel, who decided to acclimate to HBCU campus life without disclosing their sexuality to gain access to the school newspaper and a fraternal organization.
- Lauren, who decided to explore his sexual desire in safe spaces outside of his HBCU, family, and community.
- Xavier, who chose to return home to finish his collegial studies.
- And I, who joined a fraternity and enlisted in the military to assimilate to the dominant culture.

Understanding the implications of the Quare males' experiences in this study, I urge educators to intentionally disrupt the silence and invisibility in their students and the curriculum at HBCUs and other higher education institutions to prevent discourses of bullying, hypermasculine behaviors, apprehension of identity disclosure, and long-term trauma that have been inflicted on students.

### **Overview of Implications and Conclusions**

The implications that are offered in this chapter build on the notions of socialization and messages from family and communities, impacting the ways in which Quare males see themselves. The findings offer insight into how they chose to navigate HBCU spaces due to those internalized messages. Through the commonality of experiences of the five Quare males, I used a Quare of Color framework and intersectionality as analytical tools to understand how the Quare males understood and interpreted the curricula in those HBCU spaces. Being afraid to

disclose their sexual identity, all of the Quare males equated their lived experiences with both the informal and formal curricula to be non-accepting, non-inclusive, and homophobic. By hiding in plain sight and compartmentalizing their sexual identity, Paul, Nigel, Lauren, and DaQuan were allowed access and privilege to social and academic spaces, where they were intended and assumed to be occupied by their heterosexual peers, could excel in leadership roles in the SGA and newspaper, foster positive relationships with heterosexual friends, and/or join a fraternity. However, that is not the experiences of some Quare males. In implications and conclusions that are presented on the next pages, I respond to the findings by offering recommendations to families and communities as well as research, policies, and practices to accommodate the needs of the Quare males in the study and others who attend/attended an HBCU.

### **Implications for Curriculum and Practice: Black Parents and Communities**

This study suggested that parental and community beliefs about race and patriarchal norms impact how family and community see and influence ideologies about gender roles and the sexuality of Quare males. All the Quare males in this study indicated when explaining their experiences that they received messages of non-acceptance from their parents and community. These ideologies included notions of appropriate performances of masculinity and maleness in the proper spaces. Research has shown that the parental support infrastructure has not kept up with these societal changes (Brown, 2005; Feinstein et al., 2018). For example, during their socialization process growing up, the Quare males learned from family and communities that aligning with Black patriarchal masculinity allowed them acceptance and/or affirmation, unlike their effeminate Quare male peers (Brown, 2005). Some Quare males feel they are presented with the ultimatum of choosing either our sexual identity or Blackness—they do not coexist (Brown, 2005). In this study, the Quare males provided examples of Black patriarchal

masculinity, such as Black men should be providers, shoot guns, and chase or objectify women. By focusing on how messages have traumatized and impacted the experiences of their Quare male children, families and communities should think about gender with the interconnections of societal structures and norms. Parents and the Black community should acknowledge that Black masculinity is not a stagnant monolith and does influence how gender performance and sexuality are perceived (Connell, 1995; Garvey et al., 2018; Omi & Winant, 2014). Understanding that gender and sexuality are fluid and not one-dimensional, they should explore different ways of how they see, perform, and expect others to perform gender. Accepting masculinity and manhood as a continuum, Black families and communities should not allow patriarchal beliefs and pop culture to define, conceptualize, and interpret their own sense of masculinity and manhood (Goodwill et al., 2019).

For parents and communities, this process begins with becoming critically aware of the messages they receive and send to their Quare male children. By raising awareness of gendered and homophobic messages, families and communities heighten awareness and critical consciousness of the world and the power structures that shape it (Styslinger et al., 2019). Styslinger et al. argued that critical consciousness allows the space where we notice incongruities, contradictions, and oppressions in our societal structures. In doing so, families and communities would better understand how social categories shape experiences and embed power structures that mold social and material life. Moreover, when considering the combination of race, gender, and sexual orientation, critical consciousness allows Black families and communities to deconstruct the ways in which Black males are represented in popular culture from television, music, and social media (Goodwill et al., 2019). Consuming more than 33 hours of television and even more hours on social media, Black Americans are exposed to stereotypes

that depict Black men as violent, criminal, and hypersexual, thus informing gender expectations and performances (Collins, 2004; Goodwill et al., 2019; hooks, 2004). It is important that Black families and communities think about the messages received from the media; deconstruct the ways in which Black men are represented; and know that the power of words, names, and labels cannot be taken lightly to ensure their Quare males are not implicated by those messages.

In order to do so, Black families and communities should acknowledge messages that they receive and send and, through critical reflection, converse about the ways in which their experiences have shaped perceptions and biases to their Quare male children (Styslinger et al., 2019). I suggest that these conversations be led by the parents because Quare males engage and reflect critically on these aspects of race, gender, and sexuality at a young age due to messages from Black parents, communities, and others (Coles-Ritchie & Smith, 2017), and they are afraid to initiate those discussions. This will help their Quare male children become more self-aware and self-reflective, instead of perceiving their sexual identity through their gender identity (Johnson, 2005, 2008). Having conversations about the essentialness of gender, Quare males learn that doing gender creates differences between male and female, shapes dynamics of power, and influences how sexuality is perceived (Omi & Winant, 2014; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Imposing these conversations on Quare males helps them understand their experiences during the socialization process within the context of the power dynamics embedded in different social identity categories. These conversations with Quare males should start with faith-based organizations and teacher education programs. By approaching conversations about race, gender, and sexuality with faith-based organizations, teacher professional development, and teacher education programs, the senders of some of the messages, such as parents and the Black community, are made more aware of their discourses. Receivers of those messages have had

exposure to affirming messages from the curriculum in their academic environments from more inclusive educators who work in /Black communities.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice: Faith-based Organizations**

Earlier in this study, I mentioned that the academic literature asserted that spirituality serves as a lens through which Black college students, including Quare males, define and understand identity. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Black church influences not only how Quare males perceive themselves, but it also influenced how they navigate heteronormative spaces prior to and during college and impact their HBCU experiences (Lenning, 2017). In this study, all the Quare males mentioned that religion played a formative role in how they felt about their gender and sexual identities, such as the importance of aligning with patriarchal ideologies of masculinity and the deviance of gay sex, regardless of their religious affiliation. For example, Paul, Xavier, Nigel, and Lauren, who are Christian, mentioned apprehension about their sexual identity due to religious messages, while DaQuan, a Muslim, added that “sometimes I feared for my life” in his photo elicitation interview. Causing him to dissociate and latch out at peer Quare males, DaQuan’s religious affiliation influenced alienate his own needs as long as he identified with Islam due to patriarchal ideologies (El-Tayeb, 2012).

Faith-based organizations provide ready access to social support networks (Berkman & Glass 2000; House et al., 1982; Hummer et al., 1999; Pingel & Bauermeister, 2018). Therefore, parents, community, and academic institutions should draw on religious institutions as a source of social capital to alleviate adverse messages and homophobia witnessed in their communities, resulting in improved experience of Quare males (Kim & Kawachi. 2006; Pingel & Bauermeister, 2018). Understanding discursive spaces such as faith-based organizations, temples, mosques, and so on, are sites of knowledge production (Rodriguez, 2016), faith-based

organizations have thus been sites of that focus on family and community from a patriarchal perspective (El-Tayeb, 2012; Harper & Gasman, 1008; Mobley & Johnson, 2015; Parker et al., 1991).

Adopting a Professional Learning Community (PLC) approach would allow families, community centers, K-12 schools, and HBCUs to focus on increased awareness of the deconstruction of messages. It would privilege and promote knowledge production on the experiences of Quare males that would support changes in both family and community socialization and curricula and pedagogical improvement (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Guskey, 2002; Spillane & Louis, 2002; Styslinger et al., 2019). Typically used as a collaborative model to improve teaching practices and student learning, PLCs for this purpose should have community buy-in, inclusive membership, and mutual trust, respect, and support. Some strategies for combating homophobia with PLCs should include (Blackburn & Clark, 2011):

- Deconstruct homophobic messages to include those associated with social and gender norms on ways we interrogate as well as police masculinity and maleness.
- Have courageous conversations about gender and sexuality that ground the lived experiences of Quare males.
- Promote and actively display allies to the Quare community through mentorship groups and messages both verbally and through social media.
- Through seminars, social, and academic events both in the community and schools, broaden the notions of family, maleness, masculinity, and homophobia.

With these strategies, family and communities are positioned to better understand the experiences of their Quare males and support their needs.

## **Implications for Policy: Community Outreach**

In this section of the implications and conclusion chapter, I offer recommendations for policies and practices of HBCUs to better accommodate the needs and enhance the experiences of Quare males. Acknowledging that most HBCUs are located in Black communities, and they are not separated from or are monolithic in those communities, I recommend that HBCUs employ stronger policies that extend beyond cultural enrichment and focuses on race, voter registration campaigns, corporate partnerships, and community health programs that require and promote more community engagement and outreach to a diversity of communities, including Quares. Adapting to the needs and changes in society such as ideologies about sexuality, HBCUs would be able to engage with their communities through mutually beneficial and reciprocal relationships (Adams, 2014). Through more community engagement and outreach that focus on the inclusivity of the intersection of identities, HBCUs, families, and community organizations can address social issues, such as racism, misogyny, and homophobia, in their communities. By having better community engagement and outreach, the HBCU/community relationship would be a way to work with various groups towards a common cause, such as combating issues related to race, gender, and sexuality (Adams, 2014). HBCUs should partner with pre-existing organizations such as LGBT and community centers to educate others on the impact of homophobic messages on youth. In a study of Promotoras Comunitarias of Planned Parenthood Los Angeles, which teaches Familias Diversas workshop series in their communities, Marquez (2019) found that community outreach workers saw the need to educate parents and community members on queer identity and topics while discussing health issues in both schools and communities. The Promotoras of the Familias Diveras workshops used their knowledge and



understanding of Latin(x) queer communities to educate others about how they can serve as allies and advocates of Quare persons in their community. By creating a culturally relevant curriculum that used their knowledge and understanding of the community, the Promotoras were able to engage families and community members in activities and conversations on how the types of oppression queer Latin(x) persons experience are interconnected with their own uniquely heterosexual Latin(x) experiences of oppression and those of other marginalized communities (Marquez, 2019). The Promotoras of Familias Diversas offer an example of curriculum development and pedagogical practice used to support and engage their communities and address intersections of oppression.

Like the Promotoras, most HBCUs already have knowledge and understanding of the Black communities where they are located. By developing community service projects and/or initiatives, HBCUs can collaborate with organizations in the community to expose students and faculty to the experiences of Quare males in their communities. Community-based initiatives provides opportunities for cisgender, heterosexual college students to gain an understanding of the experiences of their Quare peers. Additionally, faculty will learn the importance of discussions around race, gender, and sexuality and the interconnectedness of those identities that exacerbate power dynamics in both social and educational systems impacting the experiences of Quare males (Creighton, 2006).

### **Implications for Policy: K-12 Policies and Curriculum**

While work is being done with family and communities, Anti-Bullying policies should be updated to address concerns about non-compliance of both administrators and teachers in the K-12 academic setting. If the goal is to improve Quare males' lived experiences, then discussions around harassment and bullying should be had prior to them stepping on a college campus

(Connolly, 2012). Policies should also address administrators who harass or bully teachers. By addressing this policy, K-12 academic institutions allow space where both LGBT teachers and male teachers could discuss issues of race, gender, and sexuality without being reprimanded for incorporating Quare literatures into their courses. Understanding that teaching is often looked at as gendered, males, regardless of sexuality, are ostracized for being too sensitive to students, showing care, or displaying non-normative gender behaviors (Jackson, 2007). K-12 academic environments should be spaces where teachers can show care and come out, if it is their desire. If the school is not a safe setting that protects gender and sexual identity for LGBT teachers to come out, straight teachers can be a support system for those Quare males in their classes. Openly gay teachers send messages to students that they are not alone and do not have to be alone—messages which would follow them to college.

An additional implication for K-12 academic environments would be the implementation of sociology classes throughout the curricula. Sociology courses provide a platform to discuss the lived experiences of Quare males and raise awareness of important topics such as race, gender, sexuality, and other identity markers. The sociology courses taken at milestones of their K-12 academic pursuits help to prepare for an HBCU and also allow students to make more informed decisions when socializing with a diverse group of people such as Quare males. Paul amplified the impact of his peers taking a Black Masculinities course with him. He stated that it opened up discussion specifically of how masculinity is performed and how it impacts gender. Although such courses are offered at some high schools, very few students have access to those more advanced high school Sociology courses, while other courses only teach to standardized tests. Also, most of the Sociology courses that have been taught in high school were often taught by teachers with little training in sociology (DeCesare, 2005; Lashbrook, 2001). This does a

great injustice to most of our students, including Quare males, in a K-12 academic setting. By adding a sociology track to Teacher Education programs, K-12 would have better prepared teachers who can discuss identity markers in various contexts. In a study that assessed the effectiveness of a Sociology course, Kessler et al. (2008) argued that “Sociology courses provide opportunities to extend and deepen analytic skills critical to successful transitions from high school to postsecondary education and beyond” (p. 346). The researchers found the “applicability and relevancy of the topics discussed in sociology, coupled with the opportunities this discipline offers for increasing students’ literacy skills, analytical abilities, and critical problem solving” (p. 346). With the appropriate Teacher Education programs, preservice teachers would be better prepared to discuss topics such as Black masculinities, gender fluidity, and the like, while also raising awareness of Quare males’ experiences while preparing the students with the skills they need for their HBCUs.

### **Implications for Policy: HBCU Curriculum**

By learning from experiences during community outreach and interactions with Quare males, such as those in this study, who may be in the community, teachers and administrators at HBCUs should use knowledge obtained from community engagement projects, PLCs, and/or initiatives to make recommendations and changes to curricula at their HBCUs. Earlier in this study, I mentioned that most of the 106 HBCUs do not have Quare resources or curricula that focus on gender and sexuality. With many PWIs making changes to policies that accommodate or meet the needs of LGBT students, it is important that HBCUs also align with and create a campus climate or yard culture that is more accepting of Quare males (Harris, 2003; Lenning, 2017; Strayhorn et al., 2008). Also promoting that tolerance is not enough, HBCUs should have a campus climate where Black homosexual males will experience acceptance or affirmation

(Harris, 2003; Lenning, 2017). By ensuring that the curriculum reflects the diversity of the Black community, HBCUs would continue to retain and recruit more students, regardless of their gender or sexual identity. For example, I recommend that some of the following suggestions be considered to help facilitate more inclusive informal and formal curricula at HBCUs for Quare males (Harris, 2003):

- HBCUs should create African American Studies and Queer Studies Departments and curricula.
- Although HBCUs have rich conversations about race, they should include intersectional conversations on how race impacts how we conceptualize gender and sexuality in Black communities. Faculty and staff must include Quare narratives and issues in curriculum. Basically, the scope of racial literacy should be extended to include gender and sexuality.
- HBCUs should require a course within the first 2 years that focuses on diversity, difference, or sexuality, addressing the intersections of identities of students to ensure the retention and inclusivity of Quare students as well as the knowledge and understanding of differences with heterosexual students in both informal and formal curricula.
- Promote the hiring and openness of Quare faculty and staff in the academic environment to provide relatability to Quare males and facilitate mentorship with those students.

This approach to curriculum development provides an environment in which heterosexual students, out or non-closeted Quare males, and Quare males who are hiding in plain sight have an option to take courses on gender and sexuality, and explore and better understand

intersections of their multiple identities. In a post-Trump Era when many social changes and racial and sexual oppression and discrimination are everyday conversations, HBCUs should acknowledge that strategies, such as inclusive informal and formal curricula, are needed to foster feelings of the acceptance or affirmation of Quare males with multiple salient identities on HBCU campuses; this is needed especially, with more Quare persons acknowledging their sexual desires (Woodford et al., 2012). Research has shown through an examination of overlapping identity categories that intersectionality helps reveal the complex, subtle, and diffuse ways in which power operates and influences the experiences of Quare males who attend or attended an HBCU (Tomlinson, 2013). Understanding the importance of intersectionality and inclusivity in curriculum may also be a way to curtail prejudice, harbor tolerance, and build commitment to understanding the experiences of Quare males and preparing young adults to become competent future citizens who will be more open to difference and welcoming to various identities in our society (Garvey et al., 2018; Harris, 2003; Tener, 1999).

To make effective changes in the curriculum, HBCUs should focus teacher education preservice programs on /an awareness of Quare students to include the ideal of hiding in plain sight and provide for both preservice teachers and instructors on methods for teaching at the intersections of identities, such as race, gender, and sexuality. By focusing on inclusion of curriculum courses and pedagogical methods, HBCUs build a knowledge base that helps preservice teachers understand messaging and ideologies around how Quareness is perceived, how Quare identity is formed, what affects the identity development process, and how identity issues affect students' experiences prior to going into classrooms to teach (Garvey et al., 2018; Oliver, 2016; Woods & Harbeck, 1992). By introducing novice teachers to issues that Quare males endured earlier in their careers, HBCUs can better prepare their preservice teachers with

instructional methods that can support Quare students who are out or hiding in plain sight with the types of curricula that could deconstruct homophobic messages; affirm their multiplicity of identities such as race, gender, and sexuality; and enhance their experiences in educational spaces. Additionally, preservice teachers would be informed that more identities are present in the classroom environment, although they are not being performed. Knowing and understanding that those identities may exist in classroom environments allow the opportunity for those preservice teachers to shape their curricula and pedagogy in ways to Quare racial literacy and use culturally relevant education approaches in day-to-day classroom teaching. Quare males encountering inclusive classrooms with better prepared teachers would find fewer curricula that are culturally incongruent (McCready, 2013) and do not acknowledge their multiplicity of identities, such as race, gender, and sexuality.

### **Implications for Practice: Quaring Racial Literacy**

Understanding that racial and social injustice in the United States cannot be separated from what happens in the classroom, HBCU curricula outside of teacher education programs should also address racial and social justice issues in ways that include gender and sexuality in the classroom. Employing social justice teaching practices in the curricula, HBCU faculty should provide classroom environments and other academic spaces that function to cultivate students' abilities to question, deconstruct, and then reconstruct knowledge in the interest of emancipation (Leonardo, 2004). Although I provided data from Paul's, Nigel's, and Lauren's interviews about the inclusion of race in the formal curriculum, all the Quare males in this study expressed the racial and cultural richness and focus on racial literacy that they experienced in and out of the classroom while attending their HBCUs.

By focusing on racial literacy, HBCU students will be able to discuss the social construction of race and examine the harmful effects of racism and racial stereotypes that affect the Black community (Omi & Winant, 1986). Scholars of racial literacy offer approaches to developing racial literacy in ways that move classroom discussions toward constructive conversations about race and antiracist actions in schools (Rogers & Mosely, 2006; Sealey-Ruiz, 2013; Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2011; Skerret, 2011). By raising awareness and consciousness through bold pedagogical approaches to race through tackling stereotypes and taboos, HBCU faculty should extend the scope of racial literacy to include discussions about gender and sexuality in classrooms (Ayers & Ayers, 2014; Baldwin, 1963; Collins, 1998; Johnson, 2005; Patton, 2011). In other words, HBCUs should Quare racial literacy to include discussions of Quare persons such as Angela Davis, Malcolm X, Marsha P. Johnson, bell hooks, Bessie Smith, Queen Latifah, Lil Nas X, among many others. Being defined as a skill and practice in which individuals examine literature, social media, and social interactions, a Quared approach to racial literacy disrupts current practices that reproduce social, cultural, moral, gendered, and sexualized injustices (Bell, 1997; National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE], 2010; Sealey-Ruiz, 2013).

By expanding the scope of how HBCUs approach racial literacy, race is not interpreted as a monolith; rather, gender and sexual identity and experiences are validated and deconstructed in classroom discussions. By opening and sustaining dialogue about race, gender, and sexuality, HBCU students are not surprised when discussions of the intersections of identities such as race, genders and sexuality happen in courses, such as Black Masculinities, as Paul explained in his interview. By quaring racial literacy, HBCU faculty are able to discuss with their students and with each other the implications of race and the negative effects of racism so that students can

critically analyze power relations/dynamics and social constructions. This would radically transform their realities and deconstruct messages and labels that impact the experiences of Quare males (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994; Leistyna, 2009; Lewis & Ericksen, 2016; Oakes et al., 2012; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). In practice, quaring racial literacy allows HBCU faculty to encourage students to examine, discuss, challenge, and take anti-racist, anti-misogynistic, and anti-homophobic actions in situations where their Quare male peers are affected and all students are affirmed in the classroom and on the yard (Gilroy, 1990; Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2015). In his journal article “Seeking Sanctuary: (Re)claiming the Power as Places of Back Refuge,” Mobley (2017) emphasized that Blackness must be seen, empowered, and embraced intersectionally on HBCU campuses, and these institutions must shed the intra-racial respectability politics that often permeate their campuses. Mobley posited that in order to focus on deconstructing and having more discussion on intersections of identities, HBCUs and the Black community should shed light on the nuances and complexities of identity in formidable spaces and reiterate their lived experiences. Specifically, he suggests that HBCU communities should be advocates for and support all Black identities and their intersections to include social class, sexuality, gender, religion, etc. Quaring Racial Literacy allows HBCUs to capitalize on their unique abilities to serve as spaces of refuge for Quare males (Mobley, 2017).

### **Implications for Practice: Culturally Relevant Education**

In addition to quaring racial literacy in HBCU courses to explore and disrupt the social construction of race, gender, and sexuality, HBCU faculty should employ culturally relevant education (CRE) pedagogical practices to affirm the intersection of identities of its students. CRE is a conceptual framework built on the works of Gloria Ladson-Billings and Geneva Gay, who focused on teaching and pedagogy for social justice (Aronson & Laughter, 2020; Gay,



2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally relevant education connects students' cultural references to academic skills and concepts, builds on the knowledges and cultural assets students bring with them into the classroom, engages students in critical reflection about their own lives and societies, and uses inclusive curricula and activities to support analysis of all the cultures and identities represented (Aronson & Laughter, 2020; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Through facilitating students' cultural competence, CRE explicitly explores and unmask oppressive systems through the critique of discourses of power that are embedded in racial, gender, and sexuality stereotypes in the classroom, on the yard, and in the dominant society as a whole.

By situating cultures, truth-telling histories, perspectives, specific oppressions, lived experiences, and realities of Quare males, CRE provides HBCU faculty with a tool to promote the voices of silenced Quare males and a platform that combats the misconceptions of their heterosexual peers (Knight-Manuel & Marciano, 2018; Moll et al., 1992; Yosso, 2005). In a study that explored the perspectives of educators as they identified and negotiated their understandings of the lived experiences of Black and Latino male students, Knight-Manuel and Marciano (2018) argued that negative messages and portrayals of Black and Latino young men permeate the news media and popular culture, and thus impact the experiences of students in the classroom. They posit/ed that those stereotypes, and others like them, negatively influence educators' perceptions of diverse students, regardless of the educators' racial or cultural background. Suggesting that the CRE tenets of academic achievement, cultural competency, and critical consciousness should be adopted in culturally diverse classrooms (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995), Knight-Manuel and Marciano (2018) argued that educators are able to name stereotypes and negative assumptions that students encounter, and shift classroom discussions away from damaging stereotypes that exist in society over to positive, reaffirming discussions

that build on student strengths and culture to include the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality.

To address attitudes and perceptions about negative stereotypes about Quare males in an HBCU context, I recommend that faculty reimagine or rethink classroom practices to challenge students and include more critical and uncomfortable discussions on the intersections of identities (Kumashiro, 2001a). Starting with the community outreach and engagement of HBCU administrators, faculty, and staff, and quaring racial literacy in the curriculum of students, HBCUs are positioned to debunk singular notions of cultural diversity and create more equitable educational practices that affirm and are inclusive of students (like Nigel), who would feel safe and able to participate in classroom discussions about race, gender, and sexuality (Knight-Manuel & Marciano, 2018), instead of internalizing the class discussions among peers and friends as trauma. In doing so, HBCU faculty must be iterative or reflective in their classroom practices and address biases and behaviors of both themselves and the others in the class. Understanding that Quare males may feel dissociated due to non-inclusive curricula and a hyper-surveillance of their performance of masculinity and maleness (Ayers & Ayers, 2014), HBCU faculty have to cultivate a safe space for discussion and be prepared to allow the students' culture and experiences to be voices without exploitation, inflicting non-acceptance and causing further trauma due to the histories of oppressions that are often reified in the classroom. HBCU faculty must help heterosexual students overcome their homophobia and guide Quare males to understand that being open about their sexuality is counterproductive to their other identities, such as race and gender (Adams, 2014; Aronson & Laughter, 2020; Jones, 2001).

### **Implications for Research**

This study implies and recommends that there is a need for research of Quare males using more theoretical frameworks and analyzing tools such as a Quare of Color epistemology and/or intersectionality lens. Ensuring that multiple social identities are simultaneously explored or investigated will center identities such as gender and sexuality and uproot race and heteronormativity. In this study, I propose that quaring racial literacy or quaring the curriculum are starts for HBCUs to disrupt both racial and heterosexism messages that all the Quare males in this study have experienced. Evident from the interviews with the Quare males, HBCUs, like other minority-serving institutions, focus more on race than gender and sexual orientation. HBCUs were founded to promote culture and combat racial oppression and racism. Understandably, HBCUs have curricula with racial and cultural richness through racial literacy. However, there is minimal to no research available to gain an understanding and knowledge of extending racial literacy to include gender and sexuality.

I also slightly shift to suggest three CRE tenets—academic achievement, cultural competency, and critical consciousness—that have been proven to work in a higher education classroom setting. Acknowledging that there has not been much research on sexuality, Brockenbrough (2016) was able to situate the observed informal curriculum from a local community center to make it applicable for the classroom. Researchers should continue to examine the effectiveness of CRE in various contexts and posit them in the classroom. By understanding how to enhance their students' experiences in the classroom by using their cultural backgrounds to activate prior knowledge, introduce new content, relate their experiences to other Quare males, and establish connections with their own lives, researchers can provide more data on the effectiveness of using CRE in HBCU courses that Quare racial literacy. This is key because when students do not have a space for sharing such experiences, they internalize them,

and this can affect their learning and cause long-term trauma, as both Paul and Nigel mentioned during their interviews.

### **Researcher's Reflection**

When I started to think around the idea of exploring the experiences of Quare males 6 years ago, my goal was to make meaning of their experiences in a way that the interplay of their racial, gender, and sexual identities was represented. By allowing the space for voice, I was able to recruit five Quare males to share their experiences before and while attending an HBCU. By providing glimpses of the Quare males' stories in this study, I was able to represent similar experiences of other Quare males who attend/attended HBCUs. Acknowledging that each of these experiences are specific to the individual when analyzed closely, I was able to paint a unique picture of how messages have informed Quare males and how those Quare males have learned to navigate heteronormative spaces, such as HBCU campuses. Freely providing the spectrum of their experiences, Paul, DaQuan, Lauren, Nigel, and Xavier expressed themselves in a relatable way. It was easy for them, since we also shared similar identities markers and HBCU experiences. Although we shared relatable experiences during our talks, interviews, and periods of reflection, I found myself in spaces of discomfort. At times, I was irritable, annoyed, sad, happy, closeted, out, and, most of all, emotional. Messages! Messages of masculinity, maleness, and homophobia were resuscitated, and the ways in which I experienced my HBCU were ever so present in my mind. By understanding how those messages impacted my ways of being and knowing, the Quare males and I relived some of our positive and negative experiences along with suppressed trauma. Through the five Quare males' experiences in this study, messaging from family, community, and other social institutions such as schools has made such an impact on Quare males' lives that we will be dealing with it every day for the rest of our lives. In a

recent song and video released on social named “Montero,” Lil Nas X pushed back against the messages of masculinity, maleness, and fear that are often reified with family, community, and social media to maintain social power dynamics. Performing and speaking to gender/sexual taboos and messages that made him harbor and internalize negative feelings and beliefs about his own sexual identity, Lil Nas X offered insight into how powerful some messages can be to Quare males’ psyche. He reified one of my arguments in this study—how those messages force Quare males to hide in plain sight. After much backlash and bullying on social media about his song and video, Lil Nas X released the following tweet:



That anger and trauma that Lil Nas X displayed in that tweet were very familiar to other Quare males, including Paul, Nigel, DaQuan, Xavier, Lauren, and myself. As many as 10 years younger than the Quare males in this study, Lil Nas X’s experiences validated that those messages continue to have a meaningful impact to young adults, and I need to continue to do this type of research today.

### **Conclusion**

The oppression of Quare males have had both overt and covert side effects in their families, community, and education systems such as HBCUs. With these oppressions, Quare males such as Paul, Nigel, Xavier, DaQuan, and Lauren have learned that hiding in plain sight allows access and privileges that they may not have normally obtained if they navigated them as “outed” Quare males. This study provides researchers, educators, HBCUs and others with the

opportunity to understand better why and how Quare males navigate HBCU spaces. Although leaving for new cities and educational environments offered those Quare males in this study a chance to embrace varying identities such as Quare, they chose to align with social norms for socialization and better prepare themselves for success in their heteronormative and religious conservative spaces, such as an HBCU. However, the Quare males have found that the ways in which they chose to navigate the HBCU spaces have impacted them in the long term and do not effect change in other Quare male youth, such as Lil Nas X. Using an intersectional lens, this study provided insight into those experiences. It has also provided researchers and educators with the opportunity to reflect and effect change that can impact Quare males who attend/attended an HBCU.

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## Appendix A

### Biographical Interview Questions

How do you identify yourself in terms of race?

How do you identify yourself in terms of sexuality?

Have you always identified this way?

Tell me about your family and your family life?

When did you acknowledge your present sexual orientation identification?

What are your experiences with family regarding your racial and sexuality identity? Please explain both negative and positives experiences.

How do you think your family has impacted the way you look at your racial and sexual identity?

What are your experiences with community or church regarding your sexuality? Please explain both negative and positives experiences.

Did you have difficulties as Quare male in secondary education? Explain why or why not.

Tell me about your perception of yourself compared to other students at your K-12 schools? Community? Church?

Did you have any issues of harassment because of your race or sexuality prior to attending a HBCU?

Did you participate in any clubs or organizations in secondary education?

Did you participate in any clubs or organizations designated as Quare friendly? Explain why or why not.

What value did a safe space add to your success in an academic environment, if any?

In your opinion, what structures or forms of support are needed to support the academic success when you were in elementary, junior high and high school?

What curriculum or pedagogical practices do you think teachers in elementary, junior high and high school implemented or could have implemented in the classroom to support the academic success?

What recommendations would you have for new teachers with or without context specific training be more accepting of Quare students in an academic environment?

How do you think the worldwide net has affected your experiences in education prior to attending your HBCU?

### **HBCU Experience with Curriculum Interview Questions**

Why did you make the decision to attend an HBCU?

What do you think of the vision of the HBCU you chose and how do you think it aligns with your identities?

What was your major? Explain why you chose that major.

How do you think the HBCU formal curriculum (i.e. general, core and elective courses) prepared you for your career?

How did the HBCU formal curriculum (i.e., general, core and elective courses) prepare you for life as it relates to your racial and sexual identity?

What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses to formal curriculum (i.e., general, core, and elective courses) as it relates to race and sexuality?

Do you think the formal curriculum had an impact on your experiences at an HBCU?

Were there an African American and Queer studies department at your HBCU? Did you take courses in this department? Or would you have taken courses in the department? What type of courses were you or would you be interested in? Explain your answer.

What was a typical day for you at your HBCU?

Tell me about your perception of yourself compared to other students at your HBCU?

What is your perception on diversity of students based on race and sexual orientation?

Do you think the informal curriculum had an impact on your experiences at an HBCU?

Did you join any student social organizations while attending an HBCU? Why or why not?

If you joined a student social organization, please tell me about the organization.

Did you pledge a fraternity while attending an HBCU? Why or why not?

Was there a Quare culture at your school? What did out Quare male students do? Hang out?

Were you associated with Quare organizations or out Quare groups? Why or why not.

How was the dynamics of the Quare group or groups? Did it change when non Quares were around? Why or why not.

If you were not associated with Quare groups, do you feel they existed and were identifiable? Please explain your answer.

### **Photo Elicitation Interview Questions**

**Photograph #1-** A photo that reminds you of an unhappy moment at HBCU.

- Tell me about this photograph as it relates to an experience at an HBCU.

Probes:

- Why did you pick this photograph to discuss today and not another?
- Do you care to talk about your unhappy moment? What caused it?
- Is there a relationship between your social and schooling experiences at an HBCU? Is it related to your race or sexuality?

**Photograph #2-** A photo that reminds you of a happy moment at HBCU.

- Tell me about this photograph as it relates to an experience at an HBCU.

Probes:

- Why did you pick this photograph to discuss today and not another?
- Do you care to talk about your happy moment? What caused it?
- Is there a relationship between your social and schooling experiences at an HBCU? Is it related to your race or sexuality?

**Photograph #3-** A photo based on the conversations we have had to date.

- Tell me about this photograph as it relates to you and/ or experience at an HBCU.

Probes:

- Why did you pick this photograph to discuss today and not another?
- Do you care to talk about how you were feeling when you took this photo? What caused it?
- Is there a relationship between your social and schooling experiences at an HBCU? Is it related to your race or sexuality?
- If you could go back in time and talk to the person in that picture, what would you tell him?

## Artifact Interview Questions

**Artifact #1-** An artifact that reminds you of an unhappy moment at HBCU.

- Tell me about this artifact as it relates to an experience at an HBCU.

Probes:

- Why did you pick this artifact to discuss today and not another?
- Do you care to talk about your unhappy moment? What caused it?
- Is there a relationship between your social and schooling experiences at an HBCU? Is it related to your race or sexuality?

**Artifact #2-** An artifact that reminds you of a happy moment at HBCU.

- Tell me about this artifact as it relates to an experience at an HBCU.

Probes:

- Why did you pick this photograph artifact to discuss today and not another?
- Do you care to talk about your happy moment? What caused it?
- Is there a relationship between your social and schooling experiences at an HBCU? Is it related to your race or sexuality?

**Artifact #3-** An artifact based on the conversations we have had to date.

- Tell me about this artifact as it relates to you and/ or experience at an HBCU.

Probes:

- Why did you pick this artifact to discuss today and not another?
- Do you care to talk about how you were feeling about this artifact? What caused it?
- Is there a relationship between your social and schooling experiences at an HBCU? Is it related to your race or sexuality?
- If you could go back in time and talk to the person in that picture, what would you tell him?

## Appendix B

### Emerging Themes from Study

Major Themes	Subthemes	Evidence of Theme
Importance of Parental and Community Messages (Families and Communities Making Meaning)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Black Masculinity</li> <li>- Gender Roles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Males belong outside/ women in the house (Kitchen)</li> <li>- Males should marry and take care of family</li> <li>- Sexuality is not talked about (Graduation Photo)</li> <li>- Messages to younger self</li> </ul>
Gender Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internalization of an expectation of performing Masculinity/Maleness</li> <li>- Suppressing of Quare identity in heteronormative spaces</li> <li>- Peer bullying</li> <li>- HBCU accomplishments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Objectify women</li> <li>- Play sports</li> <li>- Shoot guns</li> <li>- Pushing Quare male's downstairs</li> <li>- Non-acknowledgment of other Quare males on campus</li> <li>- Fighting other Quare males</li> </ul>
Hiding in Plain Sight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inability to come out</li> <li>- Choosing non-disclosure</li> <li>- HBCU accomplishments</li> <li>- Friendships</li> <li>- Gay off campus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Take on leadership identity</li> <li>- Nerd identity</li> <li>- Activist identity</li> <li>- Bully Quare Peers</li> <li>- Graduation Photo (I survived)</li> <li>- (Graduation Photo)Peer relationships</li> </ul>
Access and Privilege	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Campus socialization</li> <li>- Alternate safe spaces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- SGA positions</li> <li>- Class leadership positions</li> <li>- Pledge Fraternity</li> <li>- School newspaper positions</li> </ul>
Trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Avoidance</li> <li>- Self-reflection</li> <li>- Family, community, and peer attitudes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- On campus associations</li> <li>- Feared discussion about gender/sexuality in classrooms</li> </ul>