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Isaiah L. Jones
Social and Academic Experiences of
AAGBM who Graduate from
HBCUs

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the social and academic experiences of African American gay and bisexual men (AAGBM) who graduated from historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) from 2008 – 2013; and strives to answer the question: What are the social and academic experience(s) of AAGBM who attended HBCUs? The study's specific aims were to describe: (1) How AAGBM describe their social and academic experiences, positively or negatively, on an HBCU campus; and (2) How HBCUs can help facilitate satisfying social and academic experiences for its AAGBM. These aims were addressed by asking seven open-ended questions to ten (10) AAGBM who graduated from HBCUs from 2008-2013. This study found that participants had diverse social and academic experiences. Overall, participants described having positive experiences at the HBCUs they attended. Some participants chose not to reveal their sexuality while attending undergraduate college and therefore did not experience social or academic challenges related to sexuality. A few participants, once their sexuality was revealed, felt isolation from their heterosexual classmates, and one participant became the "go to" person for advice and answers. The majority of the participants reported that their sexuality did not impact their academic experiences. Several recommendations were offered to improve the social and academic experiences of AAGBM at HBCUs.

**SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF AAGBM WHO GRADUATE FROM
HBCUS**

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

Isaiah L. Jones
Smith College School for Social Work
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
2014

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

James Baldwin once said, “Love takes off the masks we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within.” In reflection of this statement, I would like to thank the individuals whose love has allowed me to flourish academically and personally. First, I would like to thank my parents, Demetrius and Glenda Jones, who have supported me in every way imaginable. I would like to thank my three older brothers, Demetrius, Sam, and D’sean for encouraging me to reach my goals. I would like to acknowledge my amazing partner, Taylor Green, for being supportive throughout the entire research process and showing me what true love means. I am also very appreciative of the support received from my extended family members and close friends.

I would like to give special recognition to those individuals who made this thesis a meaningful experience. Thanks to the participants who were willing to share their stories with such compassion and courage. And finally to my thesis advisor, Dr. Narviar C. Barker, thank you for being supportive, resourceful and understanding throughout this process. With your assistance this thesis has meaning and relevance.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Research pertaining to African American gay and bisexual men (AAGBM) has largely focused on the sexual risk behaviors of men who have sex with men (MSM). There are few studies that focus on the lived experiences of AAGBM in college and even fewer that focus on those who attended a historically black college or university (HBCU). While it has only been in recent years that some AAGBM have become more comfortable in their disclosure on college campuses, many have remained relatively invisible. This may be attributed to societal attitudes towards gender-different men, to educational institutions unintentionally having practices that oppress this student population, or a combination thereof.

Attending college can be an exciting, yet threatening, experience for all students as they learn what is expected of them academically, socially, personally and professionally. It also is a period of the life cycle that is associated with identity development, growth and change in one's attitudes and behaviors. For gender-different students, and especially AAGBM, there are extra layers of burden. Creating an identity and or exhibiting a behavior that is considered by many as socially deviant, abnormal and risky can lead to added stress, secrecy, and detachment; as AAGBM learn to balance this personality development with their academic endeavors.

While student services and College Counseling Centers do find ways to engage AAGBM, the general college population does not have the same interaction. This can result in AAGBM feeling isolated, discriminated against, or pushed out. These emotions can be even greater HBCU campuses because of cultural attitudes, religious beliefs, and institutional homophobia.

There is an unspoken assumption that higher educational institutions are more accepting and open to the plight of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals. We have seen increased literature in the last decade on gender differences on college and university campuses (Abes & Jones 2004; Allen, 1995; Brown, Clark, Gortmaker & Robinson-Keilig, 2004; Ellis & High, 2004; Sanlo, Rankin & Schoenberg, 2002; and Waldo, 1998), yet there remains little to no data on the plight of AAGBM on college campuses and especially on HBCU campuses. The needs of these students and resources that may be required are minimally visible on many campuses, and often force these students to create a support system on their own. Campus environments seem to fail AAGBM in many ways, especially in the areas of ‘alternative’ sexualities or lifestyles of non-heterosexual individuals within curricula (D’Augelli, 1993), few mentor figure relationships, or open discussions about sexual minorities and points of view. One would think that AAGBM on HBCU campuses may not face as many challenges as they would on majority college campuses, but this may not be the case. Their social and academic experiences on HBCU campuses have not been fully explored.

This study explores the social and academic experiences of AAGBM who graduated from an HBCU from 2008 – 2013; and strives to answer the question: What are the social and academic experience(s) of AAGBM who attended HBCUs? The study’s specific aims are to describe: (1) How AAGBM describe their social and academic experiences, positively or negatively, on an HBCU campus; and (2) How HBCUs can help facilitate satisfying social and academic experiences for its AAGBM. These aims were addressed by seven research questions. Study participants were asked: (1) What was your educational and social experience(s) as an AAGBM attending an HBCU? (2) What was your interaction as an AAGBM with the HBCU student body? (3) What was your interaction as an AAGBM with the university staff and

faculty? (4) How did being AAGBM affect your academic experience, i.e., challenges, services, resources; interaction with professors; (5) Did you experience bias or discrimination because of being AAGBM, i.e., risk, personal identity, stigma; (6) What were obstacles as an AAGBM, if any, in attending an HBCU? and (7) What ways did you find support as an AAGBM attending an HBCU, and what recommendations would you offer HBCUs?

Definition of Terms

Basic terms used throughout this research are defined as follows. Definitions are taken from Merriam-Webster and can be found at www.merriam-webster.com

African American: an American of African, and especially of black African descent

Gay: primarily refers to a homosexual person or the trait of being homosexual

Homosexual: of, relating to, or characterized by a tendency to direct sexual desire toward another of the same sex

Bisexual: possessing characters of both sexes; of, relating to, or characterized by a tendency to direct sexual desire toward both sexes; of, relating to, or involving both sexes

LGBT: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender

AAGBM African American Gay Bisexual Men

Significance of Study

Information gathered from this study will shed light on the unique experience of AAGBM and issues that they may face while pursuing a degree at HBCUs. This information will help not only college counselors at HBCUs have a better understanding of how to meet the unique social and academic needs of this vulnerable population, but also will extend to AAGBM at other institutions of higher education. There has been much research done on marginalized students to explore their experiences in higher education compared to their majority peers. Unfortunately, African American gay men have been overlooked as a marginalized population on higher educational campuses. This gap in the literature suggests little attention given to AAGBM, and the lack of services for, and recognition of sexual minority students in institutions of higher education, particularly on HBCU campuses. Further research in this area is necessary to assist social workers in expanding their cultural competence and inform social justice work related to diversity and inclusion among all academic settings.

The purpose of this research was to explore the social and academic experiences of AAGBM who graduated from an HBCU, and how these experiences impact AAGBM. This research also attempted to provide some strategies and to identify resources and needs of AAGBM who attend college so as to improve their social and academic experiences. Data from this study also may produce best practices for working with this population group.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations to this study. First, this study only explored social and academic experiences of AAGBM who attended HBCUs, and intentionally excluded majority institutions. Second, data on heterosexual students' perceptions towards AAGBM was not included. Third, this study used a self-identification process to create a purposeful sample that

limits the diversity within the selected sample. Fourth, the use of purposeful and convenience sampling does not allow for the findings to be generalizable to all AAGBM. Last, findings from this study may be different from AAGBM on majority institutions of higher education.

Chapter Organization

The remaining chapters provide a review of related literature, a discussion of methodology used in the study, presentation of study results and data analysis, and finally the conclusions and implications for future research.

The Review of Literature (Chapter II) describes HBCUs in context and examines the literature concerning African American men in college, gay men in college, and African American gay and bisexual men in college. The Methodology Chapter (Chapter III) provides information on the study population, study design and procedures. Chapter IV (Findings) is an analysis of the data; and lastly, Chapter V (Discussion) provides a summary of the research and recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a context for exploring the social and academic experiences of AAGBM who graduated from an HBCU from 2008 – 2013. The study's specific aims were to describe: (1) How AAGBM described their social and academic experiences, positively or negatively, on an HBCU campus; and (2) How HBCUs can help facilitate satisfying social and academic experiences for its AAGBM?

This chapter is divided into three sections: (a) a description of HBCUs and their benefits for African American students; (b) a presentation of empirical research related to African American men in college, gay men in college, and African American gay and bisexual men in college; and (c) a summary of the literature review on AAGBM in college, with explanation for the need for this study.

HBCUs and African American Education

Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are commonly described as institutions of higher education in the United States that were established before 1964 with the intention of serving the African American community and descendants of former slaves. According to Brown (1999) (as cited in Brown, Donahoo, & Bertrand, 2001), HBCUs were funded by religious organizations, philanthropists, and government agencies. These institutions were deemed necessary to educate African Americans during a time when they were not allowed to attend predominantly white colleges and universities (Bettez & Suggs, 2012).

Even in the 21st Century, HBCUs continue to provide educational opportunities to African American students. According to the U.S. Secretary of Education, there are more than 7,000 institutions of higher education in the United States; and 106 of these institutions are HBCUs. In 2010 HBCUs awarded a sixth of all bachelors and professional degrees earned by African Americans in the United States (U.S Department of Education, 2013). According to the National Science Foundation, in the late 1970s over 40% of African American science and engineering doctorate recipients received their baccalaureate degrees from HBCUs (Burrelli, Rapoport, & Lehming, 2008). While HBCUs represent only 3% of institutions of higher education the United States, they play a pivotal role in degree attainment for African American students, graduate nearly 20% of all African Americans students who receive undergraduate degrees; and more than 50% of African American professionals and public school teachers (“About historically Black,” n.d.).

HBCU’s have the unique legacy of educating and addressing the needs of African American students, and have demonstrated proficiency in the graduation rates of its students (Harris, 2012). This caveat may address why some African American students choose to attend HBCU’s over predominantly white institutions (PWIs). Research has found that African American students who attend HBCUs receive more social support (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Negga, Applewhite, & Livingston, 2007) and have more social engagement on their university campus compared to African American students attending PWIs (Allen, 1992).

African American students attending HBCUs also report having greater academic achievement and inclusivity compared to African American students who attend PWIs (Allen, 1992). One theory to explain this lack of academic progress is that African American students are left out of the informal networks that help students to thrive academically and professionally

at PWIs (Fleming, 1984). Hurtado et al. (2011) reported that African American students have more contact with their professors, feel more supported by them and have more positive peer relationships at HBCUs. The academic climate at HBCUs also offer cultural affirmation and expose African American students to role models in their profession. Furthermore, African American students at HBCUs do not have to cope with assimilation and other collegiate pressures found in PWIs (Flowers, 2002).

African American Men in College

There is a gap between degree attainment among African American men, African American women and other groups. African American men reportedly have lower college attendance and performance in comparison to other groups (Holsendolph, 2005; Palmer & Maramba, 2011; Roach, 2001). According to the U.S Census Bureau (2012), in 2009, 2,889,000 African American students were enrolled in colleges in the United States. Of this total number, 37% were male students compared to 63% female. The fact that African American men fall behind in comparison to African American women is not unique to college, and mirrors educational gaps African American men experience during secondary stages of education (Davis, 2003). Some of the reasons quoted for poor collegiate attainment for African American men include financial support, reluctance to seek academic help, and home and neighborhood issues (Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009).

Even with this educational gap, several studies have focused on populations of African American men who attended college (Owens, Lacey, Rawls, & Holbert-Quince, 2010; Spurgeon, 2009). Several studies focus specifically on African American men who attend PWIs (Bonner, 1997; Harper, 2009; McClure, 2006). Findings from some of these studies show that African American men face some form of discrimination (Chao, Mallinckrodt, & Wei, 2012), racism

(Harper et al., 2011), and stereotyping and racial micro-aggressions when attending white institutions (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). In their qualitative study, Watkins, Green, Goodson, Guidry and Stanley (2007) found that racism, and considerations about acting “too black” or “too white” were common sources of stress for African American men who attended undergraduate and graduate school at PWIs.

While there are challenges in attending PWIs, some African American men have been successful at these institutions (Harper, 2005, 2008). What leads to success at these institutions are having access to necessary resources needed to attend and persist in college, having a mentor, and being resilient (Warde, 2008). Another major factor for African American men is receiving social support from same race peers (Harper, 2006). Membership in fraternities is one way African American men find support from same race peers on college campuses. Men who join fraternities reported feeling more connected to their campus, gaining more out of their college experience, and having increased their social connections during and after college (McClure, 2006). Comrade and brotherhood relationships expressed by many African American men seemed to help them face their daily challenges and stressors.

Social support also is found in organizations other than fraternities. Jackson (2012) investigated how a group of African American men belonging to an organization called Uplift and Progress (UP) promoted and enacted brotherhood on a predominantly white college campus. Jackson found that members of UP promoted brotherhood through conversation, participating in rituals, policing each other’s behaviors, and opening up with one another.

For some African American men, HBCUs may be the best place to receive social support. African American men at two HBCUs reported having a sense of shared experiences and the ability to unite with others through identity (Grande, Sherman, & Shaw-Ridley, 2013). In

addition to receiving support from peers, African American men reported feeling supported by faculty and administrators at HBCUs and seeing these individuals as mentors (Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Strayhorn's (2008) study found when African American men have supportive relationships, they are more likely to be satisfied with their college experience.

Gay Men in College

It is assumed that the college environment is more diverse and more accepting of sexual minorities; yet this may not be the reality for lesbian, gay and bisexual students. While some lesbian, gay and bisexual students report having a positive campus climate (Fine, 2011), satisfaction with interactions among staff and faculty (Garvey & Inkelas, 2012), and not experiencing harassment (Tetreault, Fette, Meidlinger, & Hope, 2013), others report hearing anti-gay remarks by peers and staff members (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Woodford, Howell, Silverschanz, & Yu, 2012), experiencing harassment, and being threatened by violence (D'Augelli, 1992; Katz-Wise, & Hyde, 2012). In fear of this type of treatment, sexual minorities are more likely to conceal their sexual orientation from others (Gortmaker, & Brown, 2006).

The college environment may be particularly hostile for gay men. Research has shown that heterosexuals hold the most negative attitudes toward gay men in comparison to lesbians (Herek, 2002). Specifically, heterosexual men have the most negative attitudes and sexual prejudice toward gay men (Falomir-Pichastor, Martínez, & Paterna, 2010; Herek, 1988; Herek & Capitanio, 1995; Yost & Thomas, 2012).

Similar trends in attitude toward gay men have been found in heterosexual college students (D'Augelli & Rose, 1990; Negy & Eisenman, 2005; Whitley, Childs, & Collins, 2011). Negative and homophobic views held by heterosexual male college students toward gay men have been associated with their own masculinity (Keiller, 2010; Theodore & Basow, 2000).

Keiller (2010) found that heterosexual male undergraduates who conformed to masculine norms were more likely to hold negative views toward gay men. Therefore when heterosexual men see men acting outside their masculine roles, they have difficulty supporting them.

Ross (1978) (as cited in Reynolds, 1989) found that gay men who are aware of the negative reactions others have towards them, are more likely to have more challenges with psychological adjustment compared to gay men who are unaware of these reactions. In addition, Rowen & Malcolm (2002) found that gay men in college who internalize homophobia are more likely to have lower self-esteem and self-concepts. Overall, gay men and other sexual minorities are more at risk for having mental health issues and having these issues impact their academic performance compared to heterosexual college students (Oswalt & Wyatt, 2011).

Despite the challenges gay men face in college, they are able to persevere on college campuses through their own support systems. These systems may include other sexual minorities and heterosexual allies (Stevens, 2004). Allies are individuals who are supportive of sexual minorities even though they do not identify as sexual minorities themselves. Allies not only are college students, but also professionals on college campuses (Ryan, Broad, Walsh, & Nutter, 2013). Additional sources of support may include counseling centers (Welch, 1996), and gay-straight-alliances (Heck, Lindquist, Stewart, Brennan, and Bryan, 2013).

African American Gay and Bisexual Men in College

While the majority of research pertaining to non- heterosexual African American men has focused on men who have sex with men (MSM) (Loue, Daugherty-Brownrigg, Heaphy, Mendez, & Sajatovic, 2012; Oster et al., 2011; Wohl et al., 2011), few studies focus on African American men in college who self-identify as gay or bisexual. Those studies that do examine this

population have largely focused on African American gay or bisexual men who attend PWIs (Bowleg, 2013; Goode-Cross, & Tager, 2011; Harris, 2003; Strayhorn and Mullins, 2012).

While attending white institutions, AAGBM may not feel fully accepted in African American or LGBT communities on campus. AAGBM have reported experiencing both homophobic attitudes and racism, and having a harder time finding social support from either group (Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011; Strayhorn and Mullins, 2012). In addition, AAGBM are discriminated against and stereotyped for their sexual orientation and racial identity (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009). This can lead AAGBM to feel more isolated than students who do not experience marginality on college campuses based on their race and sexual orientation.

Although AAGBM belong to two marginalized groups, race may be the more salient identity for students at PWIs. In a qualitative study, Goode-Cross & Tager (2011) found that racial identity was more salient compared to sexual orientation in creating social support for AAGBM; and that connecting with other African Americans was an important aspect of their persistence at PWIs. The fact that AAGBM at white institutions find race more salient is consistent with findings that race takes precedent over sexual orientation for AAGBM (Bowleg, 2013), and is confirmed when AAGBM describe themselves as Black first, then gay (Hunter, 2010).

In general, AAGBM are more likely to conceal their sexual orientation from others compared to other racial groups (Kennamer, Honnold, Bradford, & Hendricks, 2000). Concealment for AAGBM can be a tool for survival. Garner (2008) found four major themes related to how bisexual African American men cope with heterosexism and homophobia. Two of the four major themes included were being discrete about their sexuality and masking their

sexuality. Participants masked their sexuality by illustrating extreme masculinity, associating with other masculine men, and colluding with heterosexual hegemony.

Masking sexuality also is one way AAGBM remain accepted in the African American community, which is often assumed to be more homophobic than other racial groups.

Homophobia is most often associated with African Americans because of their religiosity and close affiliations to the “black church” (Harris, 2009; Hill, 2013; Ward, 2005). Some research findings supported the assumption that African Americans tend to have more negative views of gays and lesbians (Holland, Matthews, & Schott, 2013), while other studies show little to no differences (Herek, & Capitanio, 1995; Walch, Orlosky, Sinkkanen, & Stevens, 2010).

As educational centers with religious traditions, HBCUs also are viewed as homophobic institutions. Tyre (2010) found that lesbian and gay students reported their HBCU environments were hostile and unwelcoming toward homosexual lifestyles. These students attributed homophobia to culture, religious values and ignorance on HBCU campuses. After conducting interviews with 76 African American men from 12 HBCUs, Harper & Gasman (2008) found that participants reported there was institutional resistance to homosexuality by staff and faculty, invisibility of LGBT students, and a lack of dialogue about sexual orientation both within and external to the classroom. In addition, the creation of LGBT organizations were met with opposition on eight of the 12 HBCU campuses studied in Harper & Gasman’s research.

Not all HBCUs are resistant to embracing LGBT students. Some HBCUs make it a point to provide a more inclusive environment for gay students. According to the organization website for Campus Pride, 21% of HBCUs have active LGBT-specific organizations. Among these institutions are Morgan State University, Spelman College, and Dillard University (“The state of LGBT,” n.d.). Morehouse College, located in Atlanta, GA, has a gay-straight-alliance and offers

a course on Black LGBT culture and politics (Lee, 2013). In addition, Bowie State University is reported to be the first HBCU to open a LGBT resource center for LGBT students and their straight allies (Riley, 2012). While these are steps in the right direction, some AAGBM still are not comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation to others. For example, Patton (2011) found that AAGBM attending an HBCU were less likely to include sexual orientation when describing themselves, did not feel compelled to disclose their sexual orientation to others, and did not have high participation in LGBT organizations. Findings from this literature review reinforce the need for further, more in-depth exploration of the challenges faced by AAGBM on college campuses, and especially HBCUs.

Summary

This literature review provides a context for exploring the social and academic experiences of AAGBM who graduated from an HBCU from 2008 – 2013. This literature review first described HBCUs and their benefits for African American students, then presented research pertaining to African American men in college, gay men in college, and AAGBM in college. While there is plentiful research on African American men in college and gay men in college, few studies focus on AAGBM in college. Most of the studies that do focus on this population focus on MSM or AAGBM attending white institutions. The experiences of AAGBM attending HBCUs have not been fully examined. Thus, exploring the social and academic experiences of AAGBM who recently graduated from HBCUs is important to both AAGBM students and institutions that serve them. Findings from the current study provide insight for academic institutions on how to best serve AAGBM students, how to create a positive academic climate, and how to address the social and academic needs of all students on college campuses.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This study examined the social and academic experiences of AAGBM who graduated from an HBCU from 2008 – 2013; and asked the question: What are the social and academic experience(s) of AAGBM who attended HBCUs? The study's specific aims were to describe: (1) How do AAGBM describe their social and academic experiences, positively or negatively, on an HBCU campus; and (2) How HBCUs can help facilitate satisfying social and academic experiences for its AAGBM. These aims were addressed by seven research questions. Study participants were asked: (1) What was your educational and social experience(s) as an AAGBM attending an HBCU? (2) What was your interaction as an AAGBM with the HBCU student body? (3) What was your interaction as an AAGBM with the university staff and faculty? (4) How did being AAGBM affect your academic experience, i.e., challenges, services, resources; interaction with professors; (5) Did you experience bias or discrimination because of being AAGBM, i.e., risk, personal identity, stigma; (6) What were obstacles as an AAGBM, if any, in attending an HBCU? and (7) What ways did you find support as an AAGBM attending an HBCU and what recommendations would you offer HBCUs?

Research Design

Qualitative methods were used to conduct this study, specifically semi-structured interviews. Strengths of this methodology were its subjectivity and that it allowed AAGBM participants, the focused group, to speak about their unique experiences. As a result, detailed

accounts of a specific phenomenon were described. Qualitative methods do not require large study samples to produce adequate results. Limitations of this methodology however are: (1) the opportunity for researcher bias to impact data coding; (2) the research design does not allow results to be generalized to larger populations; and (3) hypotheses are difficult to test when utilizing this method.

Sample

Participants in this study included ten self-identified gay and bisexual African American men who graduated from an HBCU. All participants met the following criteria: graduated from an HBCU between the years 2008-2013; identified as male, gay or bisexual; identified as African American; voluntarily participated; were English speaking, and were over the age of 18.

Individuals who did not meet these criteria were excluded from the study. This specific criteria was selected for the following reasons: (1) African American gay and bisexual men often are overlooked in empirical research; (2) Research on this demographic largely has focused on men who have sex with men (MSM) and not on those who identify as gay or bisexual; (3) There are few studies that focus on black men who identify as gay or bisexual in college; and (4) Underrepresentation of studies on AAGBM who attended an HBCU. The current study addressed these gaps in the literature.

Data Collection

Participants were recruited using snowball sampling and gaining access to memberships of LGBT and gay groups. Snowball sampling is a special nonprobability method used when the desired sample population is rare, and when it may be difficult to locate respondents. This method relies heavily on referrals from initial subjects to generate additional subjects. Upon approval from the Smith College Institutional Review Board, flyers were posted in LGBT and

gay communities in Atlanta, Georgia including: Buckhead/West Midtown, Downtown, East Atlanta and the popular Midtown community; word-of-mouth with colleagues, peers, and students and asking them to forward information about the study to people who fit the required criteria. Lastly, blasts were posted on the researcher's personal Facebook page, along with the following Facebook social groups: HBCU Digest, HBCU Connect, and LGBT National Pan Hellenic Council.

A pre-screening telephone interview was conducted to ensure participant eligibility. Participants were screened based upon the required criteria, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. Upon meeting these criteria, two copies of the informed consent were mailed to the address of each participant. The participants read and signed both copies, keeping one copy for themselves and mailing the other to the researcher in a pre-stamped self-addressed envelope. After the informed consent was received, telephone interviews were scheduled. Participants were given a call-in number and a special access code password to a secure conference call line set up through freeconferencecall.com. Interviews lasted between 25-35 minutes. The interviews began with respondents being asked to first respond to demographic questions, followed by semi-structured interview questions. At the end of the interview, participants were given the opportunity to ask questions.

Protection of Confidentiality

To protect confidentiality, the names and signatures on the informed consent form were not connected to the recorded interviews; and participants were not asked to say their names on the recording. Phone interviews were conducted over a secure conference call line and passwords given by the researcher were required to access it. The interviews were transcribed in private only by the researcher. Confidentiality was further protected by not disclosing identifying

information or characteristics of the participants or the college they attended when reporting data. Participant names and identifying information were not used in reporting data. In addition, all research materials including recordings, transcriptions, analyses and consent/assent documents are stored in a secure location for three years according to federal regulations. In the event that materials are needed beyond this period, they will be kept secured until no longer needed, and then destroyed. All electronically stored data is password protected during the storage period, and only the researcher has this code.

Risks and Benefits of Participation

Benefits from participation in this research was that participants had the opportunity to gain new insight into their own social and academic experience as an AAGBM who successfully graduated from an HBCU; were able to acknowledge their own resilience, strengths, and vulnerabilities as an AAGBM; and were able to give voice to the lives of AAGBM living in a dominant college culture. In addition, AAGBM may have felt a sense of pride in contributing to research that can help others better understand AAGBM life circumstances. Participation in this study was not without risks. Participants may have experienced some distress when reflecting upon their experiences as an AAGBM on a HBCU campus. This was expected to be minimal but in the event that such feelings did occur, participants were given a list of free referrals if they chose to follow-up with a counselor following their interviews.

Data Analysis

The demographic data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. This analysis gave insight about the diversity of the sample and their age, sexual orientation, and whether they were out or not. The qualitative data was analyzed using content/theme analysis. This allowed the experiences of each participant to be compared to one another and grouped

together under larger themes relevant to each research question. The researcher transcribed all interviews into a database, carefully listening to each recording multiple times. The coding process included reading and highlighting key points of participant responses, then grouping the responses for each question in order to identify salient themes in participant experiences. Participant responses that best represented the identified themes are quoted in the results sections.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents findings in response to the research question: What are the social and academic experience(s) of AAGBM who attended HBCUs? The study's specific aims were to describe: (1) How do AAGBM describe their social and academic experiences, positively or negatively, on an HBCU campus; and (2) How HBCUs can help facilitate satisfying social and academic experiences for its AAGBM. Phone interviews were conducted with ten African American gay and bisexual men who graduated from HBCUs from 2008-2013. Demographic information was collected first and then participants answered questions about their social and academic experiences while attending an HBCU. All participants answered the following questions: (1) What was your educational and social experience(s) as an AAGBM attending an HBCU? (2) What was your interaction as an AAGBM with the HBCU student body? (3) What was your interaction as an AAGBM with the university staff and faculty? (4) How did being AAGBM affect your academic experience, i.e., challenges, services, resources; interaction with professors; (5) Did you experience bias or discrimination because of being AAGBM, i.e., risk, personal identity, stigma; (6) What were obstacles as an AAGBM, if any, in attending an HBCU? and (7) What ways did you find support as an AAGBM attending an HBCU and what recommendations would you offer HBCUs?

Demographic Data

A total of ten participants were included in this study. All participants identified as African American gay and bisexual men who graduated from an HBCU between 2008 and 2013. The ages of the participants ranged from 22 to 27 years old, the average age was 24 years. Seven participants (70%) identified as gay and three participants (30%) identified as bisexual. Three participants (30%) reported being out, three participants (30%) reported being somewhat out, and four participants (40%) reported not being out about their sexual orientation. Participants attended different colleges and universities from different regions of the United States.

Social and Academic Experiences

Participants were asked to describe their social and academic experiences as AAGBM at an HBCU. Sixty percent (n=6) of participants described their social and academic experiences positively. These participants made explicit statements, such as “I thoroughly enjoyed my time” and “I had a really good experience.” Thirty percent (n=3) of the participants did not describe their experiences positively or negatively, and one participant explicitly described having an “okay” experience. None of the participants made explicit statements about having negative social or academic experiences when answering this question. Similarities and differences in responses were further discussed.

Social experiences. While describing their social experiences, forty percent (n=4) participants discussed making friends while attending an HBCU. One participant stated, “Socially, it was also a great experience. I was very social and was able to make friends well and I knew how to make people laugh.” Thirty percent (n=3) of the participants reported meeting other gay and bisexual people. “Actually, I met a lot of other gay people at college, more than I

expected, I would say.” One participant described having a diverse social experience and being able to realize who he was in terms of his sexuality and individuality.

Socially, it was interesting I would say, mostly because of the fact that it was so diverse. There was always different ...like things ...to get into in terms of activities and events, on a personal/social level. It was interesting because I think I've gone through a lot of changes at school; and an HBCU I think is one of those institutions where you actually realize who you are as a person and where you want to be.

Another participant reported people remained open to him as an out gay man because he was masculine.

I found that people were still open and friendly as long as I stayed upon a certain medium with my masculinity. I saw for some friends—it was hard being more on the feminine side, but I didn't have much of a problem because I chose to be masculine along with my sexuality, so I actually had a really good experience.

Academic experiences. Fifty percent (n=5) of the participants described having positive academic experiences. One participant stated, “My educational experience wasn't that bad, it was pretty good. I felt like I learned a lot.” Another participant described how he was able to do well academically. “Academically, I was on the Dean’s list the majority of my time in college and I graduated with a 3.5 GPA.” A more detailed description was provided as another participant described loving his educational experience provided at the HBCU he attended.

My experience educationally, I loved it! I went to [University] and I think that was probably one of the best decisions I made in my independent

upbringing. I love the structure of the school and I loved the culture that it provided, especially for it being an HBCU. It showed me that there is so much diversity with being—you know—a black person trying to, I guess further themselves education wise.

Another student who enjoyed his academic experience discussed how he can use what he learned to assist the African American community-at-large.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time. I feel like I did receive a solid education, both academically and socially—in a sense of being aware of a deeper sense of obligation to my community... that being an African American community... and about ways I can use my education and the resources I had at my disposal to somehow uplift and impact my community.

Fifty percent (n=5) of the participants spoke of their educational experiences by stating that it was not impacted by their sexual orientation. One student stated, “In terms of me being gay, I didn’t really take that into consideration. That was not a standing point for me in terms of how I dealt with my professors.” Another student commented, “I don’t think my educational experience was too much affected by my sexual preference.”

Interactions with the Student Body

After describing their social and academic experiences, participants were asked to discuss their interactions with the HBCU student body. Participants provided a wide range of responses to this question, mainly discussing positive interactions, limited interactions, changes in interactions over time, and LGBT support.

Fifty percent (n=5) of the participants reported having a positive interaction with the student body. For example, one participant simply stated, “I had a good rapport with the student

body.” Other participants provided more details about their positive interactions. These responses typically included notions of feeling accepted by the student body. One participant discussed feeling accepted, yet wondered if that was because he was not out about his sexual orientation.

It wasn't abnormal. I didn't feel ostracized in anyway. I didn't feel excluded in anyway, so by in large—I mean I pretty much felt accepted. I felt like a regular student. Again I wasn't open about my sexuality, so I am not sure if that would of played a part in my interaction.

Another participant discussed feeling accepted by the student body, while being open about his sexual orientation as a gay male.

It was pretty cool. I think overall it was like a pretty welcoming university because when I was out—you know—I was like out, out. People's interactions or ...like people's responses to me—it wasn't like anything—it was never anything disrespectful. I don't think I have ever been in a situation at [University] where I actually felt like my sexuality was compromising my safety or who I was as a person at the institution, so I think my experience with the student body was pretty good.

Twenty percent (n=2) of the participants also reported having limited interactions with the student body. One participant, a bisexual who was not out, discussed having limited interaction with other sexual minority students because he was reserved about his sexual orientation.

I had very limited interaction. I was pretty much reserved. I only talked to about two people in that arena within the student body, so I was pretty much reserved about my sexual orientation while attending [University].

Forty percent (n=4) of the participants reported experiencing changes over time in terms of their interaction with the student body. Participants reported experiencing changes for various reasons. One participant described having fewer interactions with the student body after associating more with other sexual minority students.

Originally it was a typical reaction with students. As I became more involved with the homosexual side of the student body, I became more withdrawn from the student body as a whole and I guess more open to the homosexual side or demographic of the student body.

Another student reported academic responsibilities caused him to have fewer interactions with other students and that his sexual orientation was a positive factor concerning his interactions with his peers.

So I think my experience with the student body was pretty good. I mean at some point— because I got pretty involved with my books—I just kind of became a hermit, but when I was actually social on campus, I don't think my sexuality was an issue with anybody. If anything it made more people like me.

Two participants specifically mentioned LGBT supports when discussing their interactions with the student body. One participant reported interacting with students within a gay-straight-alliance at his school.

At my school they had a lot of programs for us like [GSA], the gay-lesbian-straight-coalition ... things of that magnitude. I basically jumped into those things for the social aspect, but it ended up helping me through like my whole school—my whole matriculation. A lot of the students were really accepting of me, so it helped out a lot, especially knowing that the student body was looking forward to helping gay and bisexual men like me.

Lastly, one student described his interactions with the student body in terms of being a resource for other students who wanted to learn more about the LGBT community.

I am the know it all, the person that a lot of people come to if they have questions about random things. I know all the hook ups, so I am very resourceful as well. As a gay man I was definitely the person you would want to come to if you had questions about the LGBT community or if you had things that you don't understand. I was the kind of person that you could talk to, who would inform you and educate you about some of these issues and educate you about some of these things, without doing so in a condescending manner.

Interactions with Faculty

Participants were asked to describe their interactions with the staff and faculty members at the HBCU they attended. Ninety percent (n=9) of the participants described having positive interactions with staff and faculty members. Overall, participants reported feeling supported academically and having good communication. Thirty percent (n=3) of the participants reported having no issues with staff and faculty members. Only one student did not reference having a

positive interaction. This student stated, “It [my sexuality] definitely could have been tolerated a little bit more.”

One participant acknowledged some staff and faculty were not that accepting, yet he still described having positive interactions with them.

The university staff and faculty were really, really nice. Even though that was a factor, knowing that some people aren't as accepting of it, they were still very helpful. I had a lot of tutors and a lot of the teachers always wanted to help, so that was always good.”

Thirty percent (n=3) of the participants reported having normal interactions with staff and faculty members and feeling that they were treated fairly. One student described his experience.

My interaction with the staff was no more frustrating than a heterosexual student. We all pretty much dealt with the same kind of frustration within the organizational structure, which anybody in undergrad can imagine. Registration issues, financial aid issues and all types of other things like that. I would say that I can't recall an instance where a professor or faculty member or administrative personnel or anyone at the institution was being intolerant or openly disrespectful of anyone whose sexual orientation was anything other than heterosexual.

Twenty percent (n=2) of the participants discussed how awareness of their sexual orientation had no relevance to their interactions with staff and faculty members. One participant actually described going on a trip with staff and faculty members who were aware of his sexual orientation.

I also had a really good experience with the staff and faculty. I actually had—the staff and faculty that did know about my sexuality—I had a really good experience. I actually went to China with my partner and some of the faculty from the school, so I had a really good experience. I didn't face any problems at all from the faculty.

The most interesting response came from a participant who described having a normal interaction with staff and faculty members, but also having one unique experience. The participant did not give much detail outside of stating, “It was a usual interaction except for one interaction with a faculty member that was of a sexual nature.”

Academic Experience

Participants were asked how being AABGM affected their academic experience. Seventy percent (n=7) of the participants reported that being AAGBM did not impact their academic experience at all and thirty percent (n=3) of the participants reported that being AABGM did have an impact on their academic experience. Participants who felt there was an impact on their academic experience identified different experiences from one another. One participant discussed how conflicts between his religion and sexual orientation caused him more stress.

Actually I will say it did for a minute. I came from a very religious background and I felt condemned at one point in my life. I was very stressed and— you know— with religious affiliations, sometimes that lifestyle is not accepted at all, but at one point I was struggling.

Another participant described challenges in terms of working with other students on academic assignments, but did not see any impact outside of that.

The only way it affected me was when I needed to partner up with certain people. Even though I am out, it's not that big of a—it's not noticeable for me. Like a lot of people don't really know unless they end up asking me whether or not I'm gay, so it really didn't change much. It seemed as though the fact that I am bisexual kind of helped because it like—it opened people's minds to want to learn more things and it also helped me learn more things too.

While the last participant reported that his academic experience was impacted, he mainly discussed how he was impacted socially.

I think it affected my academic experience as far as my social life because I would have to separate two groups— I guess— groups of friends I could not bring people around. That began to affect my interactions socially with people, so I think I began to lose some friends or whatever. I think I lost some friends in the process.

Discrimination

Participants were asked if they experienced discrimination while attending an HBCU. Forty percent (n=4) of the participants reported not experiencing discrimination at all. Two of these participants explained why they didn't experience discrimination. One stated, "No, because I wasn't out completely to everyone, I didn't experience any—uh yeah—I didn't experience anything." Another participant reported minimalizing bias. He stated, "No, but then you think the bias away. When you look at being at an HBCU, that bias kind of goes away in that arena. Everything is supposed to be on a level playing field— you know— because we are all the majority black."

Sixty percent (n=6) of the participants reported experiencing at least some discrimination and of these six, two reported extensive experiences. One participant who experienced extensive discrimination stated.

Yes, oh yeah. Even as great as the experience has been, I definitely have experienced quite a bit of discrimination and stigma, but I have been able to counteract a lot of those with positivity and once again the importance of educating people on these issues, so that they don't participate in allowing these stigmas and discrimination to continue.

Thirty percent (n=3) of the participants discussed experiencing discrimination in relation to student organizations and activities on campus. One student discussed experiencing discrimination within his fraternity.

I believe being in a black Greek letter organization— being in the fraternity, I definitely experienced some discrimination within my fraternity. They often talked about how they are against that kind of lifestyle, so in that aspect yes.

Twenty percent (n=2) of the participants mentioned hearing anti-gay comments and remarks. One student initially reported not experiencing discrimination, but then remembered an instance when foul language was used against him.

“No, I lied there was one situation my freshman or sophomore year, early sophomore year I believe and I like had this like encounter with these girls. Whatever the discrepancy was, they just escalated everything. They just started blurting out names to me and my friends and it just became this big whole ordeal. Like they were just like speaking really

disrespectfully. They started saying fags and all this other type of stuff.

Then it became like everybody who was in the cafeteria that day had—we had everybody’s attention because it was all this yelling and verbal violence going on.

Interestingly, fifty percent (n=5) of the participants who reported experiencing discrimination still reported having a positive experience overall or talked as if the discrimination was not a major issue. After describing an instance when a derogatory statement was said to him, one participant stated, “Other than that it's just like I had a good experience. It's never been anything that would make me think I had a bad time at school. There's just ... always stupid people.” Another student stated that he did experience discrimination, but it had nothing to do with attending an HBCU.

I experienced some and I know like that there were some individuals that felt some type of way about it and there were jokes and ignorant things said, but I did not feel it was because I was where I was. I just thought it was because of the people. I know it was just because of the people. I don't think it was because I was at an HBCU. It was just small minded people that happened to be attending as well.

Obstacles

Participants were asked to describe obstacles in attending an HBCU as an AAGBM. This question received a great deal of feedback. Participants spoke at length and were detailed in their responses. The main obstacles participants identified were related to social acceptance, self-expression, and finding supports specific to their sexual identity.

Sixty percent (n=6) of the participants described obstacles related to social acceptance. Participants spoke about a lack of respect (n=3), tolerance/acceptance (n=5), and experiencing stigma (n=1). One student stated, “I would say just respect, as being a gay man at an HBCU. I don’t think we are respected enough as far as the whole general population. I feel that people could be a little more tolerant, a little bit more educated on the lifestyle.”

Forty percent (n=4) of the participants identified self-expression as being a major obstacle. Challenges related to gender expression and being open about one’s sexual orientation were discussed. One participant stated that more flamboyant and open students faced more challenges.

In my own opinion, when it comes to the obstacles, I think it is usually for people who are a little more flamboyant. Like people tend to not want to be in the room with them because of that and it’s like the discrimination is more focused on those who display their sexual orientation a lot more.

Another student discussed how the lack of self-expression prevents people from being comfortable with themselves and hinders them from coming out to others.

The main obstacle would be being able to express yourself. Most people aren't able to be comfortable in their skin enough to be completely out or let people or their friends know about their orientation as they want to, but most HBCU student bodies are not very forthcoming or welcoming rather to bisexual or homosexual males.

Twenty percent (n=2) of the participants described struggling to find supports specific to their sexual identity. One stated, “I would probably say the obstacles are trying to find a good group of people who identify with you because you are in a minority...” and the other stated, “I

don't know like— if it has to do with— like being at an HBCU or attending college period, but I think some obstacles that you face are having people to talk to as far as peers about your sexual preference.”

One participant had a unique response to this question. He did not identify facing an outside obstacle in terms of attending an HBCU, rather an internal one.

I think that the biggest obstacle was an internal one. I don't think it is necessarily—I think going to an HBCU we have a certain mindset of what we are going to face and I think that is the biggest problem. I think once you get there and you open yourself up, I don't think there is very much of a problem at all.

Supports and Recommendations

Participants were asked to identify the supports they found and to offer recommendations to HBCUs and how HBCUs can be more supportive. Similar to the question concerning obstacles, participants gave detailed responses.

Supports. Fifty percent (n=5) of the participants reported feeling supported through friends. One participant stated, “I guess my friends. My friends are a big support for me.” Another student stated, “I found support in a couple of friends I confided in.” Forty percent (n=4) of the participants reported receiving support from allies, people who were accepting or supportive of gay and bisexual students. One of the participants stated, “Even though I said—you know—a lot of people weren't tolerant, I did find some tolerant people.” Twenty percent (n=2) of the participants specifically identified staff and faculty members as allies. One participant described feeling supported by resident directors.

Resident directors who were very educated on the issues. My former resident director Mr. [Name], Mr. [Name]. We call him Mr. [Name]. I have no idea what his last name was, but I don't think he works at [University] anymore, but you know there were certain leaders at the university who were very educated about the issues, very aware of what was going on and because of that, they were able to implement social structures that helped me and helped other students like me.

Thirty percent (n=3) of the participants mentioned LGBT organizations helped them during their time at an HBCU. One participant in particular felt he received more support through organizations on campus than heterosexual students.

It seems like the support was higher for us because we were the minority of the minority, if that makes sense. With the faculty having like I said before [GSA], the gay-straight -alliance and things of that sort. There was so much support for us— because usually— in the regular world there's not that much support, but I feel like there was a whole lot of it.

Thirty percent (n=3) of the participants referenced LGBT organizations when answering the question, but did not identify wanting to use them as supports. One participant stated, "I'm sure there were opportunities/organizations for people that desired support. I was not really aware of any because I was not really seeking that kind of support." Another student remarked, "I never joined any of those social—I guess—organizations because I didn't feel like I should be labeled for being different, if that makes sense." The last participant discussed how being out, or not, impacted the purpose of LGBT organizations. "There were some student organizations on

campus, but if you are not open or actively out than you weren't really a part of the organization, so they did not really serve a purpose.”

Interestingly, only one participant referenced the counseling center as a support. He appeared very enthusiastic when discussing the benefits of that kind of support.

I think the support that I found at my university was through the counseling center. The counseling center serves as a great resource for anyone that is going through a situation— like as far as their sexual orientation. I think that is a major resource where they could just talk about it. I think a lot of times people don't have people to talk to about their situation.

Recommendations. For the last part of the interview, participants were asked to offer recommendations. Recommendations were themed around having more events or organizations/clubs (n=8) and better educating students about LGBT people (n=2). There were differences in terms of what type of events and organizations/clubs participants felt were necessary. Thirty percent (n=3) of the participants made recommendations for events and clubs to be catered to LGBT student specifically. One student stated, “One thing that HBCU's could do and some are doing it on some campuses, is to have more social events or social clubs catered to LGBTs as a group.” Another student stated, “I would definitely say put on more programs for the population of people who are in that lifestyle, so put on more programs that make it more aware.” Forty percent (n=4) of the participants recommended having events and organizations/clubs that would unite all students. For example one student stated,

Like give all the students this medium, an organization or whatever it can be so that people understand that everybody is the same regardless of who

likes what and —you know— who tolerates what, so that way you can build unity within the students, which would help bring unity as a school and as an institution.

Another student described how a gay-straight-alliance united students together despite their sexual orientation.

Even though I wasn't a part of the [GSA], I attended some of their activities and events and I thought it was a great program to have. There were actually a lot of people, straight or bisexual, gay or transgender that attended and weren't apart of the group or were just there to support. That was a great thing to have.

Twenty percent (n=2) of the participants specially stated that forums open to all students would help to promote dialogue about LGBT issues. Both participants made mention of having these events be voluntary instead of mandatory. One student stated.

I think it really starts with dialogue and conversation, engaging people in healthy dialogue and discussion— debate even—it might come to that...so I think there is something in providing a forum or platform of some sort for people to engage in conversation. I would shy away from making it a mandatory thing and make it a more voluntary thing because there is something— you're already a step ahead if you provide a forum for people who already want to be there, to show that interest to be a part of something that is voluntary and provide an avenue for people to discuss and share stories.

Twenty percent (n=2) of the participants referenced the need for more education. One participant spoke to the importance of educating students more about LGBT people.

I would say more education is probably needed though. More education in what it means to be gay or lesbian, how it is not a choice, how just because— I mean education in the sense of debunking the stereotypes, that type of an education.

Summary

This chapter presented findings in response to the research question: What are the social and academic experience(s) of AAGBM who attended HBCUs? The study's specific aims were to describe: (1) How do AAGBM describe their social and academic experiences, positively or negatively, on an HBCU campus; and (2) How can HBCUs help facilitate satisfying social and academic experiences for its AAGBM? These aims were addressed by asking seven open-ended questions to ten African American gay and bisexual men who graduated from HBCU's from 2008-2013. Participants provided a variety of responses and valuable information when discussing their social and academic experiences. Overall, participants described having positive experiences at the HBCU they attended. However, experiences were not without challenges. Several recommendations were offered to improve the social and academic experiences of AAGBM at HBCUs. Implications of these findings will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the social and academic experiences of AAGBM who graduated from an HBCU from 2008-2013 and addressed the question: What are the social and academic experience(s) of AAGBM who attended HBCUs? The study's specific aims were to describe: (1) How do AAGBM describe their social and academic experiences, positively or negatively, on an HBCU campus; and (2) How can HBCUs help facilitate satisfying social and academic experiences for its AAGBM? Phone interviews were conducted with ten African American gay and bisexual men who graduated from HBCU's from 2008-2013. All participants responded to the following questions: (1) What was your educational and social experience(s) as an AAGBM attending an HBCU? (2) What was your interaction as an AAGBM with the HBCU student body? (3) What was your interaction as an AAGBM with the university staff and faculty? (4) How did being AAGBM affect your academic experience, i.e., challenges, services, resources; interaction with professors; (5) Did you experience bias or discrimination because of being AAGBM, i.e., risk, personal identity, stigma; (6) What were obstacles as an AAGBM, if any, in attending an HBCU? and (7) What ways did you find support as an AAGBM attending an HBCU and what recommendations would you offer HBCUs? Implication of the findings to these questions are discussed in relation my previous literature.

Social and Academic Experiences

Sixty percent (n=6) of the participants reported having positive academic and social experiences. Thirty percent (n=3) of the participants did not describe their social and academic experiences positively or negatively and ten percent (n=1) participant reported having an okay experience. The majority of participants reported making friends and meeting other gay students at the HBCU they attended. In terms of academics, participants reported feeling supported by faculty and staff members. These findings support literature that speaks to HBCUs being socially and academically supportive environments for African American students (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Hurtado et al, 2011; Negga et al., 2007). Harper's (2006) study found that receiving social support from same race peers was a major supportive factor for black men in college. This support could explain why most participants described having positive experiences despite being sexual minority students. While there were no reports of any negative social or academic experiences, some were identified when participants were asked specific questions later in the interview. This suggests that negative experiences did not stand out when participants reflected on their social and academic experiences overall.

Interactions with the Student Body

Participant's responses illustrated a range of experiences when it came to how they interacted with peers on HBCU campuses. Half of the participants described having positive interactions with the student body, two participants reported having limited interactions, and four participants reported experiencing changes over time. The positive responses of participants support Fine's (2011) study that found sexual minority students can view their campus climate positively. Interestingly, participants reported feeling accepted by the student body in relation to disclosing and concealing their sexual orientation. This finding supports Gortmaker and Brown's

(2006) study that found positive and negative interactions with peers on college campus can be related to sexual orientation disclosure. Associating with other sexual minorities was linked with participants having limited interactions with the student body and experiencing changes over time. For example, having more gay friends meant engaging less with the larger student body for some participants. These experiences may have caused participants to reconsider who they associate with and how they identify on HBCU campuses.

Interactions with Faculty

Nearly all participants described having positive interactions with staff and faculty members. Overall, participants reported feeling supported academically and having good communication. Many students reported having no issues with staff and faculty members. Only one student did not reference having a positive interaction. This finding illustrates that AAGBM, like heterosexual African American students, feel supported by staff and faculty members and appear pleased with their interactions. This finding supports Hurtado et al.'s (2011) study that found African American students at HBCUs feel supported by their professors and have sufficient contact with them. While some staff and faculty members may not be in support of homosexuality, it appears their views did not dictate their interactions with AAGBM at HBCUs. Contrary to the findings in Harper and Gasman's (2008) study, participants did not report institutional resistance to homosexuality by staff and faculty members.

Academic Experiences

Most participants reported that being AAGBM did not impact their academic experience at all. This finding suggests that sexual orientation does not impact how students do academically or operate in academic settings. This may be due to sexual orientation not being discussed or acknowledged in academic settings, or that one's sexual orientation is a private

matter and is not associated with academic performance. Several participants reported that they do not believe their sexual orientation was taken into consideration. However, a small percentage of participants reported that being AABGM did have an impact on their academic experience. This finding speaks to how academics may be impacted by increased stress levels and considerations about social involvement in classroom settings. It is likely, though not explored in this study, that those students with increased stress levels and low social involvement within the classroom are less comfortable with their sexual orientation and the fear of exposure elevates the stress.

Discrimination

Differences did surface in terms of participants' experiences with discrimination on HBCU campuses. Some participants reported not experiencing discrimination at all. This finding coincides with literature that found that sexual minority students did not always report experiencing discrimination while in college (Fine, 2011; Garvey & Inkelas, 2012). However, the majority of participants reported experiencing discrimination on some level and among them, two reported extensive experiences. Some participants discussed experiencing discrimination in relation to student organizations and activities on campus. Other participants mentioned hearing anti-gay comments and slurs. This finding coincides with previous studies stating that sexual minority students do experience discrimination and harassment while attending college (D'Augelli, 1992; Katz-Wise, & Hyde, 2012). More specifically, it supports Tyre's (2010) study that showed that HBCUs can be hostile environments for lesbian and gay students. Interestingly, most participants who reported experiencing discrimination still reported having a positive experience overall or talked as if the discrimination was not a major issue, that it may have been

expected. This finding is supported in Fine's (2011) study, which showed that sexual minority students minimize incidences of heterosexism and homophobia.

Obstacles

Most participants described obstacles related to social acceptance. Participants spoke about a lack of respect and tolerance/acceptance, and experiencing stigma. These findings suggest that participants were not as socially accepted as they would have liked to be even though they typically described their overall experiences at HBCUs positively. This could be related to heterosexual college students holding the most negative attitudes toward gay men in comparison to lesbians (D'Augelli & Rose, 1990; Negy & Eisenman, 2005; Whitley et al., 2011). In addition, participants may have felt excluded by male peers who conformed to masculine norms, as the literature suggests (Keiller, 2010; Theodore & Basow, 2000). Some participants identified self-expression as being a major obstacle, discussing challenges related to gender expression and being open about one's sexual orientation. This finding supports Harper and Gasman's (2008) study that showed that black male students at HBCUs reported feeling limited in terms of self-presentation and expression. As Harper and Gasman suggested, participants may have felt limited in self-expression due to some HBCUs being more conservative and holding traditional views towards gender expression and sexuality.

Supports and Recommendations

Participants reported receiving support in a variety of ways. Half of the participants reported feeling supported by friends. Participants also reported receiving support from allies. This finding supports Steven's (2004) study that found gay men persevere on college campuses through their own support systems consisting of individuals who are heterosexual and non-heterosexual. Other students mentioned gay-straight alliances helped them during their time at an

HBCU, supporting Heck et al.'s (2013) study that found gay-straight alliances can be a support for sexual minority students in school settings. Some participants reported that they did not participate in a gay-straight alliance or other gay related groups. This finding supports Patton's (2011) study that found AAGBM are less likely to participate in LGBT organizations. The lack of participation in LGBT organizations may be linked to concealing one's sexual orientation or feeling that joining such organizations will cause students to be labeled as different from other African American students. Interestingly, only one participant referenced seeking individual counseling services as a support. A possible explanation for this finding is that AAGBM are less likely to utilize counseling services when they have social supports such as supportive friends and allies. It also may be attributed to African American men's reluctance, in general, to seek help because of the fear of being perceived weak.

Participant-offered recommendations themed around having more events or organizations/clubs and better educating students about LGBT people. Participants suggested that HBCUs provide events and clubs catered to LGBT student specifically, implement events and organizations/clubs that would unite all students, and have forums that promote open dialogue about LGBT issues. These recommendations support Harper and Gasman's (2008) study that showed black males attending HBCUs reported that LGBT students were invisible on campus; and administrators and faculty did not facilitate discussions about LGBT issues. The recommendations offered suggest that HBCUs need to actively recognize sexual minority students on their campuses and find ways to add discussions about sexual orientation into campus dialogues and educational materials.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations to this study. First, this study only explored social and academic experiences of AAGBM who attended HBCUs, and intentionally excluded majority institutions. Second, data on heterosexual students' perceptions towards AAGBM was not included. Third, this study used a self-identification process to create a purposeful sample that limits the diversity within the selected sample. Fourth, the use of purposeful and convenience sampling does not allow for the findings to be generalizable to all African American gay and bisexual men. Last, findings from this study may be different from AAGBM on majority institutions of higher education.

Conclusion

While HBCUs may be perceived as homophobic for a variety of reasons, the participants in this study generally described having positive social and academic experiences while pursuing their undergraduate degrees at these institutions. Participants did report experiencing some discrimination and facing obstacles, but those setbacks did not heavily influence their views on their overall college experiences. A possible explanation for the positive outlook is that AAGBM often can find individuals who identify with their race and sexual orientations at HBCUs. In addition, race may be more salient in comparison to sexual orientation (Bowleg, 2013) and being in a racially supportive environment may cause participants to see discrimination related to sexual orientation as less important.

Participants reported finding support in friends, allies, and gay-straight alliances. Participants also recommended improvements that could make HBCUs more supportive of sexual minority students. Recommendations suggest that HBCUs should take a more direct approach in recognizing sexual minority students by having more events and organizations and

facilitating open dialogues about LGBT issues. It also was recommended that students be educated about LGBT people. In response to these recommendations, counseling centers at HBCUs can take a leading role in outreaching to this population through programming and creating gay-straight alliances on campuses where there are none. The fact that only one participant referenced using the counseling center as a support may speak to the need for counseling centers to advertise services that LGBT students can benefit from.

Future research should continue to focus on AAGBM at HBCUs. There is still a paucity of literature focused on this population in this specific context. Areas of exploration can include AAGBM involvement in male specified organizations, AAGBM's perceptions of counseling services at HBCU counseling centers, and what contributes to AAGBM resilience at HBCUs.

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APENDIX A

Informed Consent



SMITH COLLEGE

**Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Smith College School for Social Work • Northampton, MA**

.....
**Title of Study: The Experiences of African American Gay and Bisexual men who Attended
Historically Black Colleges & Universities**

Investigator(s):

Isaiah Jones,

Smith College MSW Student

Phone: [REDACTED]

.....
Introduction

You are being asked to participate in a research study that explores the social and academic experiences of African American gay and bisexual men (AAGBM) who graduated from historically black colleges and universities (HBCU).* An HBCU is an college or university in the United States that was intended to and currently educates predominantly African American students. You were selected as a possible participant because you graduated from a HBCU between the years 2008-2013; identify as male, gay or bisexual; identify as African American; volunteered to participate in a telephone interview; are English speaking; and are over the age of 18. If you do not meet all of these criteria, please do not continue. I ask that you carefully read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to participate in the study.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to answer the question: What are the social and academic experiences of AAGBM attending a HBCU? The study's specific aims are to describe: (1) How AAGBM describe their experiences, positively or negatively, on an HBCU campus; and (2) How can HBCUs help facilitate satisfying experiences for its AAGBM?

Description of the Study Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: Provide your mailing address so you can receive two copies of the informed consent form (This document). You will

then read and sign both copies, keeping one for yourself and mailing the other to the researcher in a stamped self-addressed envelope. After the informed consent is received, you will be contacted for a mutually agreed time and date for a telephone interview. You will call into a secure conference line with a special access code. During the interview, you will be asked to respond to demographic and interview questions. You will be allotted 25-35 minutes to complete the process (demographic and survey questions). At the end of the interview, you will be given the opportunity to ask questions. You also will have the option to contact this researcher with questions relating to the final results of this research study. Outside of this, there will be no follow up activity with the researcher.

Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study

The study has the following risks. Participants may experience some distress when reflecting on their experiences as an AAGBM on a HBCU campus. This is not likely to happen, but in the event that you experience feelings from participation, I will provide a list of free referrals for you should you wish to follow-up with a counselor following the interview.

Benefits of Being in the Study

The benefits of participation include gaining new insight into your own experience as an AAGBM who recently graduated from a HBCU that will be useful in acknowledging your own resilience, strengths, and vulnerabilities. Your participation gives voice to the lives of AAGBM, who often are overlooked in dominant college culture. In addition, you may feel a sense of pride in contributing to research that can help others better understand AAGBM life circumstances. Participants will not receive compensation for their participation in this study. This study is being conducted as a research requirement for my master's in social work degree. Ultimately, this research may be published or presented at professional conferences.

Confidentiality

Your participation will be kept confidential. Names and signatures on this form will not be connected to the recorded interviews and you will not be asked to say your name on the recording. The audiotapes will be transcribed in private by me, and possibly another transcriber. If a transcriber is used, they will be asked to sign a confidentiality pledge. The transcriber only will have access to audiotapes and not informed consent forms. Confidentiality also will be protected by not disclosing identifying information or characteristics of the participants or the college they attended. Finally, all research materials including recordings, transcriptions, analyses and consent/assent documents will be stored in a secure location for three years according to federal regulations. In the event that materials are needed beyond this period, they will be kept secured until no longer needed, and then destroyed. All electronically stored data will be password protected during the storage period. I will not include any information in any report that I may publish that would make it possible to identify you.

Payments/gift

You will not receive any financial payment for your participation.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study *at any time* (up to the date noted below). Your decision to refuse will not result in any loss of benefits (including access to services) to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely up to the point noted below. If you choose to withdraw, I will not use any of your information collected for this study. You must notify me of your decision to withdraw by email or phone by 24 hours after your interview has been conducted. After that

date, your information will be part of the thesis report.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Isaiah Jones at [REDACTED] or by telephone at [REDACTED] if you would like a summary of the study results, one will be sent to you once the study is completed. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any problems as a result of your participation, you may contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Committee at (413) 585-7974.

Consent

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep. *[If indicated, include this: You will also be given a list of referrals and access information if you experience emotional issues related to your participation in this study]*

.....

1. I agree to be [audio or video] taped for this interview:

Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher(s): _____ Date: _____

2. I agree to be interviewed, but I do not want the interview to be taped:

Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher(s): _____ Date: _____

APENDIX B

Interview Questions

Screening Questions:

1. Do you identify as African American
2. Do you identify as gay or bisexual?
3. Did you graduate from a historically black college or university between the years 2008-2013?
4. Are you over the age of 18?
5. Are you English speaking?

Demographic Questions:

1. What is your age?
2. What is your sexual orientation?
3. Are you out about your sexual orientation?
4. What is your ethnic or racial background?

Terms Used in this Study:

- a. *African American gay or bisexual man (AAGBM)*
- b. *Historically Black College/University (HBCU)*

Research Questions:

- (1) What was your educational and social experience(s) as an AAGBM attending an HBCU?
- (2) What was your interaction as an AAGBM with the HBCU student body?
- (3) What was your interaction as an AAGBM with the university staff and faculty?
- (4) How did being AAGBM affect your academic experience, i.e., challenges, services, resources; interaction with professors;
- (5) Did you experience bias or discrimination because of being AAGBM, i.e., risk, personal identity, stigma;
- (6) What are obstacles as an AAGBM, if any, in attending an HBCU; and
- (7) What ways did you find support as an AAGBM attending an HBCU? What recommendations would you offer HBCUs?

APENDIX C

Organization Email

Dear _____,

I am a MSW student at Smith College School for Social Work. I am writing to inquire about the possibility of distributing an announcement to African American men at _____ about a study that I am conducting.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of African American gay and bisexual men (AAGBM) who recently graduated from Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCU). Participants will be asked to participate in an audiotaped phone interview. All interviews are confidential and will take approximately 25-35 minutes to complete. I'd be grateful if you could assist in the development of this study by sending the announcement below to individuals through your email list.

If I need to speak with a specific individual about this study, please provide me with that name and contact information. Thank you for your assistance with this request. Please let me know if additional information is needed or if there are questions that I can address about this research, which has been reviewed by the Smith College Human Subjects Review Board.

Sincerely,
Isaiah Jones

THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN AT HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

I am a MSW student at Smith College School for Social Work interested in exploring the experiences of African American gay and bisexual men (AAGBM) who graduated from Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCU). You are being asked to participate in this study if you self-identify as AAGBM, graduated from a HBCU between the years 2008-2013; identify as male, gay or bisexual; identify as African American; willing to participate in a 25-35 minutes telephone interview; are English speaking; and are over the age of 18. You will be screened via telephone to confirm your eligibility and willing to participate in the study, which should only take 5 minutes. If you do not meet all of the criteria, you will be excluded from this study.

If you meet the criteria and are interested in participating, please call or email me. I will answer any questions concerns, establish your eligibility, and set a mutually agreed time for an interview should you participate. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

This research has been approved by the Smith College Human Subjects Review Board.

Sincerely,
Isaiah Jones

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

APENDIX D

Facebook Blast

Hello Facebook community! I am an MSW student at Smith College School for Social Work and I need your help! I am seeking participants for my master's in social work research study that explores the experiences African American gay and bisexual men (AAGBM) who recently graduated from historically black colleges & universities (HBCU). If you have graduated from a HBCU between the years 2008-2013; identify as male, gay or bisexual; identify as African American, English speaking, and are over the age of 18, then I want to talk to you. The 25-35 minutes interview would be conducted by phone and is confidential. My research will offer you a chance to have your voice heard and to tell your story. Please reply to this post or inbox me on Facebook if interested and I'll provide you with further information. If you know anyone who fits this criteria and who might be interested in participating in this study, please spread the news and have them contact me at [REDACTED]. Thank you so much for your help and interest!

APENDIX E

Recruitment Flyer

Are you an African American gay or bisexual man?

Did you graduate from an historically black college or university between the years 2008-2013?

Are you over the age of 18?

Are you English speaking?

If you answered yes to these questions I would like to talk to you!

I am a MSW student at Smith College School for Social Work and I invite you to participate in a research study that explores the social and academic experiences of African American gay and bisexual men who recently graduated from an HBCU. The 25-35 minute interview is confidential and will be conducted by phone. Through my research, I want to give you a chance to have your voice heard and tell your story!

Contact Isaiah Jones for questions or information



Contact Isaiah Jones
p: [REDACTED]

Contact Isaiah Jones
p: [REDACTED]

Contact Isaiah Jones
p: [REDACTED]

Contact Isaiah Jones
p: [REDACTED]

Contact Isaiah Jones
p: [REDACTED]

Contact Isaiah Jones
p: [REDACTED]

Contact Isaiah Jones
p: [REDACTED]

Contact Isaiah Jones
p: [REDACTED]

Contact Isaiah Jones
p: [REDACTED]

APENDIX F

List of Referral Sources

Private Counselors.

Find a Therapist.com A directory which includes counselors who work with gay and lesbian people.

Tel: 1-866-450-FIND (1-866-450-3463)

GoodTherapy.org A directory where you can search for therapists who work with sexuality concerns.

HelpPro lets you search in your area for therapists working with sexuality issues or sexual orientation.

Tel: 781-862-5215

Gay and Lesbian Yellow Pages provides details of all kinds of gay friendly services.

Tel: 1-800-697-2812

Low Cost or Free Services.

The Gay & Lesbian National Help Centre offers confidential peer (non-professional) counseling, information and resources through their free nationwide telephone hotline.

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender National Hotline toll-free phone:1-888-THE-GLNH (1-888-843-4564)

GLBT National Youth Talkline toll-free phone:1-800-246-PRIDE (1-800-246-7743)

California

Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Centre offers low cost mental health services to the gay community.

Tel: 323-993-7400

Florida

The Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Community Center of Central Florida offers professional counseling.

Tel: 1 (407) 228 8272

Pennsylvania

William Way Center offers free peer counseling (non-professional) over the phone.

Tel: (215)732-2220

Services for Youth and Students.

The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network is an organization for students, parents, and teachers that tries to affect positive change in schools.

The Trevor Project is a national 24-hour, toll free confidential suicide hotline for gay and questioning youth.

West Hollywood Office Tel: 310.271.8845

New York Office Tel: 212.695.8650

APPENDIX G
HSR Approval Letter



November 4, 2013

Isaiah Jones

Dear Isaiah,

School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

You did an excellent job on your revisions. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine Kersten'.

Congratulations and our best wishes on your interesting study.

Sincerely,

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Narviar Barker, Research Advisor