

Queering and Browning the Pipeline for LGBTQ Faculty of Color in the Academy: The Formation of the LGBTQ Scholars of Color National Network

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Abstract

While the literature on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people in academia has increased over the past two decades, there is a dearth of research concentrating on LGBTQ graduate students and faculty of color. The present paper provides an overview of LGBTQ people of color's experiences across different educational systems and academic levels, from K-12 education to faculty positions. Specific to higher education, social determinants to academic success for LGBTQ people of color are identified - ranging from systemic and interpersonal discrimination, mental health issues, and social support. One organization that has attempted to queer the academy is the LGBTQ Scholars of Color National Network, which was created in 2014 to connect and advance the LGBTQ people of color in academia. Data from the network is introduced - highlighting participants' need for a network for queer and trans people of color (N = 368), as well as value of having such a network (N = 132). Results support the need to disrupt educational systems by "queering" and "browning" a pipeline for LGBTQ people of color in academia. In doing so, I push to dismantle the inequities experienced by LGBTQ faculty of color and to increase awareness of systemic oppression in higher education.

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Queering and Browning the Pipeline for LGBTQ Faculty of Color in the Academy: The Formation of the LGBTQ Scholars of Color National Network

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While the literature on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people in academia has increased over the past two decades, there is a dearth of research concentrating on LGBTQ graduate students and faculty of color. The present paper provides an overview of LGBTQ people of color's experiences across different educational systems and academic levels, from K-12 education to faculty positions. Specific to higher education, social determinants to academic success for LGBTQ people of color are identified - ranging from systemic and interpersonal discrimination, mental health issues, and social support. One organization that has attempted to queer the academy is the LGBTQ Scholars of Color National Network, which was created in 2014 to connect and advance LGBTQ people of color in academia. Data from the network is introduced – highlighting participants' need for a network for queer and trans people of color (N = 368), as well as value of having such a network (N = 132). Results support the need to disrupt educational systems by “queering” and “browning” a pipeline for LGBTQ people of color in academia. In doing so, I push to dismantle the inequities experienced by LGBTQ faculty of color and to increase awareness of systemic oppression in higher education.

Keywords: LGBTQ students | students of color | LGBTQ faculty | faculty of color | academic achievement

Over the past two decades, there has been a growth in academic literature that has focused on the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people of color - namely LGBTQ Black/African Americans, Latina/o/x Americans, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans (Duran, 2018; Huang, Brewster, Moradi, Goodman, Wiseman, & Martin, 2010). Most of this research concentrates on the physical health and mental disparities of these populations – revealing a higher prevalence of substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, mental health issues, trauma, suicidal ideation, and general health disparities than their LGBTQ White counterparts (Akerlund & Chung, 2000; Mereish & Bradford, 2014). Researchers have investigated LGBTQ people of color's experiences of intersectionality, or the ways that holding multiple oppressed identities may lead to complex systemic and interpersonal discrimination, negatively impacting an array of social, psychological, educational, legal, and health outcomes (Crenshaw, 1989; Duran, 2018; Nadal, 2013). For instance, studies on intersectional microaggressions reveal that LGBTQ people of color encounter a spectrum of subtle, overt, and systemic discrimination, based on their racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities, which then negatively impact their mental and physical health (Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011; Nadal, Erazo, Shulman, Han, & Deutsch, 2017).

Many queer scholars have made an intentional shift from discussing LGBTQ people of color through a deficit model and instead through a resiliency model (Akerlund &

Chung, 2000; McConnell, Janulis, Phillips, Truong, & Birkett, 2018; Singh, 2013). Focusing on resiliency is important for historically marginalized groups, as it demonstrates their ability to navigate and overcome systemic oppression, instead of placing any blame or responsibility for how they may suffer from the systems that oppress them. For instance, Singh and McKleroy (2011) described how transgender people of color navigate the realities of racism and transphobia, by acknowledging systemic oppression and forging connections with others trans activists of color. While both strengths-based and deficit-focused studies have elucidated the general experiences of LGBTQ people of color in general, there is little written on how LGBTQ people of color perform academically, or how identity development and experiences of discrimination affect their educational or vocational trajectories. Even further, the literature on LGBTQ faculty of color or LGBTQ graduate students of color is virtually nonexistent – demonstrating a need for more scholarship to broach the subject, so that LGBTQ people of color in higher education are not further marginalized, invalidated, misrepresented, pathologized, or discouraged from continuing their academic pursuits. The purpose of this paper is to illuminate the lived experiences of LGBTQ people of color in academia, namely LGBTQ graduate students and early career professionals of color, whose voices have been generally silenced in academic literature.

I begin this paper with a literature review on the experiences of LGBTQ people of color in the academy. First, I will provide an overview of the educational experiences of LGBTQ people of color– underscoring literature on K-12 students, undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty members. Second, I will introduce three social determinants that may impact LGBTQ people of color in the academy: (a) discrimination, (b) mental health, and (c) social support. Third, I will describe the formation of LGBTQ Scholars of Color National Network – an organization that aims to advance the pipeline of LGBTQ people of color in the academy. The network, which was created as a way of addressing the issues negatively impacting LGBTQ faculty of color, demonstrates one way that advocates can “queer” and “brown” academia by creating a pipeline for an underrepresented and underserved population.

Educational Experiences of LGBTQ People of Color

In order to understand the need for an intersectional pipeline for LGBTQ people of color, one must be critically aware of the trajectory of LGBTQ people of color across all educational systems and grade levels. This section will review experiences of queer and trans people of color in K-12 settings, in undergraduate settings, in graduate settings, and in faculty positions.

LGBTQ Students of Color in K-12 settings

While racial disparities in academic achievement have been studied for decades (Paschall, Gershoff, & Kuhfeld, 2018), the literature on LGBTQ K-12 student achievement is still relatively new (Chappell, Ketchum, & Richardson, 2018). Most studies on LGBTQ student achievement cite how victimization may influence educational issues, such as problems in motivation or concentration, negative mental health, truancy, or harmful coping strategies (Poteat, Scheer, & Mereish, 2014). Studies with LGBTQ high school students have revealed how individuals who were victimized and bullied due to their sexual orientation or gender identities were less likely to aspire to

attend graduate school (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). However, because most of these studies on LGBTQ K-12 students consist of mostly White samples and do not present detailed or disaggregated data on race, less is known on how homophobia and transphobia contribute to academic success of LGBTQ students of color.

Some studies that have centered LGBTQ students of color in K-12 settings report that that LGBTQ youth of color experience more harassment, discrimination, or bullying than their White LGBTQ counterparts. For instance, in 2014, GLSEN reported that LGBTQ youth of color, in comparison to White students, reported higher rates of race-related harassment and violence; and that LGBTQ Latina/o youth were twice as likely as non-LGBTQ Latina/o students to report being excluded by peers, verbally harassed, or physically assaulted at school (Kosciw, et al., 2014). LGBTQ students of color may also be punished more than their White counterparts; Lambda Legal (2013) revealed that significantly more Black LGBTQ youth were sent to detention (for any reason) in middle or high school compared to of non-Black LGBTQ students (69% versus 56%) and that Black LGBTQ students were suspended more compared to non-Black students (31% versus 18%). LGBTQ students of color were also more likely to report a lack of LGBTQ-affirmative resources or support systems in their schools – with majority reporting a lack of a Gay-Straight Alliance, supportive faculty members, or LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009). Some scholars have reported the multiple stressors and discriminatory experiences faced by queer Black and Latinx youth and provide recommendations for culturally-responsive pedagogical and theoretical approaching to effectively serving these queer youth of color (Brockenbrough, 2016; McCready, 2012).

LGBTQ Undergraduate Students of Color

Studies have reported that LGBTQ college students who experience discrimination are more likely to experience negative mental health and physical outcomes, as well as negative academic performance and engagement (see Garvey, Sanders, & Flint, 2017 for a review). Yet, a major limitation is that most of these studies consist of majority White samples or do not report racial differences, and thus, may not represent perspectives of LGBTQ college students of color.

The limited scholarship on LGBTQ college students of color does provide exploratory insight about the population. As an example, Kumashiro (2001) argued how Queer Theorists have historically neglected to discuss issues of race – centering scholarship on queer identities and experiences on White people. Means (2017) proposed Quare Theory, an alternative to Queer Theory that centers Black LGBTQ people, divulging the unique ways that queer Black students navigate the academy. Miller & Vaccaro (2016) exposed how queer students of color encounter obstacles in leadership positions, particularly in LGBTQ student organizations that are predominantly White and in which they encountered stereotyping, tokenization, and exoticization. Finally, Duran (2018) conducted a systematic literature review on 68 studies centering queer college students of color and underscored several themes: (a) obstacles in coming out and finding social support, (b) navigating campus environments in which resources are based on singular identity spaces, and (c) lack of resources and representation. Taken together, it is evident that there are many challenges for being a queer or trans college student of color;

accordingly, further research is important to understand how these factors affect individuals' educational trajectory, particularly for those interested in academia.

LGBTQ Graduate Students of Color

There is very limited research on experiences of LGBTQ graduate students, and even less for queer and trans graduate students of color. In fact, in an August 2019 search of the ERIC database (which catalogues educational research and information), there were no results for literature using any combinations of the terms “LGBTQ graduate students”, “queer graduate students”, “graduate students of color”, “LGBTQ doctoral students”, “queer doctoral students”, and “doctoral students of color”. Using race-specific terms produced some results; however, those numbers dwindled as more terms were added (e.g., there were 297 hits on “Black” and “doctoral students”, but only 2 results when adding “gay” and 1 result when adding “queer”).

In spite of this, studies that do exist are helpful in understanding general experiences of LGBTQ graduate students of color. For example, Means and colleagues (2017) discuss the multiple obstacles faced by Black gay men who are pursuing doctoral degrees – highlighting the many ways they have learned to become “resilient scholars”. Stout and Wright (2016) studied a sample that 48% Asian American, 38% White, 3 % Latinx, and 3% Black LGBTQ graduate and undergraduate students, finding that a lower sense of belonging predicted desire to drop out of school (Stout & Wright, 2016). The lack of literature on LGBTQ graduate students of color results in the lack of understanding of, and support towards, their needs and potential obstacles.

LGBTQ Faculty of Color

Though there is a dearth of literature on experiences of LGBTQ faculty in general (Renn, 2010), the few studies that do exist center on White narratives and do not account for experiences of LGBTQ faculty of color. For instance, in Garvey and Rankin's (2016) study examining the retention of LGBTQ faculty members ($N = 348$), findings include that negative campus climate is a significant predictor of faculty retention; however, because only 12 percent of the respondents were people of color, it is unclear if there are other factors that may influence retention rates of LGBTQ faculty of color. Similarly, while both Messinger (2011) and Bilimoria and Steward (2009) revealed LGBTQ faculty members' work-related stressors related to LGBTQ issues on campus, neither study reported participants' racial or ethnic backgrounds – making their results less generalizable or useful for understanding LGBTQ faculty of color.

Similar to the research on LGBTQ graduate students, research on faculty of color tends not to be fully intersectional- in that there is a discrepant lack of inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity. Turner, González, and Wood's (2008) provide a comprehensive twenty-year review of the experiences of faculty of color in academia, but then indicate there is “almost nothing written on issues related to faculty of color and the intersection of race/ ethnicity and sexual orientation” (p. 157). Delgado-Romero, Manlove, Manlove, and Hernandez (2007) share similar sentiments in their review of Latina/o/x faculty, revealing: “One aspect of Latino/a faculty experience that is virtually absent from the research literature is the experience of Latino/a lesbian, gay, bisexual,

and transgendered (LLGBT) faculty” (p. 43). Thus, while discussions of race have been notably missing from Queer Studies, discussions on sexual orientation and gender identity have also been notably missing from Ethnic Studies.

There are some qualitative studies and narrative writings of LGBTQ faculty of color who share their experiences in the academy. Aguilar and Johnson (2017) surveyed 18 LGBTQ faculty and staff of color through individual interviews or open-ended questionnaires; they found several themes including (a) the double burden of mentorship and service towards LGBTQ students and students of color; (b) a lack of inclusivity of their intersectional identities in their departments and amongst colleagues; and (c) a general lack of institutional support. Misawa (2015) describes the types of bullying that queer faculty of color face in the academy as a result of their racial and sexual orientation identities. For example, a gay Black male faculty shared:

Well, my first couple of years there, I always felt like there was a target on my back, and I really, I was really having a hard time finding out specifically why. I knew that I was one of very, very few African Americans on campus on faculty, and then also being gay . . . I know that my performance was never given the same weight as the other people’s performance, when I would publish a major piece . . . get teaching awards, those were always diminished and minimized, and my contributions were devalued (p. 9).

Similarly, LaSala and colleagues (2008) discussed how being an LGBTQ faculty of color may result in both tokenism and scrutiny, while Morales-Díaz (2014) argues that LGBTQ faculty of color become more visible – leading to the possibility of more scrutiny – which may then impact issues related to tenure and promotion (Morales-Díaz, 2014). In addition to the typical stressors of being a faculty member, deciding whether to “come out” can be psychologically distressing and may possibly lead to further experiences of marginalization, tokenization, or scrutiny.

Social Determinants of Academic Success

Several factors may influence success (or failure) for LGBTQ people of color in academia. In this section, we name three of these social determinants: (a) discrimination, (b) mental health, and (c) social support.

LGBTQ People of Color and Discrimination

LGBTQ people of color are susceptible to homophobia or transphobia within their families or racial and ethnic communities; racism within general White-dominated LGBTQ spaces or communities; and racism, heterosexism, sexism, and other forms of oppression within the general population (Balsam, et al, 2011; Nadal, 2013). Such experiences with discrimination may be systemic (e.g., laws that allow for LGBTQ people to be discriminated against if it aligns with a person’s “religious freedom”), but it may also be interpersonal and more covert, taking the form of microaggressions (e.g., the sexual racism that many LGBTQ people of color experience in online dating). For example, Nadal and colleagues (2017) found that participants could identify microaggressions that they perceived were due to one of their identities (i.e. their race or their sexual orientation), as well as microaggressions that they perceived were due to

multiple identities. Further, LGBTQ people of color are susceptible to hate violence; Waters (2017) reported that 79% of all homicide victims of hate crimes in 2016 were people of color, with 61% who were transgender women of color. Out of those who survived hate violence, 61% were people of color (with 29% who identified as Latina/o/x and 21% who identified as Black). Navigating a spectrum of discrimination regularly can be psychologically exhausting and may hinder LGBTQ people of color from thriving in all aspects of their lives (Nadal, 2018).

LGBTQ People of Color and Mental Health

Previous research indicates LGBTQ people of color are at higher risk for suicide and other mental health problems than LGBTQ White people (Meyer, Dietrich, & Schwartz, 2008), and that LGBTQ-based discrimination is a predictor of suicidal ideation for LGBTQ people of color (Sutter & Perrin, 2016). Ghabrial (2016) discussed common stressors of LGBTQ people of color – ranging from the distress of coming out to navigating mental health issues to upholding expectations of being LGBTQ people of color. Singh and McKleroy (2011) described how the intersection of transphobia, racism, and other forms of oppression may negatively impact transgender person of color's self-esteem and mental health. Finally, experiences with systemic and interpersonal discrimination may increase psychological stressors for LGBTQ people of color, in ways that LGBTQ White people may not encounter; for example, one study reported that while heterosexism was a predictor of depression for both LGBTQ White students and LGBTQ students of color, that being more engaged in LGBTQ communities increased depression symptoms for LGBTQ people of color (Kulik, Wernick, Woodford, & Renn, 2017).

Despite the exposure to racism, heterosexism, and transphobia, previous studies have also found that LGBTQ people of color are highly resilient (McConnell, Janulis, Phillips, Truong, & Birkett, 2018). Further, having a strong sense of self and lowest levels of internalized oppression can also serve as a protector factor for LGBTQ people of color. For instance, one study with LGBTQ Latina/o/x people found a strong racial identity can be a protective factor for coping with heterosexism, while a strong sexual orientation identity can be a protective factor for coping with racism (Velez, Moradi, & DeBlaere, 2015). Future research may examine if similar trends on mental health would emerge specifically for LGBTQ faculty of color.

LGBTQ People of Color and Social Support

One of the protective factors for determining success and optimal mental health for LGBTQ people is social support. Previous studies have found that when LGBTQ youth attend an institution with a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), they were more likely to have higher GPAs, less likely to drop out, less likely to have suicidal ideation, and more likely to identify LGBTQ social support (Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010). When LGBTQ programs and LGBTQ student groups are present on campus, LGBTQ students are more likely to report safer campus climates and lower rates of discrimination and victimization (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009). For LGBTQ youth, social support from family, friends, and community members also predict higher levels of psychosocial adjustment and self-esteem (Snapp, Watson, Russell, Diaz, & Ryan, 2015).

Concurrently, mentoring and social support are also vital in the success of students of color. Because students of color encounter an array of obstacles that may differ than their White counterparts (e.g., being first-generation college students, cultural values, family expectations, etc.), mentoring can be instrumental in ensuring academic success (Alvarez, Blume, Cervantes, & Thomas, 2009). Further, for students of color, social support has been found to reduce depressive symptoms (Farrell & Langrehr, 2017) and increase academic success (Baker, 2013).

While social support would be important for both LGBTQ people and people of color, social support would be especially salient for LGBTQ people of color who navigate racism, heterosexism, and sexism in their everyday lives. However, it may be difficult to find social support that is intersectional and affirming of all of their identities. For instance, Ramirez, Gonzalez, and Galupo (2018) qualitatively examined the responses of LGBTQ people of color in response to the Pulse shooting in Orlando in 2016. Using a thematic analysis, participants described their feelings of personal identification to the victims, as well as negative reactions to the lack of intersectionality in other's responses to the tragedy. Thus, while LGBTQ faculty of color may feel some personal connection to White LGBTQ faculty and heterosexual/cisgender faculty of color, they may feel most connected with people with similar intersectional identities.

LGBTQ Scholars of Color National Network

Given the many obstacles faced by LGBTQ people of color in the academy, it becomes crucial for social justice advocates to disrupt racist, sexist, heterosexist, and transphobic educational systems and to "queer" and "brown" the pipeline. One way that this has been attempted was through the LGBTQ Scholars of Color National Network (LGBTQSOC) - a national organization that was founded in 2014 by Drs. Kevin Nadal and Debra Joy Perez, with the aim of providing opportunities for LGBTQ people of color in the academy to build coalitions with others with similar identities and worldviews (Nadal, 2016).

The primary avenue for creating these connections thus far has been through biennial conferences. Some aspects of the conference have been traditional - with plenary sessions, breakout sessions, poster sessions, and keynote speakers (whom have included Dr. David Malebranche, Dr. Tania Israel, Geena Rocero, Harlan Pruden and Reina Gossett. Other aspects have been queer and brown; for instance, conference coordinators pushed for more personal and emotional exploration, with breakout sessions on self-care and healing. Social networking was strongly encouraged with wine and cheese receptions and a dance party. Finally, speed mentoring sessions allowed for senior scholars to meet briefly with early career professionals and students, to discuss pertinent issues across varying levels in the academy.

The network "queers" academia in multiple ways. First, aligning with Freire's (1996) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* - in which the relationship between teachers, students, and society is framed through the lens of colonizer and colonized - we name the problem of systemic oppression on LGBTQ people of color in the academy, as a way of imagining the possibilities and changing the status quo. Through the creation of the LGBTQSOC, the founders and leaders acknowledge the underrepresentation of LGBTQ people of color

in academia; broadcast this disparity to our colleagues and institutions; and assert the need to decolonize the academy.

Second, borrowing from Renn (2010)'s call for Queer Theorists to challenge "normative constructions of socially constructed binaries" (p. 132), we aim to disrupt systems by creating pathways for LGBTQ people of color who encounter multiple forms of marginalization. We also center our mission on Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989) in that we recognize the ways that systemic oppression has targeted and harmed people with multiple marginalized identities; while Intersectionality Theory was originally framed through the lens of dual oppressions of Black women, we apply the theory to capture the ways that multiple prongs of systemic oppression negatively impact LGBTQ people of color. In doing so, we are intentional in fighting the Whiteness normalized in Queer Studies and the heterosexist cisgender patriarchy normalized in Ethnic Studies and Critical Race Theory.

Third, the LGBTQSOC was modeled on historical community-activist movements of resilience and revolution led by LGBTQ trans women of color like Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, and Miss Major (Jourian & Simmons, 2017). Further, conference coordinators were intentional in promoting a resilience model, in which we celebrated our strengths and successes, instead focusing on the deficit model in which LGBTQ people of color are usually framed (Nadal, 2016). In doing so, we create an intentional space for social support and empowerment for queer and trans people of color in the academy that defies the dominant White, heteronormative, cisgender, patriarchal spaces that we traditionally navigate. We queer and brown a system that was not historically made (or meant) for us.

Overview of the Current Study

The purpose of this study is to explore perspectives of LGBTQ people of color in the academy, particularly graduate students and early career professionals. While there has been robust research on LGBTQ undergraduate students of color (see Duran, 2018 for a review) and budding research on LGBTQ faculty of color (e.g., Aguilar & Johnson, 2017; Misawa, 2015), there is a dearth of research on LGBTQ graduate students and early career professionals. Utilizing data from the LGBTQ Scholars of Color National Network, we employed the following exploratory research questions: (1) What are some of the common experiences for LGBTQ people of color in academia? (2) What are the typical obstacles for LGBTQ people of color in academia? (3) How can the LGBTQ Scholars of Color National Network uplift LGBTQ people of color in academia?

Methodology

Two sets of data were extracted from the LGBTQSOC's first two biennial conferences (which were held in 2015 and 2017 respectively). The first dataset, Accepted Applications, is derived from an online application, in which prospective participants were asked to share their reasons for attending the conference, to join the network, or both. Some questions were open-ended (e.g., "Please tell us why you would like to join the LGBTQ Scholars of Color network" or "How would you describe the effectiveness of your mentor relationships?") Some questions were forced-choice answers (e.g., "In your

current position have there been opportunities to collaborate on research with other scholars in your institution?”). The second dataset, Conference Evaluations, consists of online conference evaluations from participants who attended both conferences. Similarly, questions were open-ended (“Please provide any additional comments about the panel.”) and closed-ended (e.g., “How satisfied were you with the conference?”).

Participants

In 2015, there 296 prospective applicants; in 2017, there were 450 prospective applicants. Due to financial cost and space, we could only accommodate about half of the applicants. A selection committee reviewed each application and considered equitable representation based on race, gender identity, sexual orientation, geography, and discipline. This process yielded in 143 participants in 2015 and 225 participants in 2017, or a total of 368 participants. Participants’ self-reported race, gender, and sexual orientation identities are included in Appendix A.

Content Analysis

For the current exploratory study, we utilized a content analysis method (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) analyzing the two datasets. A team of two researchers (i.e., one undergraduate student and one professor) collaboratively worked to identify common themes based on keywords or ideas in responses. Specifically, each researcher was provided with all raw data, and individually grouped each statement into categories. The two individuals then reconvened and consensually agreed upon common and recurring themes. Themes were labeled as “typical” if described by at least 10 participants; themes were labeled as “notable” if described by at least 2 participants. We note that “variant” is often used in coding in qualitative research; however, we intentionally queer our method of analysis by using language that is more inclusive.

Results

The content analysis resulted in two primary domains and several themes, which are presented below. The two domains are: (a) The Need for a Network, and (b) The Value of a Network. For each quote, participants’ self-identified descriptors regarding race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and educational status are used when provided.

Domain 1: The Need for a Network

Each applicant was asked to explain why they were interested in participating for the conference. Several “typical” themes emerged, including: (a) mentorship, (b) emotional support and validation, (c) coalition building, (d) personal growth, (e) practical resources and support, and (f) giving and getting. Sample quotes from participants are presented below.

Theme 1: Mentorship. Mentorship was a typical theme for multiple participants, with dozens who asserted that they did not have mentors whom they could connect with.

One gay Black cisgender male Associate Professor shared: “This is a crucial initiative for all of us, especially because [we] wrestle and negotiate multiple marginalization in our lives and in the academy. Mentoring relationships can be crucial sources of strength and healing and I believe the time has come for us to stand up with one another.” One gay cisgender male Latino doctoral student stated, “As a budding gay scholar of color, I would like the opportunity to engage with potential mentors and peers. I have always lived in the Southern U.S. so my experiences with people like me (both socially and within the academy) are somewhat limited.” One Black transgender woman stated: “My professional development has been impeded by the absence of Black and Brown mentorship in my field. Graduate school was very difficult for me, and although I earned a 3.75 GPA, I would have done even better had I received mentorship and guidance.” It is evident that many participants were searching for mentorship and support, particularly in response to feeling isolated in their home institutions.

Some participants discussed having a mentor without a shared identity, or only one shared identity, which limited their full connection. One gay cisgender Latino male doctoral student disclosed: “My current advisor does not have a background in working with LGBTQ communities. Gaining access to a network of LGBTQ Scholars of Color would fill a huge void in terms of mentorship.” Similarly, a Black cisgender lesbian post-doctoral fellow divulged: “While I currently have a mentor who provides support regarding manuscript and grant writing, I lack mentorship around succeeding in academia as a queer woman of color in a predominately White, heterosexual academic environment, which a senior LGBTQ scholar of color could provide.” Finally, one Black gay cisgender male shared:

As a first-generation college student, I have always relied on my mentors to provide support through my academic journey. Most of these mentors have either been white or identified as straight. I am eager to find fellow educators, academics and scholars who identify as queer and of color. It is this intersectionality of identities that is the foundation of this network and ultimately why I wish to join.

Taken together, it appears that participants desired finding a mentor who could validate them on all of their multiple identities, while providing them with the didactic training they need.

Theme 2: Isolation. A typical theme involved participants who felt isolated and lonely in their home departments, institutions, or their fields in general. One queer Black transgender woman doctoral student stated: “It can be isolating and frustrating in the early stages of the doctoral career to find ‘little interest’ in one's work within traditional humanities disciplines.” One Latina lesbian cisgender adjunct professor shared: Economic hardship, being a single parent, caregiving for my own parent, and the absence of a support network have made it exceedingly difficult to find and unite with other scholars of color. The result has been professional isolation and intellectual demoralization. Unconnected to other scholars doing work resonant with my own, I struggle to convince myself to persevere and make my voice heard.

One Black genderqueer early career professional divulged: “As an independent scholar, access is difficult to reach beyond the Internet and library when you are a multiple marginalized identity that is socially and economically disadvantaged by function and focus.” Another queer Black transgender woman verbalized: “It has been an isolating experience as a Black queer person, even in the Bay Area. Being able to be

around a group of my peers and learn from their experiences and develop new strategies is the push my vision needs.” Feeling isolated appeared to be a major stressor for several of these participants; searching for social support was deemed an important part for their ability to survive and thrive in the academy.

Theme 3: Coalition Building. Because participants typically felt isolated, they hoped that the network could provide them with opportunities to network and build community. Coalition-building was important for personal validation, collective healing, and political progress. One Latina lesbian cisgender woman unveiled a desire for: “a communal space for sharing resources & support through a group of individuals who have shared-experiences and sometimes a similar lens. [I want] to feel like I am part of a collective, rather than just a solo individual trying to manage social challenges on my own.” One queer Southeast Asian cisgender woman doctoral student disclosed:

I have seen few people of color and even fewer queer people of color among my peers. At the professional conferences I attend, the number of people who look like me and the number of people who understand my story have been few, and while, at least at some of these conferences, space is made to include those who do not quite fit into society’s binaries, it is rare that I engage with people who understand the intersection of queer, woman, API. I want to be part of [the network] because there is strength in numbers, and I want to join with others like me to build our own space in academia.

One queer Black cisgender woman asserted: “Having only recently received my PhD I am excited to build with mentors and peers to learn how queer and women-of-color scholars build with activist communities to challenge conventionally produced knowledge about the meanings/implications of political injustice. The network would afford just such a much-needed opportunity.” One Black bisexual cisgender woman doctoral student stated: “It’s my hope that this network provides me with an intellectual community and home where I can collaborate with, learn from, and build opportunities with other LGBTQ scholars of color. Through these relationships I hope we can expand opportunities for other scholars of color not yet in the network, build our profile and collective power through skill shares and workshops, and project our scholarship/findings and interests to the larger intellectual community.” In reading these testaments, it becomes evident that participants were hopeful in building personal and professional relationships that could help sustain them in their academic pursuits.

Theme 4: Personal and Professional Growth. It was typical for participants to describe a desire for opportunities for personal and professional growth. A transgender Filipina woman doctoral student proclaimed: “It is vital for my professional growth and personal mental health to connect, engage, and learn from fellow scholars of color who are doing similarly community-based work.” One Black cisgender lesbian early career professional added: “It would be invaluable and therapeutic, to share and grow in a space with scholars who not only reflect my life experiences, but also better understand my approach to research and evaluation.” Further, one Black bisexual cisgender woman doctoral student avowed:

There can never be enough mentorship and perspective, doctoral student life and academia in general is a relentless struggle for people of color; therefore, networking in an environment with others of like-mind and experience can only help me develop stronger research and advocacy skills in addition to reinforcing my psychological armor.

Theme 5: Practical Resources and Guidance. In addition to emotional and psychological support, a typical response was the need for practical resource and guidance – ranging from research approaches and methodologies to navigating academia. One gay Black cisgender male doctoral student identified how he was searching for “ears to listen and give advice on how to navigate the multitudes of microaggressions I face on the daily as a queer scholar of color would be essential for my success.” One gay Filipino cisgender male mid-career researcher revealed: “To learn from others how they address common research challenges, such as small sample size, English only instruments, or limited sampling targeted to individuals who may have an internet connection, smart phone device, or exclude immigrants from participation.” A gay/queer Black cisgender male declared: “This network will provide me with a safe space to be unapologetically queer as I peak into my future as an academic.” A queer Black ciswoman Master’s student was searching for “connections, which are crucial to sustaining the emotional energy and intellectual rigor it takes to create anti-oppressive scholarship. It is too easy to leave academia, or to create work that is antithetical to the justice-focused work that we hope to do.” A queer Latino cisgender male graduate student wished “to discuss and acquire the tools that can better prepare [him] to develop education and outreach programs that will decrease the gap in health inequality and devise novel approaches that ultimately improve the health of the urban poor.” These sentiments demonstrate the pragmatic needs that a network could provide queer and trans people of color in the academy.

Theme 6: Giving and Getting. While many participants described what they hoped to get from the conference and the network, a typical reply included ways that they hope to contribute to the network too. One gay Black cis male shared: “I want to network and collaborate and create more open and brave spaces for other Queer Persons of Color. I want to network across disciplines and engage in personal and professional activities with other LGBTQ Scholars of Color. I also want to give back to young scholars coming behind me.” A queer Latina cisgender woman avowed: “I want to join because I want to be a mentor and a mentee. I believe I have a lot to offer to this group as a queer Latina who is working on dismantling the stigmas of mental illness in communities of color.” One queer Latino cisgender male added:

I would endeavor to both benefit from my involvement and contribute to the experiences of others. For instance, informal/formal mentoring with newer graduate students would allow me to share ways that I have successfully (and politically) navigated issues they may encounter (e.g., funding, mentorship difficulties). Additionally, speaking with such distinguished faculty may allow me to start to build collaborative working relationships, receiving valuable feedback and sharing intellectual ideas (whether formally or informally), or even simply the important, increased exposure to “people like me” (so to speak) who have successfully traversed the pitfalls of academia.

This sentiment aligns with prior literature which describes how communities of color engage in mutually beneficial mentoring relationships as a way of surviving in academia (Griffin, 2012).

Domain 2: The Value of a Network

Seventy-five out of 143 participants (or 52.45%) responded in the 2015 sample; fifty-seven out of 225 participants (or 25.33%) responded in the 2017 sample, resulting in 132 total evaluations. While over 80 percent of participants reported being “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with both conferences, qualitative data revealed three main domains: (a) Validation and Connection, (b) Critical Reflection and Intentionality, and (c) Personal and Professional Growth.

Theme 1: Validation and Connection. Participants identified feeling validated and connected, in ways they had not felt in other academic spaces. One participant shared: “It was such a wonderful experience and every moment just felt like a piece of scholarly heaven, that my life had been missing via other conferences.” Another stated: “It has definitely been one of my favorite conferences I have ever attended. Personally, I enjoyed the strong focus on building interpersonal relationships, discussing social justice, and just generally connecting with others at an intimate level.” Another added: “Overall, the conference FAR surpassed what I could have hoped for. Every aspect of it was amazing.”

Theme 2: Critical Reflection and Intentionality. It is important to acknowledge the critical and less positive feedback that was provided, as a way of improving the network. One notable response from the 2015 conference was the lack of representation of different fields and of different groups. For instance, because most of the original conference planning committee members were social science or public health experts, many of the keynote and plenary sessions involved others in similar fields – resulting in many feelings of neglect from other fields, especially Humanities. Another notable response was that specific racial and ethnic groups were not represented. Both critiques pushed the 2017 planning committee to be more interdisciplinary and to have more racial/ethnic representation with the plenary speakers. Though disciplinary and racial/ethnic representation was not identified as an issue in 2017, accessibility issues emerged (e.g., namely involving physical space and audio difficulties). Such feedback is a critical reminder for future conference planners to always be mindful of intersectionality and inclusivity in a spectrum of ways.

Theme 3: Personal and Professional Growth. Participants revealed how the conference was critical in affirming their personal and professional identities, which could assist in advancing their career trajectories. One participant unveiled: “I felt more empowered/affirmed in relation to my intersecting identities in personal-professional work than ever before in my life. Thank you so much for all of the time, energy, and effort invested into this. The conference was pivotal in helping me reorient and continue pursuing professional goals as a QPOC.” About one-third of the 2017 conference attendees were returning participants from the 2015 conference; one of these participants shared:

Attending the previous conference had a long-lasting impact in my professional and personal life. I benefitted from the contacts I made during the conference, but more than anything I felt validated as an LGBTQ scholar of color. It was the best conference I have attended so far because it maintained a balance between the personal and the professional and it covered topics that are important to me. The sentiment shared by this participant and many others demonstrates the salience of building spaces for LGBTQ people of color in academy and in other systems that do not support them.

Discussion

Results from the current study indicate that LGBTQ people of color in academia have an array of unique stressors that are unique to heterosexual/cisgender people of color or LGBTQ White people in academia. They described similar themes as previous literature on LGBTQ students of color (see Duran, 2018) – from social support to finding others with shared multiple identities. While participants appear to be accustomed to feeling isolated in academic spaces, they also demonstrate their resilience in being able to survive and thrive, with their limited support systems or resources. Further, results support that when LGBTQ people of color feel validated and supported, they can feel more affirmed and motivated in their professional lives.

Results also indicate how the LGBTQ Scholars of Color National Network can serve as a model of creating revolutionary spaces to combat systemic oppression in the academy. As noted above, the conference diverged from traditional academic conferences in that there was an intentionality to build social support and genuinely discuss personal obstacles - instead of merely presenting empirical data or maintaining formalities. In this way, the network disrupts White heterosexist patriarchal values of individualism and “professionalism” and instead advocates for collectivism and emotional authenticity to be more commonplace in academia (and perhaps especially for queer and trans people of color).

For the network itself, future organizational directions include forming local or regional LGBTQSOC chapters, so that members can meet more frequently; special interest groups based on discipline or identity groups could also promote more inclusion and feelings of validation. Future programming goals could include seeking more mentoring and networking opportunities, as well as scholarships on all levels. Potential research directions could include collecting and promoting disaggregated data, so that the needs of LGBTQ people of color (especially those in the academy) are well documented and publicized – resulting in proper outreach, programming, and support services for the underrepresented populations.

The data derived from the network has implications for ways to improve to the lives of for LGBTQ people of color on all levels. As LGBTQ support services and groups have been found to be beneficial in promoting academic success and psychological wellbeing (Pitcher et al., 2018), funding and institutional support for such groups are needed. Administrators must also increase their understanding of intersectional identities when hiring faculty, admitting graduate students, or when providing funding or pragmatic support for their constituents. For example, in being cognizant of the stressors that LGBTQ faculty of color face, university deans and department chairs may be mindful about overworking their LGBTQ faculty of color (e.g., consistently asking LGBTQ faculty of color to serve as “diversity” representatives). Moreover, administrators may initiate training opportunities for topics of interest for LGBTQ people of color (e.g., programming for employees and students), which increases the potential for approval and buy-in, while also relieving the burden of historically marginalized groups. LGBTQ organizations can be reflective and intentional in maintaining leadership that is representative of communities of color; they may also willfully acknowledge the historical role that racism and other forms of oppression play in LGBTQ organizational dynamics. Concurrently, racial and ethnic organizations who are committed to ensuring

the success of students and faculty of color must dismantle heteronormative and binary spaces and traditions— from ensuring that people are addressed by their gender pronouns to creating programming that is LGBTQ-affirmative.

Moreover, given that 76 percent of full-time faculty at degree-granting postsecondary institutions were White (U.S. Department of Education, 2018), it is clear that being a full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty of color in itself is a revolutionary act. Thus, being an LGBTQ faculty of color is even rarer and more extraordinary. Thus, in order to “queer” and “brown” academia even more, we must be intentionally loud about this disparity, while celebrating and uplifting the few who continue to build pathways and pipelines for future generations.

Finally, while Shirley Chisholm is credited as saying “If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair”, one of the mantras of LGBTQSOC is: “If you don't get invited to the table, build your own table.” While queer and trans faculty of color are tasked with navigating systemic racism, sexism, heterosexism, transphobia, xenophobia, and ableism in their home institutions, the network provides them with “their own space” – where they are encouraged to build coalitions, uplift each other, and empower themselves. In building this table, it is hoped that queer and trans scholars of color gain the confidence to build their own tables and even secure their own seats at tables in which they were not originally invited.

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Appendix A: Demographic Identities of Sample (N = 368)

2015 Conference Participants (N = 143)

Race	N	%
Black/African American	63	44.1
Latina/o/x American	36	25.2
Asian American/ Pacific Islander	22	15.4
Multiracial people	10	6.9
Arab American/Middle Eastern	7	4.8
Native Americans	5	3.5
Gender	N	%
Cisgender men	60	42.0
Cisgender women	50	35.0
Transgender men or women	17	11.9
Genderqueer/ Gender nonconforming	16	11.2
Sexual Orientation	N	%
Queer	55	38.5
Gay	39	27.3
Lesbian	24	16.8
Bisexual	15	10.5
Unique Descriptor	10	7.0
Educational Level	N	%
Doctorate Received	47	32.9
Current Doctoral Student	43	30.0
Master's Degree Received	30	21.0
Current Masters Student	23	16.1

2017 Conference Participants (N = 225)

Race	N	%
Black/African American	105	46.7
Latina/o/x American	39	17.3
Asian American/ Pacific Islander	35	15.6
Multiracial people	31	13.8
Native Americans	7	3.1
Unique Descriptors	8	3.6
Gender	N	%
Cisgender men	103	45.8
Cisgender women	69	30.7
Transgender men or women	11	4.9
Genderqueer/ Gender nonconforming	41	18.2
Sexual Orientation	N	%
Queer	83	36.9
Gay	82	36.4
Lesbian	24	10.7
Bisexual	16	7.1
Unique Descriptor	20	8.9
Educational Level	N	%
Doctorate Received	52	23.1
Current Doctoral Student	86	38.2
Master's Degree Received	56	25.0
Current Masters Student	31	13.8