

Dr. Melina McConatha
Faculty Development Grant Summary
Summer 2018
LGTBQ Resources for HBCUs

A growing number of researchers have published studies calling for more supportive and safe educational spaces (Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010). In order for our students to effectively learn and grow Lincoln University must have an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students regardless of gender or sexual identities (Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010). Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, and Frazer (2010) suggest that over half of LGBTQ students report bullying, abuse, and violence (Walls et al., 2010) on campus. Statistics suggest that bullying based on gender and sexual identity accounts for 80% of reported violence (Balick, 2004) in educational settings. Bullying, harassment, and violence based on LGBTQ identity have become methods of isolating people in the LGBTQ community (Kimmel, 2008) and, in turn, perpetuating long term social problems. Findings that highlight these disproportionate rates of bullying, abuse, and violence against LGBTQ young adults also reveal an alarming heightened suicide risk- especially in communities of color (Morrison & L'Heureux, 2001; Evans & Chapman, 2014). These findings underscore the importance of support in historically black educational systems for student with diverse gender and sexual identities; indeed, they constitute a call for action. Many higher educational policies are beginning to address violence, abuse, and discrimination based on gender and sexual identity. However, trainings and policies relating to the specific needs of historically black campuses are few and far between.

This summer Lincoln University participated in a step in the direction of becoming part of the larger movement of advocating and standing for the human rights and inclusivity of the LGTBQ community at HBCUs. We have developed a new student powered organization to support or students and advocate for university policies that support our LGTBQ community. Our students named the group Spectrum in an effort to symbolize the diverse and unique umbrella of identities this group works to support.

Many students have shared alarming experiences of struggle here on our campus based on their sexual and gender identities. Our first step in our research was to better understand these experiences so we could develop interventions and educational opportunities for a more inclusive campus climate. We felt it was essential to our mission and vision to create a culturally competent framework specific for HBCUs. This summer we contacted 25 HBCUs to better understand what resources were available in other historically black educational spaces. The results were staggering. We found that less than 10% of the HBCUs provided accessible LGTBQ services. While most colleges and universities shared that students are supported regardless of sexual or gender identity- minimal organizations or students' services existed to meet the specific needs of LGTBQ students.

In addition, the majority of resources available online were developed by predominantly white institutions. It is the position of the researchers that in order to best serve our students

while maintaining the mission and history of our legacy- Lincoln should create an Ally training that is created and lead by people of color. A framework was developed in an effort to guide students, staff, and faculty leaders in moving forward in Ally trainings. The following is a brief summary of the five elements developed by faculty and students in creating, maintaining, and disseminating Ally programs at HBCUs:

Student Powered: Students must have agency in the development and implementation of all LGBTQ programs in order to maintain a contemporary cultural context in the black community

Policy: It is essential to have specific policies stating that LGBTQ students, staff, and faculty are protected. These policies must include access to gender neutral bathrooms, required trainings for existing and new university members, and a code of conduct regarding LGBTQ student support on campus.

Student Services in Education: Opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to attend and learn more about how to best support LGBTQ campus members

Administrative Accountability: The campus community must be held accountable for any behavior, discourse, or neglect of people in the LGBTQ campus community

Legacy: Program Development relating to visibility as it relates to the history of leaders in the black community that are lesbian, gay, trans, bisexual, and queer

These 5 steps are a small push forward in a long journey. We find this to be an exciting opportunity not only to support our students, but to welcome new students that feel confident that our campus community in a safe and inclusive space for the LGBTQ community. We also want to prepare our graduating students with the culturally competence that is essential and required of most people in today's world. We hope to continue the lifelong learning process and continuous research best practices when serving our LGBTQ students in the context of our unique mission and legacy. We hope this framework will be only one of many ways Lincoln continues to creating a safe and inclusive campus community for ALL of our campus community.

RESEARCH PUBLICATION

Files-Thompson, N & McConatha, M. (2019). Social media and the mobilization of intercultural communities: Digital storytelling of violence against trans women of color in Eguchi, S & Calafell, B. Queer intercultural communication: The intersectional politics of belonging in and across differences. Rowman & Littlefield.

McConatha, M and Brown, D. (2019). Culturally Competent LGBTQ Ally Trainings for historically

Black educational spaces: A case study in Wadley, J. Handbook of Sexuality Leadership, Community Engagement, and Social Empowerment. Routledge/Taylor & Francis.

PUBLICATIONS

LGTBQAI Communities Historically Black Educational Spaces:
A Case Study in Student Powered Campus Engagement
Melina McConatha and Denise Brown

Authors Note:

Melina McConatha MSW PhD, Department of Human Services, Lincoln University
Denise Brown MA ABD, Department of Human Services, Lincoln University

LGTBQAI Communities Historically Black Educational Spaces:
A Case Study in Student Powered Campus Engagement

A growing number of researchers and educational leaders have published studies calling for more supportive and inclusive learning spaces (Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010). In order for students to effectively grow educational spaces must provide safe learning environments that meet the needs of students from diverse gender or sexual identities (Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010). Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, and Frazer (2010) suggest that over half of trans identified students report disproportionate rates of discrimination and violence on college campuses (Walls et al., 2010). Bullying, harassment, and violence based on LGBTQAI identities have become methods of isolating people (Kimmel, 2008). This chapter looks to explore student driven efforts to engage and mobilize LGBTQAI communities in order to include instead of isolate a student population already rich with diversity.

While many leaders in higher education are beginning to address violence, abuse, and discrimination based on gender and sexual identity, it is suggested that LGBTQAI students in Historically Black Educational Colleges and Universities (HBCU) find unreceptive and hostile environments on many campuses (Gasman, Nguyen, & Kalamazoo, 2013; Squire & Mobley, 2015; Styrahorn & Scott, 2012). Alarming, researchers show that LGBTQAI people of color report even higher rates of depression and suicidal ideation as a result of conservative climates (Wilton, Chiasson, & Nandi, 2018, Evans & Chapman, 2014). Some causes of the rates of depression and suicidal ideations include, intimate partner violence not regularly reported due to stigmas, greater psychological distress, and higher perceived sexuality discrimination (Wilton, Chiasson, & Nandi, 2018, Evans & Chapman, 2014). These findings call for action and underscore the need for a more research highlighting unique challenges and strengths in educational systems serving communities of color. For the purpose of this poster, the authors look to center a student powered LGBTQAI community engagement project at the nation's first degree granting university, Lincoln University. This project self-titled Systems of Change from Communities of Color is a student driven theoretically rich collection of digital stories of LGBTQAI people of color. The student's goal was to make an informed policy proposal to change campus climate and engage LGBTQAI students. The poster will detail the historical context of LGBTQAI movements at HBCUs, the guiding theoretical frameworks, an example of

the digital media collections and policy proposals, the privileges and positionality of faculty partnerships, and the underlying common themes found to be helpful in student's leadership in LGTBQAI community engagement.

LGTBQAI COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN HISTORICALLY BLACK EDUCATIONAL SPACES

This chapter provides a much-needed visibility to the unique challenges and strengths that historically black institutions have in negotiating campus climate as it relates to LGTBQAI community mobilization in the context of a campus historically rich in activism and social change. Spelman College, one of the nation's leading HBCU, founded the Audre Lorde Project in an effort to center the contributions, work, and resources of LGTBQAI communities in historically black educational spaces. The project was named after the activist and social justice leader self-identified as a "black feminist lesbian poet" (Threatt Kulii, Reuman, & Trapas, 1997). The first of its kind at an HBCU, the project was also student driven and included the digital archives of the life and work of Audre Lorde and writings on race, gender, and sexuality. The Audre Lorde Project lead the way to "increase public awareness and understanding about African American LGBTQ experiences; to explore the marginalization of racial issues in the LGBTQ movement and in gay and lesbian studies; and to create climates that acknowledge, value, and respect difference, especially within HBCUs, where profound silences continue to exist around gender and sexuality" (Audre Lorde Project, 1994?). In conjunction with the digital resources, "participants from eleven partnering HBCUs and other colleges and universities gathered at Spelman to engage in dialogue about LGBTQ issues on our campuses. Leading experts presented research findings and offered recommendations about how HBCUs might establish more open and inclusive environments for their LGBTQ constituents" (Guy-Sheftall, 2012).

As noted, work in historically black academic spaces that center social justice, activism, and student mobilization is by no means new. The work also illustrates how students driven projects and digital media can be characterized as community engagement. For the purpose of this work and community engagement is defined as "a community-level effort to address an issue or concern through organized action" (Fawcett, Francisco, Hyra, et al, 2000). The intention of this organized action is to create a safer and more inclusive historical black educational space for students identifying as LGTBQAI while empowering students to take leadership roles. This work looks to encourage leadership through the context of a historically black space, therefore, ensuring that the majority of resources come from and are accessible by predominantly black spaces. Theoretical standpoints centering race, gender, and communities while decentralizing power were applied in an effort continuous maintain work rooted in communities of color.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

By incorporating a critical race feminist perspective this project did not position faculty or administration as "the expert." By utilizing digital social media students were able to participate in knowledge sharing activities from people they identified as "peers." Classroom activities were incorporating to provide students an opportunity to find and collect resources online. This collection on digital work that they were able to in turn share positioned the students as both "learners and knowledge-producers" (Bondy, Light & Nicholas, 2017). Breaking away from

traditional means of teacher-student educational models provided spaces for student-powered learning.

This project examined experiences of gender and sexual identity as a result of social constructions shaped by culture, history, social expectations, and shared experiences. Applying critical race feminist theory to the exploration of the constructed nature of gender and sexual binaries helped shape the understanding of the digital storytelling and sense making of human experiences online in the project. As Beggan & Allison (2017) assert "from a social constructionist point of view, the importance and nature of sexuality is derived from how we, as a collective culture, choose to see it." Feminist theory also furthered our understanding of the identities individuals people were given instead of claimed, as well as those that society embraces and disregards to reinforce cisgendered (when an individual identifies with the sex assigned at birth) or gender-conforming heteronormativity (Butler, 1990).

A study of the nuanced experience of discrimination of students of color based on gender and sexual identity requires a broader feminist framework to question, discuss, and explore shared experiences of people of color in the context of intersecting identities. Students studied critical race feminism in prior to the analysis and collection of social media in order to understand the nuances of "injustices faced by racially minoritized communities in uniquely intersectional experiences" (Rogers, 2017; Patton and Ward, 2016). By centering race, gender, and sexual identity in this work, the project works towards ending oppression by using social media and scholarship as a catalyst for social change.

A Student Engagement Project: Applications in Socio-Ecological Systems Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory highlights the importance of this and linking people with the larger context and how people can connect with other systems to create change. Ecological systems theory provides a framework and identifies specific systems of connections that can help to shape a person's community. Exploring these systems one can gain a better understanding of the unique strengths and needs of LGBTQAI students of color. Digital social media and archives provide a space to understand these specific connections unique to an individual's identity (refs here). As shown in the Audre Lorde Project, by sharing the stories and work of LGBTQAI People of Color online others can easily access, relate, connect, share, and support each other. For example, a LGBTQAI person of color struggling at a conservative HBCU campus can share and connect with others in similar situations from the safety of their screen or phone. A once isolated student can now have a space to share, connect, and take a leadership role in creating change on campuses with a simple share (Brown & Thomas, 2014). A digital story can call for social action, connect with peers, faculty, administration, and communities through a social media post (refs here). Most importantly, students can seek out other LGBTQAI people of color that may not be as visible or "out" on campus and, in turn, connect and mobilize to create change.

Bronfenbrenner developed the theory to highlight the dynamic interactions between young people and their unique environment. Furman and Gruenewalk (2004) have expanded this theory to explore how people create social change through an analysis of existing systems. By using Ecological Systems as a foundation, Socio-Ecological systems work look specifically at

social justice movements and supporting community engagement through an individual; existing context. This more contemporary application of Socio-Ecological Systems is a useful framework for students to study and collect representative perspectives of LGBTQAI people of color online and on campus and, in turn, promote community engagement and social change.

Digital Stories can link people with educational institutions, as well as other communities simultaneously. An analysis from a Socio- Ecological Systems theory was used by students in the Systems of Change in Communities of Color project to identify ways a LGBTQAI person can connect with peers, social media, schools, and communities to create change. Socio-Ecological theory looks at a student as a leader and agent of change in the context of their unique interacting systems. For the purpose of this project students looked at LGBTQAI individuals of color on social media as the unit of analysis and leader of community engagement. In this projects students explored the LGBTQAI person of color's closest community (MICROSYSTEM)- in which they chose as the college campus, peers, and family. Students examined how micro systems interacted with each other on social media (meso-system)- in which many looked how posts by friends, family, and peers connected online following posts and shares. In order to better understand the context of these posts students looked at how the media (exosystem) portrayed LGBTQAI people of color and how that, in turn, shaped the lived experience of the community. Each of these noted systems exist within the larger cultural and ideological framework of today's world. In an effort to better understand that students looked at the current social and political climate (macrosystem), while identifying shifts in time and history (chronosystem).

In the Systems of Change by Communities of Color project students identified ways that LGBTQAI people of color experiences were be validated, supported, shared online. Studies show that interactions in social media can reflect relationships and community engagement in physical spaces (Wolff, Allen, Himes, Fish, & Losardo, 2014). In other words, an analysis of systems of support for people for LGBTQAI people of color on social media is an opportunity for students to; reflect opportunity for to feel less isolated, become more connect with a larger system, have mentorship from other LGBTQAI people of color, and engagement with peers to create a more inclusive policy on campus informed by stories shared through posts of LGBTQAI people of color.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THROUGH POLICY REFORM

Through the careful collection of digital data, including the brief summary of aforementioned digital labor of LGBTQAI people of color, the students developed a framework helpful as educational policy student leaders-informed by theory. As noted, the majority of LGBTQAI resources available online were developed by predominantly white institutions. It is the position of the students and authors of this chapter that in order to best serve students while maintaining a culture and mission historically rich in black social movements educational resources provided to students must be predominantly created and shared by people of color. The framework was developed through data and course discussions following the socio-ecological LGBTQAI leadership project outlined above. The following is a brief summary of the five elements

developed by students following the social media research in creating, maintaining, and disseminating programs to engage students and mobilizing the LGTBQAI community at HBCUs:

(1) Student Powered: Students must have agency in the development and implementation of all LGTBQAI programs in order to maintain a contemporary cultural context in the black community

(2) Policy: It is essential to have specific policies stating that LGTBQAI students, staff, and faculty are protected. These policies must include access to gender neutral bathrooms, required trainings for existing and new university members, and a code of conduct regarding LGTBQAI student support on campus (See below)

(3) Student Services in Education: Opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to attend and learn more about how to best support LGTBQAI campus members

(4) Administrative Accountability: The campus community must be held accountable for any behavior, discourse, or neglect of people in the LGTBQAI campus community

(5) Legacy: Program Development relating to visibility as it relates to the history of leaders in the black community that are lesbian, gay, trans, bisexual, and queer through a digital LGTBQAI resource page and ongoing LGTBQAI student lead educational opportunities (Department of Human Service Students, 2018)

POLICY PROPOSAL

We are a collective of students from the Department of Human Services working on a project we named Systems of Change from Communities of Color. We have been researching the experiences of LGTBQAI people of color online in order to better understand the needs of the community on our campus. Being that we are the first HBCU- we must be leaders in a social justice movement that has already begun without us. Attending a historically black institution is an honor- we look to learn from and support people like ourselves to create a better world. We have been leaders of change since our college doors opened, however, we have much to change. Many HBCUS have a policy to declare and maintain support and inclusivity for LGTBQAI students. However, our campus community is silent in policy and action as it related to our gender and sexual identity diversity. As one of us wrote in reflection "If you see me I look just like any other person and that is exactly what I am- a person here, at this campus, waiting for someone to hear my voice. We are not different, we are here because we are the same" As students we look to you to implement a policy here on our campus. Through our project and studies we have learned that so many LGTBQAI people of color live lives filled with violence and discrimination based on who they are. If "Black Lives Matter" then don't LGTBQAI black lives matter just as much? Shouldn't we have a policy that states that we support our students regardless of sexual or gender identity? Our university should welcome and protect our LGTBQAIP students, staff, and faculty instead of silencing them. Please consider a policy that declares our inclusivity and engage students in order to see our diversity as a strength instead of a weakness. As one of our mentors Alice Walker wrote "no person is your friend who

demands your silence, or denies your right to grow.” Please help us share our voice, learn, and grow.

~A Selection of Students from Lincoln University’s Psychology and Human Services Department

NAVIGATING PRIVILEGES AND PARTNERSHIPS THROUGH POSITIONALITY IN LGBTQAI CAMPUS LEADERSHIP

The Consortium of Higher Education (2016) called for the following point of considerations when supporting LGBTQAI Students of Color on College Campuses:

Visibility: Do resources for LGBTQAI students primarily include the faces of people of color? Include LGBTQAI people of color when discussing historical and current social justice movements.

Consider collaborations and intentionally partner with LGBTQAI people of color

Consider your own positionality to this topic, show up authentically, and practice self-work to examine how we show up in LGBTQAI spaces in historically black spaces.

acknowledging that campus LGBTQAI campus centers have been founded with the "white founding movement narrative" and make spaces and room to challenge these narratives with student leaders of color.

FACULTY PARTNERSHIP POSITIONALITY

As noted, this chapter explores applications of critical race feminist perspectives in LGBTQAI community engagement at historically black educational spaces. In doing so the authors must participate in the reflexive practice of positionality (ref). This chapter reflects the perspectives of a non-tenured heterosexual African American woman and a non-tenured white queer cis-gendered woman professor in addition to data used from a collection of students at the nation’s first degree granting historically black college. A short summary of the process is included in this chapter to maintain transparency in leadership roles in LGBTQAI community engagement and mobilization:

“As an African American straight woman born and raised in Philadelphia I have the experience of being a product of inner-city struggles which include periods of poverty, discrimination, and injustices. Like many African American women, I was indoctrinated in the church which was predominately black and most of my community was African American as well. In terms of sexuality I find that homosexuality is targeted and held to a more severe level of "sinful" behavior within the church. My perception of sexuality in general is that it is far more complex than labels and difficult for the black community to understand that concept due to being restricted by labels. However, seeing sexuality as an experience of personality, feelings, emotions, self-identity and physical evolutions is not a popular thought in many circles regardless of color, human nature gravitates towards labels! As a black woman within the black community I would be accepted and welcomed as a straight woman however, if I were gay then I would only be welcomed by certain circles outside of the church environment. As a black woman I would also experience rejection and discrimination outside of the black community for

just being a black woman. Therefore, it is my understanding that leadership means to support those who are both minority and identify with LGBTQAI because the discrimination they experience is double what I have experienced (Brown, 2018).

“As a white woman in the queer community working in educational spaces supporting LGBTQAI communities of color I am constantly questioning my positionality and how it shapes my work and relationship students. In my research I look to primarily listen, advocate and share the work my students find most important, and work to better understand how to pass on power and privileges provided to be because of the shade of my skin. and stand in solidarity. My queerness has created spaces at times that have not been safe and not been easy. However, my whiteness and my gender presentation provide certain freedoms. These privileges have led to this chapter- a space to reflect, access to the internet, a working computer, colleagues to comfortably share my thoughts on gender and sexuality safely, relationships with people in the LGBTQAI community that have economic resources to take a moment to share their thoughts safely and thoroughly, and the opportunity to learn a language in academia that will be published in my name and not my students- to name just a few. I often struggle with knowing “what to do” with these privileges. Sharing this work is a privilege and falls dangerously close to “white savior” frameworks and “white founding movement” narratives in LGBTQAI movements. Ultimately, the efforts in this chapter look to center and share the work of students from a historically black educational space, rich in a history of social justice, that will one day be future leaders of the LGBTQAI community (McConatha, 2018).

MOBILIZING STUDENT LEADERS AT HBCUS

Ongoing efforts of campus LGBTQAI inclusivity must include partnerships with the larger campus community (Rankin, S., Blumenfeld, W. J., Weber, G. N., & Frazer, 2010). These connections begin with student leaders (Adekemi et al, 2017). Traditional literature in higher education leadership suggest a more hierarchical model looking to administration and “hero” positions (Eddy and VanDerLinden, 2006). However, by centering students as leaders’ campus climate shifts can be a result of peers rather than rooted in power and authority. Researchers posit the role of administration, faculty, and staff is more helpful in providing resources and tools for student leaders (Rivers & Swank, 2017). Liefwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) suggest a leadership framework that shares opportunities to make significant decisions. By empowering students with a voice, while simultaneously being provided with current research and skills in engagement, a campus community can not only engage LGBTQAI students, but lay the groundwork for future community leaders (REF NEEDED HERE).

DISCUSSIONS FOR FUTURE LEADERS

People of Color continue to be underrepresented leadership positions which in turn shape the everyday lives of the larger communities served (ref). In addition, people in the LGBTQAI community continue to be under represented in these same key roles (ref).

QUESTIONS

- 1: Where can you find spaces of voices for leadership that may be underrepresented?
- 2: How can student leadership in sexuality help inform sex ed curriculum?
- 3: How can student driven policy reform be an opportunity for campus engagement

4: How can someone be an informed Ally for LGBTQAI People of Color?

5: What are other educational spaces where communities of color are the majority, yet underrepresented in the discourse of gender and sexual identities?