

# Unapologetically Queer in Unapologetically Black Spaces: Creating an Inclusive HBCU Campus

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*Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are notoriously perceived as unwelcoming towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students, and are considerably behind predominantly white institutions (PWIs) in regards to providing supportive and affirming environments. Fewer than 25 percent of the 105 HBCUs in the United States have LGBTQ student organizations, and only three have established LGBTQ resource centers. This article, written by the co-founder of one of these centers, is a reflexive exercise that describes the history, successes, and challenges of developing and sustaining an LGBTQ resource center on one HBCU campus. Establishing LGBTQ initiatives at HBCUs is absolutely imperative to the retention of LGBTQ students, student success, and sustainability and the purpose of this article is to guide other HBCUs as they work to become more inclusive institutions.*

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**H**istorically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are notoriously perceived as unwelcoming towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students, and are considerably behind predominantly white institutions (PWIs) in regards to providing supportive and affirming environments. This article is a reflexive exercise that begins by delineating the positive contributions of HBCUs in regards to educating black college students, continues with a review of the limited literature on the LGBTQ experience at HBCUs, and concludes by describing the history, successes, and challenges of developing and sustaining an LGBTQ resource center on one HBCU campus.

Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are schools which were established after the Civil War and before 1964 whose primary mission is to educate black students (Gasman 2013). They have a rich and critical history in the United States and have played a major role in the socio-economic advancement of

the black community. Until the 1960s, HBCUs educated nearly all black students pursuing post-secondary degrees in the United States (Lundy-Wagner 2015). Though today they represent less than 3 percent of post-secondary schools in the United States, the 105 HBCUs enroll 11 percent of black college students (Gasman 2013).

HBCUs provide an environment for black students that simply cannot be matched by predominantly white institutions (PWIs), and the positive outcomes associated with attending an HBCU are well documented (Harper and Gasman 2008; Palmer and Young 2012; Strayhorn 2012). Black graduates who attended an HBCU report a greater college experience than black graduates who attended a PWI. They are twice as likely to recall a professor who cared about them, a professor who made them excited about learning, and having a mentor, and post-graduation they have a greater sense of purpose and financial well-being (Gallup 2015). Fifty five percent of black HBCU graduates “strongly agree that their university prepared them well for life outside of college,” compared to only 29

percent of black graduates from PWIs (Gallup 2015:7). Perhaps consequently, black HBCU alumni have a much stronger attachment to their alma mater than black PWI graduates (Gallup 2015). Regardless of whether an African-American student attends an HBCU or a PWI, satisfaction with the undergraduate experience appears to be influenced by the degree of support associated with the campus environment (Chen, Ingram and Davis 2014).

HBCUs are particularly effective at educating black collegians because of high levels of support from faculty and administrators, intense mentorship relationships, and an overall campus



climate of support and caring for students (Palmer and Young 2012). However, not all students attending HBCUs receive equal levels of support. Although studies of the experiences of LGBTQ students on HBCU campuses are limited and often based on extremely small sample sizes, they do reveal that LGBTQ students do not necessarily view administrators and faculty as supportive; LGBTQ students face unique challenges related to the culture and campus climate of HBCUs, and they struggle to find spaces that affirm their sexual and/or gender identities (e.g., Ford 2015; Means and Jeager 2013; Patton 2011; Patton and Simmons 2008). At least one HBCU has gone so far as to formally label homosexuality as a form of “sexual misconduct” (Harper and Gasman 2008).

Mobley and Johnson (2015) argue that “rather than encouraging students to walk in their own truth and embrace their authentic selves, many HBCUs compel students who identify as gay or lesbian to suppress these identities while on campus” (p. 79). Unlike their PWI counterparts, HBCUs have been painfully slow to respond to the needs of LGBTQ students (Gasman 2013). Overall, only 21 HBCUs have LGBTQ student organizations and only three have formal offices or centers dedicated to serving LGBTQ students; the first of which did not open until 2012 at Bowie State University (Gasman 2013).

There are many aspects of HBCU culture which may cause LGBTQ students to have a less positive HBCU experience than their non-LGBTQ peers, but the most obvious and documented are the conservative and religious underpinnings of HBCUs, the fervor with which racial identity is celebrated and emphasized above all other identities, and the rigid gender roles that HBCUs enforce upon their students (Ford 2015; Means and Jeager 2013; Patton 2011; Patton and Simmons 2008).

### *Conservatism and Religiosity*

In many ways HBCUs have extremely progressive histories, beginning with their revolutionary missions of educating those who might not otherwise have access to education. HBCUs have played an undeniable role in black protest movements, including the Civil Rights movement, but did so within the parameters of an extremely conservative culture fostered by the religious roots of most HBCUs (Mobley and Johnson 2015). Thus, “a palpable tension persists within HBCUs as they continue to negotiate their commitment to the mission of racial uplift and their historically conservative campus environments,” which has undoubtedly played a role in the slow progress of HBCUs towards

inclusivity for LGBTQ students (Mobley and Johnson 2015:79).

Most HBCUs were formed by religious organizations, many of whom have reputations for perpetuating homophobic attitudes in the black community (Mobley and Johnson 2015). The black church continues to have undeniable influence over HBCUs, even among public HBCUs. For example, important campus events, such as graduation ceremonies, often begin and end with prayer and hymns grounded in Christianity<sup>1</sup>.

Research affirms that spirituality serves “as a lens through which black college students define and understand identity” (Stewart 2012:18) and black LGBTQ people attend church more frequently than other LGBTQ people of color (Battle, Pastrana, and Daniels 2012). It is not surprising, then, that the church influences not only how LGBTQ students perceive the HBCU experience but also how they interact (or avoid interacting) with other LGBTQ students on campus. As one gay male participant in Ford’s (2015) study explained,

“I remember when I first started school, there were individuals that I would look at, and I would tell myself, ‘I will never talk to them flaming queens,’ because going to a black college is like going to a black church, basically. You know, certain things are looked down upon, and being a black flamboyant gay man was one of the main ones.” (P. 361)

### *Racial Identity*

HBCUs are, as the title of this article suggests, unapologetically black spaces, as they should be. African-American history is woven into every aspect of campus life and HBCU students, faculty, and staff are reminded of the bravery of our institution founders at every opportunity. It is the level of pride which the historical

significance of HBCUs invokes that no doubt draws students to HBCUs and helps to recruit and retain faculty and staff. It is this hyper-focus on racial history and identity and the perceived pressure to “choose” an identity which may cause LGBTQ students to privilege their racial identity over other identities, especially at an HBCU (Patton 2011). The pressure to deny or ignore one’s sexual or gender identity is especially pronounced in the parts of the black community where gayness is associated with being white (Ford 2015). Despite the fact that intersecting identities inform one’s experiences, often times (perhaps more so for students at an HBCU) racial identity trumps the others. Moreover, just as gayness is conflated with whiteness, blackness is often defined through hyper-femininity, hyper-masculinity, and heterosexuality.

### *Traditional Gender Roles*

Campus life at an HBCU is arguably more vibrant and exciting than it is at a PWI. The school pride is palpable and every event is a well-orchestrated celebration. It is at these events, however, that the very gendered nature of HBCU culture is most evident. Unlike PWIs, HBCUs annually crown a campus Queen and/or King, also called Mr. and Miss, who represent their institution at on-campus events and serve as ambassadors to the broader public. These roles are extremely coveted, surpassed only by the prestige of being elected president of the Student Government Association, and the winners are truly treated like institutional royalty. The Queens of each HBCU not only compete for the title on their own campus, but face-off with other HBCU Queens to be featured on the cover of *Ebony* magazine as one of their Top HBCU Queens of the Year. The demands of the Queen and King roles are so great that many attend a national leadership conference to learn the ropes. As one might assume, the Queen and King are

<sup>1</sup> Indeed, as I write this article, the HBCU for which I work is kicking off our homecoming week with a “gospel explosion.”

expected to personify very traditional ideals of femininity and masculinity, and they serve as role models in the gender socialization process which occurs on HBCU campuses. LGBTQ students who fail to mirror these gender expectations find themselves at greater risk of verbal harassment and physical violence (Ford 2015).

Many HBCUs enforce very strict dress codes (Harper and Gasman 2008), some of which dictate acceptable gender presentation. Morehouse College, an all-male HBCU, even went so far as to create an “Appropriate Attire Policy,” which expressly prohibited students from wearing women’s clothing. It was no secret that this policy was meant to control the school’s gay and transgender students. Then V.P. for Student Services, Dr. William Bynum (as quoted in Mungin 2009) admitted, “We are talking about five students who are living a gay lifestyle that is leading them to dress a way we do not expect in Morehouse men” (p. 1). Interestingly, Morehouse offered its first LGBT history course in 2013 – it was offered via Skype by a professor at Yale (Gasman 2013).

Rigid gender roles and hyper-masculinity shape the LGBTQ experience at an HBCU (Ford 2015; Patton and Simmons 2008), and the degree to which one experiences harassment and abuse is related to the degree to which one conforms to the traditional gender roles (Ford 2015). A participant from one study describes the pressure to perform gender:

“Going to an HBCU, being black had a lot of pride associated with it, especially being a black man. There were things you shouldn’t say or do. You shouldn’t have any feminine characteristics. I have been gay all my life. It was evident. I’m not the most masculine man in the world, but I’m also not the most effeminate. The pressure to be masculine was challenging, but not a challenge to who I was” (Ford 2015:359).

Though the research is limited and focuses largely on conservatism, racial identity, and gender socialization, the policy implications for serving LGBTQ students at HBCUs are made quite clear: LGBTQ students need more than just LGBTQ student organizations. Established Queer spaces (like centers) are important, opportunities for LGBTQ students to engage in political advocacy are necessary, mentors are essential (especially mentors who can identify with the students’ experiences), and safezone-like training is critical (Ford 2015; Means and Jeager 2013). Thus, developing spaces which affirm the multiple identities of LGBTQ students at HBCUs must be a priority. The following section describes the evolution of one such space.

### **Our Story**

So, today I walked into the Safezone...and an excited young woman said to me, ‘Hello! Welcome to the Safezone! Is this your first time here?’ Inside I laughed, because as many of you know I founded the Safezone three years ago, but honestly my heart was beaming. The fact that she didn’t know me or the history of the Safezone was actually a sign of hope for me. It means that what I started...is now so institutionalized that it’s no longer just me sitting in a dusty old dorm room waiting for whatever random student wanted to talk about their needs. It meant that now we have come so far that we have students standing proud at the door waiting to welcome the next person who enters (Emily Lenning, Facebook, September 29, 2016).

Before describing my institution’s story, it is necessary to put my institution and my own identity into context. The HBCU described here is located in a large city in a southeastern state and is located ten miles away from a major U.S. Army installation. Founded in 1867, the institution has an annual enrollment of roughly 6,000 students. Most of the students are female (68 percent), black (63 percent), and reside in-

state (96 percent), and nearly half (48 percent) are non-traditional students over the age of twenty-four (Office of Institutional Research 2016). Seventy-six percent of students are eligible for federal Pell grants, which is slightly higher than the average among HBCUs in the state (69.8 percent) and nearly triple the eligibility at PWIs (27.5 percent) in the state (Gasman 2013).

I am a white, cisgender lesbian. Other than being a lesbian, I hold several points of privilege which the majority of my students are not afforded—most notably my race and economic status. Indeed, I am the unapologetically Queer person referenced in the title of this article, an identity that many of my students do not feel comfortable claiming. The term Queer has a negative connotation within much of the black LGBTQ community because it represents forms of race and class privilege not extended to them (Means and Jeager 2013). Indeed, gay African American men “are less likely to use terms such as ‘gay’ or ‘bisexual’ because they have political ramifications and to a large extent are viewed as ‘whitewashed’ terms” (Patton 2011:79). There is no doubt that the process of claiming a particular sexual orientation or gender identity label is far more complicated for people of color than it is for whites, so to proclaim that I am unapologetically Queer is in and of itself a privilege. Indeed, to be “out” at all can be complicated for black LGBTQ individuals “because doing so means dealing with homophobia and traditional male expectations within the African American community and racism in the gay community” (Patton 2011:79). It may very well be that the privileges I enjoy explain why I have played the role that I have in the struggle to make my HBCU more inclusive.

I am unapologetically Queer in part due to my own experience as a college student. I attended a mid-sized Midwestern PWI which established a very active and progressive LGBTQ resource office long before I ever stepped foot on campus. The inclusive tone set by that office played a role in my own coming out process, and I found

comfort and fellowship in the events they sponsored. Prior to taking my current position I was quite naïve about HBCUs. Other than knowing they existed I was unaware of their unique culture and assumed that the only thing distinguishing them from PWIs was their history and racial make-up. To put it mildly, I was dumbfounded to learn that my institution had literally no resources for LBGQT students and neither did most HBCUs. As much of my scholarship is focused on issues facing the Queer community, I naturally felt compelled to do something about what I saw as an injustice. Admittedly, I waited until I earned tenure before I put my extra energy into creating a more inclusive campus. The work I eventually did ultimately made my institution the third HBCU in the country to open a space devoted exclusively to meeting the needs of our LGBTQ students.

The development of our LGBTQ center, which we call the Safezone, has been a slow, non-linear, and somewhat accidental process. It began when our Career Services office announced that it had received a small grant to improve the way they served LGBTQ students. The grant required employees to receive training in LGBTQ issues so, having already trained our campus police department, I contacted the office and offered to conduct the training. The training was well-received and I was shortly thereafter asked by the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs to conduct trainings for all units under the Division of Student Affairs (i.e., Health Services, Center for Personal Development, Residence Life, Intramurals, Student Activities, Student Center), all student leaders (i.e., Student Government Association, the Pan-Hellenic Council, Residence Assistants), and eventually the Chancellor’s Cabinet. Each three-hour workshop shared the same basic components, but they were all tailored to address issues related specifically to the services provided by the various units or activities the organizations engaged in. Most of the hundreds of staff and students that I trained embraced me and the

information I provided them, but some were visibly appalled that they had to sit through such training. This is no different from my experiences with audiences outside of the HBCU setting. In my follow up report to the Vice Chancellor was a recommendation to open a space for LGBTQ students and, to my delight, she agreed.

In the fall of 2013, we (myself and one of the career counselors who secured the aforementioned grant) were given a small office in one of our administration buildings. We each spent a few hours a week there but few students ever came by, likely because there was no formal announcement of the space and because it was far from areas typically populated by students. Had students come by, all they would have found was us; we had no resources to speak of. Our big break happened when renovations began on our student center, and everything housed there (e.g., student government offices, student activities) was moved to an old dormitory. The Safezone office was moved there just before National Coming Out Day in October of 2013, which is when we held our big “grand re-opening.”

Even though we were relegated to the second floor of the dorm, which was only occupied by our office and the student newspaper, there was definite momentum. We received pamphlets, films, and stickers from the *National Black Justice Coalition* and the *Human Rights Campaign* (each of which sent a representative to our opening), we were given a small budget to purchase office supplies and LGBTQ-themed artwork, and many students, faculty, staff, and administrators stopped by during the opening event. Then, silence. We did

host a few events, such as movie night, an anti-bullying dorm storm, and a few guest speakers. Some were well attended (e.g., when we brought a black, gay Reverend to campus) and others brought in only a few students, but the office itself remained extremely underutilized. On occasion a student would stop by to see what we were about and the newly formed student group (then called the Gay-Straight Alliance) would sometimes use the space, but otherwise our hours spent there were essentially fruitless. We did have hope, though, that because we were put in the building with the other student center offices we would move with them after the new student center was complete. We were confident that being a permanent fixture in the student center would be just what we needed to become part of the landscape.

As it turns out, there was no formal plan for where we would go after the renovations were complete, and the career counselor who had been



so instrumental in supporting the Safezone left the institution to pursue a graduate degree. At the same time, I was finding myself spending less time engaging in Safezone-related tasks. This was in part due to developments in my career, but also because I felt it was misguided for the institution to assume that I alone would or could

continue to address all LGBTQ issues on our campus. Even though few students were utilizing what little services we had to offer, I knew that under-utilization was not an indication such services were not needed, but rather the students who needed them may not feel comfortable accessing them. It was a pivotal moment at my institution—they either had to formally institutionalize the Safezone, or let it go. The administration decided to do something in between (due in part to a limited budget).

Unable to fund a new hire to staff the Safezone office, the Division of Student Affairs set out to find an existing employee who wanted to dedicate a portion of their time to staffing the Safezone office for the 2014-2015 school year. The office was given a new space in the form of an empty office which was even smaller than the dorm room we previously had. Months passed until finally a white, heterosexual, cisgender female staff member agreed to take on the extra responsibility. She had no background in LGBTQ issues and her “regular” job was to assist commuter students, but she was enthusiastic and anything, it seemed, was better than nothing. With her installment, the Safezone had yet another “grand opening” with much less pomp and circumstance than the first time – the office was so small the visitors had to stand around outside of it. Needless to say, in its second year of existence the Safezone was more symbolic than anything. The staff member left the institution in the spring of 2015 and the Safezone space was delegated to another university organization.

Just when it looked as though Safezone would close for good, our university hired a new Director of Cultural Programming (in October 2015) who happened to be a black gay man with prior experience advising an LGBTQ student organization at another HBCU. Having read articles about our Safezone program, he was surprised he could not find it when he arrived on campus. He quickly took it upon himself to resurrect the Safezone in addition to his other work responsibilities. He organized a field trip to

an HBCU that was one of the first HBCUs to open an LGBTQ center. Accompanying him were three staff in Student Affairs, including the Director of Student Engagement. They visited the center, spoke to its Director (whose only job is to run the center), and participated in an LGBTQ campus event which was being held that day. The trip sparked renewed interest in the Safezone from administrators and by the end of the 2015-2016 school year a new space was identified and new materials, equipment, and furniture was ordered.

The new space, which features an office and a larger gathering space which has a couch, chairs, a television, stocked bookshelves, and two computers, is a bright and inviting space on the lower level of our student center. The Safezone now has the benefit of being in the busy and heavily populated student center, but is also tucked away just enough to give our less confident students some sense of privacy. To celebrate the new (and hopefully final) location, a third grand opening was held this fall and it was even better attended than the first one. The Director of Cultural Programming spends three days a week there and students, finally, have begun to utilize the space for studying, hanging out, and holding meetings for our LGBTQ student group (now called Club F.L.A.M.E.). Like other units in Student Affairs, the Safezone now receives a small annual budget that is used for purchasing supplies and hosting LGBTQ-themed events. We are hopeful this is an indication of some measure of cultural shift by the university.

### **Challenges to Queering HBCUs**

Though our institution has advanced considerably, we still have a long way to go. Our journey has made it clear we cannot afford to take the Safezone for granted, and that its doors will only remain open if we are vigilant and dedicated to its existence. Of particular challenge on our campus, and likely on other HBCU campuses that try to expand their LGBTQ services, are the

lack of HBCU models for serving LGBTQ students, gaining institutional and student “buy in,” and sustainability.

### *Finding HBCU Models*

When we started this journey at our institution, we had no idea what LGBTQ services should and could look like on an HBCU campus. It is not appropriate to simply mimic what has been done on the campuses of PWIs because LGBTQ spaces on HBCU campuses should uniquely reflect the culture of HBCUs. Despite any negative aspect of HBCU culture, it is the positive aspects of HBCU culture which produce successful black graduates. Those positive characteristics (e.g., supportive faculty and administrators, mentorship, caring campus climate) must be reflected in any LGBTQ spaces. Further, HBCUs will not automatically become LGBTQ-affirming by eradicating or changing the issues outlined above (i.e., conservatism, religiosity, racial identity, rigid gender socialization). Conservative values, Christianity, black pride, and celebrations of traditional femininity and masculinity have defined HBCUs for their entire existence and deserve to be recognized as cornerstones of the institutions. Even LGBTQ students find comfort in these traditions and many choose the schools they do because the HBCU value systems reflect those they were raised in. Thus, it is necessary to find ways to connect the people on HBCU campuses who are interested in doing the work of building inclusive spaces that reflect the spirit of HBCUs.

### *Institutional Buy-In*

Key to institutionalizing LGBTQ services is having administrators who recognize the need for, and support the development of, Queer spaces on HBCU campuses. Students at HBCUs (for reasons previously outlined) may be less likely to be out, and the perception of having a small LGBTQ population can give administrators an excuse not to invest in things

like Safezone training, LGBTQ events, and LGBTQ centers. That gender or sexual identity takes a back seat to racial identity in many instances may make it easier for administrators to deny a need for services which support healthy explorations and development of student’s gender and sexual orientation. It is no secret that there has been administrative opposition when HBCU students have tried to form LGBTQ student organizations, and few HBCU administrators and faculty have facilitated intentional campus discussions about LGBT issues (Harper and Gasman 2008). Positional subordination is very real at HBCUs (Harper and Gasman 2008) and so students are not likely to fight for something if administrators do not appear to be on board. Organizations like *Human Rights Campaign* or *National Black Justice Coalition* have provided much needed support for the work that has been done on HBCU campuses, and their focus should be shifted to the administrative cabinets of HBCUs where little or nothing has been done. It is time for administrators to recognize that by failing to address the needs of their LGBTQ students, HBCUs are putting themselves at a competitive disadvantage to those institutions that do (Lee 2015).

### *Student Buy-In*

Student buy-in, if it does happen, will surely take time. LGBTQ students at HBCUs are often rendered invisible and pushed to the margins of the campus community (Harper and Gasman 2008) and consequently may take some time to feel comfortable in spaces where their identity is on display. For our institution, I suspect this will be less true after our Safezone has been around long enough that the student body doesn’t remember a time when it did not exist. Persistence, however, is only one step towards sustainability. Other factors, especially race, may influence the successful development of LGBTQ initiatives on HBCU campuses.



Black LGBTQ people are less likely to feel connected to the LGBTQ community than other LGBTQ people of color (Battle, Pastrana, and Daniels 2012). Indeed, for some members of the black community, gayness is akin to whiteness and represents colonialism (Ford 2015). Thus, black LGBTQ students, especially those attending an HBCU, may not be initially drawn to overtly LGBTQ spaces. This is probably especially true in a case like ours, where the Safezone was initiated by a white person who is still today considered a primary representative of our program. Even though I have a good rapport with both LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ students, I will always be the “other” and will never truly understand the experiences that my black LGBTQ students have.

For LGBTQ initiatives to be successful on HBCU campuses, race must be a constant consideration. It is imperative that LGBTQ students not feel like their racial identity is being minimized at the expense of their sexual or gender identities. The likelihood of this happening is heightened when LGBTQ initiatives are largely led by white faculty and staff whose privilege allows them to ignore their own race and the historical oppression that it represents. This is not to say that white faculty and staff should sit idly by when there are LGBTQ students in need, but that they must be mindful in the way they go about advocating for inclusion on HBCU campuses and that they must be willing to purposefully exclude themselves when appropriate. White advocates must recognize that if they are not intentional in their actions, they risk perpetuating the very same climate that alienated LGBTQ students on HBCU campuses to begin with.

### *Sustainability*

Though our institution is credited as being the third HBCU in the country to open an LGBTQ resource center, there have been times that the label of “center” would be considered a stretch. Despite the efforts of a few people, the doors of

the Safezone have been inconsistently open. Even now, when we feel confident, we are careful not to hold our breath. We are proud of the work we have done and recognize it is considered “groundbreaking,” but the fact that our Safezone has been recognized as a model for other HBCUs (Mobley and Johnson 2015) is a clear indication that HBCUs in general have a long way to go.

LGBTQ spaces on HBCU campuses by their very nature will challenge the status quo on these campuses, and such challenges are long overdue. However, black people have had to challenge the status quo for far too long, and perhaps not having to face a daily struggle is what makes HBCU campuses a safe haven for black students. This may explain why some LGBTQ students on campus seem completely uninterested in “fighting” for space and recognition and, quite frankly, it is not their job to do so. There must be faculty and staff who are willing to do the work, which means the potential for compassion fatigue is great. Truth be told, the progress on HBCU campuses is largely the work of a small number of dedicated faculty and staff (McMurtrie 2013) who, it should be noted, are doing it on their own time and potentially risking career advancement.

### **Looking Ahead**

Though HBCUs have recently been applauded for the work they are doing to meet the needs of their LGBTQ students, there is way more rhetoric than action. There is a difference between having a purposeful and operative center and having an office with a sign on the door, and there is a difference between being tolerant and being inclusive. HBCUs are by and large tolerant of LGBTQ students, but have a long way to go before they can truly be considered inclusive. It is a slow, non-linear, and sometimes accidental process which requires an incredible amount of time, dedication, and experience. Creating spaces for LGBTQ students at HBCUs is especially important because black

LGBTQ people are more likely to be “out” when they feel connections to the LGBTQ community broadly and when they feel that their sexual orientation is an important component of their identity (Pastrana 2016). It is time we encourage LGBTQ students at HBCUs to come out from the shadows. They deserve a college experience which teaches them not only to be unapologetically black, or unapologetically Queer, but to unapologetically embrace their whole, authentic selves.

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