

**A PEER-DRIVEN ASSESSMENT OF THE LGBTQ STUDENT OF COLOR  
EXPERIENCE AT UCLA 2021-2022**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and additional sexual minorities (LGBTQ+) face marginalization and report feelings of isolation on college campuses today, despite an increase in programs, services, and available resources. This calls for further research on the experiences and unique needs of gender, sexual, and racially minoritized students. While this area is growing, there is a need for examination which squarely explores intersecting identities at large universities in urban areas. This study aims to explore the unique needs of LGBTQ+ students of color at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) to examine how intersecting identities impact their unique needs. This contributes to the scholarly research that identifies how queer and trans students of color's challenges are based on not just race, gender, or sexuality, but a combination of all three – and beyond. Data was collected from semi-structured interviews and focus groups to capture participant gendered, sexual and racialized experiences. The findings of this study can contribute to enhance the provision of services available through the LGBTQ inclusion centers and other campus partners.

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## TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Source: <https://lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu/educated/glossary>

**Ace/ Asexual:** A broad spectrum of sexual orientations generally characterized by feeling varying degrees of sexual attraction or a desire for partnered sexuality. Asexuality is distinct from celibacy, which is the deliberate abstention from sexual activity, despite sexual desire. There are many diverse ways of being asexual. A person who does not experience sexual attraction can experience other forms of attraction such as romantic attraction, as physical attraction and emotional attraction are separate aspects of a person's identity.

**Agender:** A person who does not identify themselves as having a particular gender.

**Aro/ Aromantic:** A romantic orientation generally characterized by not feeling romantic attraction or a desire for romance.

**BIPOC:** (pronounced "bye-pock") is an acronym that stands for Black, Indigenous, People of Color intended to center the experiences of Black and Indigenous groups and demonstrate solidarity between communities of color.

**Bioromantic:** A person that is romantically attracted to people of two specific and distinct gender identities.

**Bisexual:** A person whose primary sexual and affectional orientation is toward people of the same and other genders, or towards people regardless of their gender.

**Cis/ Cisgender:** A gender identity, or performance in a gender role, that society deems to match the person's assigned sex at birth.

**Disability/ (Dis)ability/ Dis/Ability:** A social construct that identifies any restriction or lack of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered "typical" for a human being given environments that are constructed for and by the dominant or "typical" person.

**Gay:** A sexual and affectional orientation toward people of the same gender.

**Gender Expansive:** An umbrella term used for individuals who broaden their own culture's commonly held definitions of gender, including expectations for its expression, identities, roles, and/or other perceived gender norms. Gender expansive individuals include those who identify

as transgender, as well as anyone else whose gender in some way is seen to be broadening the surrounding society's notion of gender.

**Gender Fluid/ Genderfluid:** A person whose gender identification and presentation shifts, whether within or outside of societal, gender-based expectations (between two or more genders).

**Gender Variant:** A person who varies from the expected characteristics of the assigned gender.

**Genderqueer:** A person whose gender identity and/or gender expression falls outside of the dominant societal norm for their assigned sex, is beyond genders, or is some combination of them.

**Lesbian:** A woman whose primary sexual and affectional orientation is toward people of the same gender. However, some nonbinary people also identify as lesbians, often because they have some connection to womanhood and are primarily attracted to women.

**LGBTQIA+:** An acronym for those identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and the "+" representing additional identities regarding sexual and romantic attraction in the community.

**Nonbinary:** A gender identity and experience that embraces a full universe of expressions and ways of being that resonate for an individual, moving beyond the male/female gender binary.

**Pansexual:** A person who has romantic, sexual or affectional desire for people of all genders and sexes.

**Queer:** One definition of queer is abnormal or strange. Historically, queer has been used as an epithet/slur against people whose gender, gender expression and/or sexuality do not conform to dominant expectations. Some people have reclaimed the word queer and self-identify as such. For some, this reclamation is a celebration of not fitting into norms/being "abnormal."

Manifestations of oppression within gay and lesbian movements such as racism, sizeism, ableism, cissexism, transmisogyny as well as assimilation politics, resulted in many people being marginalized, thus, for some, queer is a radical and anti-assimilationist stance that captures multiple aspects of identities.

**QTBIPOC:** An acronym that stands for Queer and Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Color, intended to center and highlight the unique experiences and needs of Black and Indigenous groups and demonstrate solidarity between communities of color.

**Trans:** The term trans acts as a more inclusive term than transgender for gender non-conforming and nonbinary folks.

**Transgender:** An adjective used most often as an umbrella term and frequently abbreviated to “trans.” Identifying as transgender, or trans, means that one’s internal knowledge of gender is different from conventional or cultural expectations based on the sex that person was assigned at birth. While transgender may refer to a woman who was assigned male at birth or a man who was assigned female at birth, transgender is an umbrella term that can also describe someone who identifies as a gender other than woman or man, such as nonbinary, genderqueer, genderfluid, no gender or multiple genders, or some other gender identity.

## OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

Themes	Description
<b>Theme 1: The pandemic changed how students navigated coming out and levels of outness.</b>	Students who moved back home due to COVID were sometimes forced back in the closet. In general, participants sought to build virtual community which led to broader social networks.
<b>Theme 2: Community support is paramount to QTBIPOC student well-being</b>	Student organizations and a large campus enables meeting other QTBIPOC students.
<b>Theme 3: The campus climate can feel isolating or hostile.</b>	Due to social and structural barriers, participants report experiencing overlapping experiences of discrimination on the basis of race, gender, and sexual orientation.
<b>Theme 4: Black queer students articulate race as a salient identity: racial microaggressions make LGBTQ+ spaces feel unwelcoming.</b>	QTBIPOC students struggle to feel welcome in single-space identity-based environments and experience race-based microaggressions in LGBTQ+ spaces.



## OVERVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations	Description
<b>Recommendation 1</b>	Hire more QTBIPOC identifying students, staff, and faculty.
<b>Recommendation 2</b>	Increase education on QTBIPOC students' coming out process and identities.
<b>Recommendation 3</b>	Increase visibility of QTBIPOC staff and faculty in student resource centers.
<b>Recommendation 4</b>	Increase opportunities for QTBIPOC students to meet both inside and outside of the classroom.
<b>Recommendation 5</b>	Utilize social media to organized groups to help students navigate campus and promote accessibility.
<b>Recommendation 6</b>	Create a more respectful and inclusive environment for transgender, gender non-conforming, and nonbinary students.
<b>Recommendation 7</b>	Increase visible markers on campus to designate safe spaces for QTBIPOC students.
<b>Recommendation 8</b>	Address concerns of hyper surveillance of QT Black students through collective and extensive implicit bias training.
<b>Recommendation 9</b>	Increase basic needs and financial resources for QTBIPOC students.
<b>Recommendation 10</b>	Increase programs and services that cater to intersections of race/ethnicity and sexuality.

## **RESEARCH IMPERATIVE**

While studies on QTBIPOC student experiences in higher education have increased (Duran et al., 2020), there is still a knowledge gap about QTBIPOC student experiences at large, elite public institutions. Our study aimed to fill this gap by analyzing if QTBIPOC students feel supported at the university by available programs and resources and to develop recommendations to advance support for this population.

Research conducted on the critical needs and experiences of gender, sexual, and racial minorities has long been conducted from an outsider perspective by researchers who do not hold a similar identity (Stringer, 2007). Peer-driven approaches to research are useful to generate a deeper understanding of critical research foci. Informants are usually more willing to share intimate and potentially sensitive aspects of their lives with personnel who reflect the community (Allen, 2017). Additionally, a shared lived experience between the researcher and the researched can add a robust depth to the data. For this reason, it was critical for the researchers on this project to also identify as QTBIPOC. Therefore, we were focused on understanding the unique needs of LGBTQ+ students of color at UCLA and investigate what programs and services they access on campus, as well as conduct interviews and focus groups to gather details about how they navigate intersectional identities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Research initially understood queerness from a white, able-bodied, and middle-class perspective that was a placeholder for queer people (Renn, 2010). Misawa (2010) argues that very few studies focused on the gender identities of college students and even fewer studied the sexual orientations of students, especially of students of color. Linley and Nguyen (2015) further note much initial research on LGBTQ folks in academic “curricular contexts” centers white cisgender gay male college students. Additionally, studies on students of color tend to focus exclusively on cis-heterosexual communities that render queerness and transness invisible (Jourian, 2017; Kumashiro, 2001; Misawa, 2010; Nicolozzo, 2016).

Although scholarship on queer and trans students of color has grown in recent years (Duran, 2019), how queer and trans students of color navigate experiences in higher education has not yet fully been researched (Duran and Jones, 2020). This pervasive dearth of research also shapes student service praxis the erasure of other marginalized oppression facing queer students of color. Martinez and Jackson (2018) posits this as “intersectional failure” that further retrenches the holistic supports that queer students of color (2018:91).

Harris (2003) describes navigating multiple marginalized identities as experiencing a “double-burden.” Harris further illustrates this by describing the experiences of gay and bisexual Black men having to face experiences of marginalization within different affinity groups. He writes they felt their racial identities prevented them from being welcomed by White queer students and their sexual orientation curtailed friendships with straight Black students.

Strayhorn (2013) further elaborates on this experience of being “in-between” or being unable to find spaces where both of their marginalized identities are accepted and centered. Washington and Evans (1991) found in their early study that when students connect with other fellow queer students of color, in particular with queer faculty of color on campus, they are significantly more likely to feel a greater sense of belongingness, and consequently, achieve academic success. Spanierman et al., (2013) and Vaccarro and Mena (2011) also found that residential environments can play a role in impacting queer college students of color’s sense of belongingness because of the ample opportunities for academic and social interactions with peers via co-curricular and on-campus involvements. Carter’s (2013) study highlighted that engaging in student involvement not solely centered around LGBTQ+ activism can greatly impact queer

students of color. Ultimately, Duran et al., (2020) recently demonstrated that QTBIPOC students' sense of belonging was associated with a supportive residential environment, students' involvement in co-curricular activities, increased student-faculty interactions, and an overall, positive racial and LGBTQ+ campus climate.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This report is a thematic analysis, in the vein of Braun and Clarke's framework which lays out a systematic method of gathering and analyzing qualitative data (2006). Given this is a student-driven analysis, following the first iteration of the UCLA QTBIPOC Student Experiences Project, the researchers sought to identify patterns and themes that is more a method than a methodology. This work goes beyond summarization because the findings and themes were interpreted per Braun and Clarke's six-step analysis, with most time spent coding, finding and focusing on defining themes.

However, the analysis is informed by a cultural wealth paradigm, as originally articulated by Delgado Bernal and Villalpando (2002). The traditional academic narrative marginalized the resources that academics of color bring to their work, including vast resources such as "knowledge, practices, beliefs, and values that are derived from culturally specific lessons...within the local communities that have been subordinated by dominant society" (172). The importance of drawing upon one's background is a strength for research such as this because it does not cast doubt upon or shame the marginalized group; it considers such perspectives paramount to "talking back" to various forms of oppression (hooks 1989). Further, the focus on marginalized groups offers competing and "alternative interpretations" of higher education practices that devalue academics of color and their research participants (176). Cultural resources bestow legitimacy to research findings, which is reflected in this report.

Secondly, this research is grounded in Yosso's theory of community cultural wealth model that challenges the traditional model of "cultural capital" (2005). Yosso considers this model as an extension of the cultural wealth paradigm (see: Delgado Bernal and Villalpando 2002), and critical race theory (CRT), which challenges scholarship that assumes racial domination and oppression is aberrant rather than axiomatic. Rather than viewing communities of color with "deficit thinking" that casts people of color as inherently inferior to other communities, the community cultural wealth model sees people of color as holding various forms of capital: aspirational, familial, social, linguistic, resistance, and navigational (78).

The failures of higher education and student services to adequately attend to the needs of queer and trans students of color is not a problem that we view as individualistic, nor do we view the outcomes of those problems as individually resolved. Instead, we understand the strategies of

intersectional communities as strengths that are cultivated dynamically – within and outside of multiple, loosely connected groups. This narrative focuses on the institutional failures that lead to higher rates of attrition, mental illness, and isolation. Indeed, we view the community wealth as integral to keeping queer and trans students of color whole. The two research questions that guide this study are as follows:

1. What are the unique needs of LGBTQ students of color at UCLA?
2. How do the many intersecting identities of LGBTQ students at UCLA impact the unique needs of the population?

## **DATA COLLECTION**

This study was approved by the IRB. Participants were recruited for this study through the use of flyers, email advertisements, networks, and social media advertisements. All interested participants filled out a questionnaire/ survey, which helped determine if they met the following criteria to participate in this study: participants must (1) identify as a UCLA undergraduate or graduate student, and (2) self-identify as holding a transgender, gender nonbinary, agender, or any other gendered or sexually minoritized identity and (3) self-identify as a person of color.

Participants that met the aforementioned criteria were interviewed on Zoom for approximately 45 minutes, at which time they were also asked if they are interested in participating in a focus groups. The two focus groups were structured based on underrepresented student identities, specifically transfer students and first-generation students. The focus groups were closed sessions that took place via Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants received modest gift card incentives for their participation.

## PARTICIPANTS

Twenty-nine students agreed to participate in this study, all of whom self-identified as racialized minorities and members of the LGBTQIA+ community. The following section indicates participant demographics in the last two years (19-20 and 20-21).

### Student Type:

F1. Student Type	2019-2020	2021-2022
<b>Undergraduate</b>	17	20
<b>Transfer (Undergraduate only)</b>	6	7
<b>Graduate</b>	5	9
<b>Total Participants</b>	22	29

In comparison to the 2019-2020 iteration of this study, there was an increase in the total number of participants. Undergraduate participants increased by 3 (n=20) and graduate participants by 4 (n=9). All transfer students interviewed were undergraduates (n=15). Undergraduate students remained the overrepresented student population in this study.

### Racial/ Ethnic Identity:

F2. Racial/ Ethnic Identity	2019-2020	2021-2022
<b>Asian/ Asian American</b>	6	6
<b>Black/ African American</b>	1	9
<b>Indigenous/ Native American</b>	1	2
<b>Latinx/ Hispanic</b>	7	5
<b>Multiracial (two or more racial groups)</b>	7	7
<b>Total Participants=</b>	22	29

In comparison to the 2019-2020 iteration of this study, Latinx/ Hispanic participants decreased by 2. However, there was a significant increase in the participation of Black/African American students (+8) and one Indigenous/ Native American participant.



### Gender Identity:

<b>F3. Gender Identity</b>	<b>2019-2020</b>	<b>2021-2022</b>
<b>Agender</b>	--	1
<b>Cisgender Woman</b>	12	9
<b>Cisgender Man</b>	3	6
<b>Gender Fluid</b>	2	1
<b>Genderqueer</b>	3	1
<b>Nonbinary</b>	2	10
<b>Trans, Transqueer</b>	--	1
<b>Total Participants =</b>	22	29

In comparison to the 2019-2020 iteration of this study, a majority of participants (n=14) identified under the umbrella of gender variant or gender expansive, which includes a broadened notion of gender identity (agender, gender fluid, genderqueer, nonbinary, transqueer). Cisgender women comprised the second largest identity category (n=9). Overall, there was an increase in cisgender male participants (+3). For the first time, students identifying as agender and trans/transqueer joined the study.

### Sexual Orientation:

<b>F4. Sexual Orientation</b>	<b>2019-2020</b>	<b>2021-2022</b>
<b>Aromantic, Asexual</b>	--	1
<b>Bisexual</b>	9	7
<b>Gay</b>	4	4
<b>Lesbian</b>	4	3
<b>Homosexual/Biromantic</b>	1	--
<b>Pansexual</b>	4	6
<b>Queer</b>	--	8
<b>Total Participants =</b>	22	29

In comparison to the 2019-2020 iteration of this study, the majority of participants in this study identified as queer (n=8) with bisexual (n=7) and pansexual (n=6) as the second and third most-identified category. There was a slight increase in pansexual (+2) and aromatic/asexual respondents (+1).

**Disability Identity:**

<b>F5. Disability Identity</b>	<b>2019-2020</b>	<b>2021-2022</b>
<b>Has a disability</b>	--	14
<b>Does not have disability</b>	--	15
<b>Total Participants=</b>	22	29

For the 2020-2021 iteration of this study, the research team added disability as a new self-reported category. This year, 48% (n=14) of the study participants self-reported as having a disability.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

The data collected from this study was systematically analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) thematic analysis, which consists of six phases. In the first phase, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data by doing an individual reading of the individual and group interviews. At each stage of the six phases, the research team wrote memos to capture initial thoughts, emerging concepts, and questions raised by the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2020). In the second phase, the team generated initial codes deductively and inductively using Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel. In the third phase, we formed themes by linking codes we developed. In the fourth phase, we reviewed and refined our themes by checking the validity of them. In the fifth phase, we defined and named our themes by creating a detail analysis of each individual theme. Lastly, we produced recommendations based on the themes of the approach.

Braun and Clarke's thematic approach allowed us to anchor our findings in our participants' lived experiences, noting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights (Nowell et al., 2017). Throughout the entire process the research team wrote memos on our positionality, methodological decisions and tried to remain cognizant of our biases through constant conversations, which support the trustworthiness of the data (Creswell, 2013).

## **RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY**

This research was borne out of a desire to amplify the voices of students whose voices are so often overlooked and marginalized, in real life and in digitized data. The scholars on this project are all queer people of color who connect deeply to the 29 students who agreed to participate in this project. We understand that our existence is a disruption of systems rooted in white supremacy and heteronormativity, twin oppressions that shape the livelihoods of many. We understand what it means to face cisheteronormativity and contend with the microaggressions that come along with being multi-layered, but often being forced to choose. The value of this study cannot be understated because even speaking unheard truths is a form of healing and resistance. As an elite PWI, UCLA was not designed for students like us, yet we know that this report is a step toward recognition, comfort, and safety. We are messengers for their testimony and feel deeply rooted in the community as folks who share similar experiences and also aim to use research as a space for disruption and respect, rather than reinforcing exploitation or exhibition.

## FINDINGS

### CENTERS, PROGRAMS AND SERVICES ACCESSED

Bruin Resource Center (BRC): 14% of participants (n=4)

- Resources accessed: study lounge space, Undocumented Student Program (USP): legal services and textbook bank

Community Programs Office (CPO): 34% of participants (n=10)

- Resources accessed: grocery boxes, grocery gift card program, Thanksgiving/winter food baskets, food closet, study lounge space, incentivized workshops, writing/math success program

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): 24% (n=7) of participants

- Resources accessed: therapy, referrals, group therapy

Graduate Student Resource Center (GSRC): 44% of graduate student participants (n=4)

- Resources accessed: printing, writing tutor, workshops offered, accessed programs and services online or via email

LGBTQ Campus Resource Center (LGBTQ CRC): 66% of participants (n=19)

- Resources accessed: study lounge spaces, We Write the Rainbow, QTBIPOC space, Ace and Aro space, QT Fan Fanatic, and other, non-specified virtual programs.

Transfer Student Center: 47% of transfer participants (n=4)

- Resources accessed: Programs and services, non-specified.

<b>Centers, Programs, and Resources Accessed</b>	
<b>Academic Advancement Program (AAP)</b>	2
<b>Arthur Ashe Student Health &amp; Wellness Center (ASHE)</b>	2
<b>Center for Accessible Education (CAE)</b>	2
<b>Center for Community College Partnerships (CCCP)</b>	1
<b>Dashew Center</b>	1
<b>Dean of Students (DOS)</b>	1
<b>Good Clothes, Good People</b>	1
<b>Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life (FSL)</b>	1
<b>Pilipino Transfer Student Partnership</b>	
<b>Program for the Education and Enrichment of Educational Skills (PEERS)</b>	1
<b>Santa Monica Rape and Sexual Assault Center</b>	1
<b>Veteran's Affairs Office (VAO)</b>	1

## THEMES

### **Theme #1: Student's level(s) of outness impacted their experience to navigate their day-to-day activities on and off campus.**

Levels of outness impacted QTBIPOC students' ability to transition living in the residence halls. One student, who identified as "undocumented Asian American queer nonbinary trans" shared,

"I wasn't comfortable with my identities for a really long time. I didn't seek [resources] out. I didn't want to identify myself in that way because if I did people would start seeing me differently or I would-- it would entail that I would have to come out ... our RA was-- he was gay and he was super about making sure that space was safe for queer people."

Here, while the student was not comfortable being out or identifying as part of the LGBTQIA+ community, they shared the impact of seeing a LGBTQIA+ identifying student staff member in their residence hall. They shared that their residential assistant fostered an environment was safe for LGBTQIA+ individuals which improved their overall experience transitioning to on-campus housing.

However, due to COVID-19 pandemic, students experienced having to abruptly move back home. QTBIPOC students' levels of outness impacted their transition back home in many ways. One student shared,

"I didn't want to move back home because my mom doesn't know. And I'm living at home and it's fine right now, but it's definitely conflicting living here. It makes me question myself a lot."

Here, this particular student highlights moving back home as an uncomfortable experience because it entails having to hide who they are and their identities. Additionally, they expressed this process made them second guess who they were. Others shared this same sentiment: some noting that if they presented in a gender non-conforming manner or if they used alternative pronouns that they would have to hide their identities as soon as they got home.

Beyond home life, varying levels of outness also influenced how students will go about navigating spaces on campus. A mixed-race Black student shared:

“I used to spend a lot of time at the LGBTQ Center because I had a lot of friends who worked there. I kind of stopped going as often for a while and then I started going back. Obviously, now we don't have that space anymore because we're not in-person. But I'm still, fortunately, able to communicate with my friends. I never really went to the spaces there, no. So, I'm not really losing events because I would just go to study and then if I was at a weekly thing, it was pretty much coincidence because they would just be holding it while I was already there to study. And they're like, ‘Do want to come?’ And I would just go, ‘Sure’ [laughter].”

Here, the student names having peers who work at the LGBTQ Center as the impetus for them stepping into the space, utilizing its resources, and attending programs. They also shared that while during the start of pandemic they were not able to access the physical space, they remain in contact with their peers.

The anecdotes shared above are consistent with the empirical literature. Duran and Perez's (2017) study found that QTBIPOC students are less likely to disclose or share their sexual orientation publicly and more often likely to adopt normative labels and not describe being a part of the LGBTQIA+ community. Similarly, Tillman-Kelly (2015) found that QTBIPOC students' adoption of sexual identity labels is a complex and ongoing journey; students take into consideration many different questions and factors that are tied to their coming out process. Lastly, Patton (2011) notes that not all QTBIPOC students are out to their families and often maintain specific identities or suppress their gender expression in ways that do not align with their identities. Patton (2011) further notes that coming out is a selective process and QTBIPOC student often feel pressure from their family and culture to identify in a certain way and navigate the coming out process in complicated ways.

**Theme #2: Community played a crucial role in the wellbeing of QTBIPOC students and is often where students were able to find resources and support.**

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult to build and find community for many QTBIPOC students. A number of our participants shared experiencing isolation. One student who identifies as a Bisexual Black, Nigerian American shared:



“I haven't really found any sort of community, mostly because it's virtual. I've met people here and there. But as I said, here and there isn't really the same as a community. [There are] some acquaintances [but I feel] too detached.”

Here, this student shared finding it difficult to create a community in a virtual environment during quarantine. They shared having difficulty reaching out and forming new relationships with peers online because of the pandemic. While they noted finding some acquaintances, they did not feel connected to them.

Conversely, some QTBIPOC students noted that its thanks to UCLA's large student population that they were able to find community around their identities or similar interests. One Queer, Black student said:

“The good thing about UCLA is that because it's so big, you can also find people who have a common interest as you ... There's a lot of social justice clubs, organizations at UCLA ... I think organizations who have similar interests I had, career wise, were really helpful ... [and were] how I found community essentially.”

This sentiment was shared by others who noted they were able to find community planning for a virtual conference, joining a group chat, attending virtual study sessions, or events. There was also a number of student organizations named like the Afrikan Student Union (ASU), BlaQue, Transgender UCLA Pride (TransUP), and more.

In general, QTBIPOC students brought up how important it is to meet and interact with queer peers of color on campus and in class. Finding community through fellow queer students allows QTBIPOC students at UCLA to bond over shared understanding and common experience. One Undocumented Asian student shared:

“I feel whenever I interact with queer people on campus or in classes, it feels nice. I don't know, it feels kind of safe, but that shared bond, that shared identity it's like, ‘Oh, okay. Cool.’ You probably have seen some similar things or experienced similar things, but I feel like I have to seek that out. It's not a given. And I'm not saying that everyone is queer, but we definitely exist ... But I guess I've just-- that just entails a safer campus where you feel comfortable just disclosing that or not even having to disclose that in the

first place. It's just inherently safe in the beginning, but I don't know if I could say that's true right now.”

Being able to connect with others in the Queer community provides for greater safety that can come from mutual understanding and shared identity. However, finding others who are in the queer community can be a bit challenging because not everyone is or can afford to be out for a number of reasons. Safety, we found, continues to be at the forefront of QTBIPOC students' minds when it comes to forming community here on campus.

The quote captured above are consistent with the literature base. Strayhorn (2013) describes the sense of belonging for QTBIPOC student on college campus as “betwixt and between.” He argues that QTBIPOC students often find it difficult locating spaces where all their marginalized are accepted and centered. In addition, Walls & Washington (1991) found student relationships with QTBIPOC staff and faculty were very important to their overall success on campus. Additionally, co-curricular spaces like student organizations and non-identity based organizations had an impact on identity development and allowed for them to make sense of their experiences on campus (Russell, 2012; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011).

### **Theme #3: Campus climate is one of the biggest factors in shaping QTBIPOC students' experiences navigating UCLA with their identities.**

For many QTBIPOC students at UCLA, race was the most salient identity. QTBIPOC students desire spaces that especially affirm and protect their racial identity, as well as their converging gender and sexual identities. A Black Queer student shared,

“I've never actually experienced more violent place. I know that it's really sad to say, but I remember having this moment where -- I wouldn't know if it's just medical school or not. But I remember this moment, where I was having some difficulty and I'm really feeling-- like I am Black. I know I am Black. But that's always been like a positive thing. It's always been, "Oh, that's awesome." And I felt for the first time in academia, like it was bad thing in the real world. It's a bad thing. But it's always been-- yeah, I just had never kind of experienced it ever. I'm like, "What the hell." (14, p.2).

Here this student shared that prior to entering UCLA, the mentors and people around them celebrated and made them feel proud of being Black. However, he shares that it was once he came to UCLA and experienced this space to be hostile for Black people that this feeling changed.

Similarly, other Queer and Trans Black students shared feeling hyper-surveilled not only from police but in the classroom setting as well. With the onset of the pandemic and the move to an online learning environment, hyper-surveillance took on a new level with the requirement of having cameras on either in class or during exams. A Black medical student shared their experience:

“I think for Black [students], for me in particular, there's just this extra level of like surveillance and suspicion that comes with the testing and being 100 on camera on and having nothing on your desk.”

This Black student shared that they felt like they need to make sure their entire space was clear so as not to draw any suspicion or even give the faculty member any possible cue that they were cheating. They also shared making sure they presented themselves fully on Zoom as to not draw any suspicion on themselves.

Another Black Queer graduate student shared during their first year on campus, they were in charge of bird feeders and had someone call the police on them. They shared feeling confused at the time because only people with card access could enter and exit the UCLA graduate buildings. He shared that instead of someone asking him what he was doing, someone immediately thought he was up to no good because he was Black.

That was when I actually felt physically in danger ... They were like, "Oh," Well, I don't know if you know, but the courtyards in the graduate housing were-- on the first floor, there are windows, and there are rooms on the first floor. So, if people have their window's blinds open or whatever, there's clear view into their rooms. And then police asked me like, "what if there was a woman inside of an apartment and she was changing? You would have seen her naked? And that would have been--" and I said, "I'm gay, so that [laughter] is just stupid," and he was like, "Okay, you fucking smart ass”.

This student later shared that this incident made them feel self-conscious of being Black on campus, later saying, “Anyone can call the police at you.” However, their Dean and faculty member from their graduate program were really supportive and understanding of the situation.

In addition, trans, gender non-conforming, and nonbinary BIPOC student found it especially challenging navigating campus as well. They felt othered by their race and gender expression from peers and even faculty. One trans student explained:

“I don't want to use any of the resources that we are entitled to use as students at the university because that interrogation is so humiliating, that incessant questioning and having to prove who you are, and then explain to some random stranger your entire gender and sexual identity because you need to in order to check out, for instance, a library book, that happens so many times that at one point you just give up. It's not worth it. I don't need to deal with that.”

The extra level of scrutiny that trans students have to undergo in their day-to-day interactions creates an added barrier that discourages trans students from accessing resources that they need and are imperative to their success as a student.

**Theme 4: Navigating single identity spaces can create obstacles for QTBIPOC students as they lack the resources and representation needed to feel supported in their intersectionality.**

For QTBIPOC students, existing in the intersections of race and sexuality can create conflict as they may not feel supported equally in both of their identities due to systematic racism, homophobia, and lack of intersectional resources. A Black Queer student shared,

“I haven't found a safe space, it means I don't feel I don't have a community [...] unless there's a space specific for queer black women, I don't believe it will be a safe space for me. For places that I use, when I choose to go to-- if I would join women's group, I wouldn't join it if there are white women there because that's not safe for me because I've dealt enough microaggressions that at work. And similarly, I've been in queer spaces where there's white queers, who've also been racist. So that's not a safe

space for me. Then been in black spaces where black people are queer phobic or sexist and [inaudible] free but those aren't safe spaces. [...] More like community spaces, but not safe.”

As described here, students who exist at the intersection of being LGBTQ+ and a person of color, can feel the challenges exacerbated. Twenty-nine students report feeling that in spaces designed for a single identity, such as womanhood, they experience microaggressions based on a different identity, such as race. In this way, a single-identity affinity space does not allow them the same sense of belonging because of discrimination or exclusion from peers. In order to feel belonging, these students need affirmation that incorporates multiple identities. This can introduce new perspectives and deconstruct harmful ideals and norms from dominant communities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Recommendation #1: Hire more QTBIPOC identifying students, staff, and faculty.**

Increase the visibility of LGBTQIA+ identifying people on campus by hiring more QTBIPOC students, staff, and faculty. Students, staff and faculty continue to play a big role in sharing resources, offering support and mentorship, and facilitating spaces. QTBIPOC students have shared seeing more LGBTQIA+ members on campus helps provide a greater sense of safety and allows for better advocacy at a higher level for students.

### **Recommendation #2: Increase education on QTBIPOC students' coming out process and identities.**

Provide trainings for campus community members at various times throughout the year. Positions should consider providing LGBTQIA ally training that includes an intersectional frame. Greater knowledge surrounding the issues that QTBIPOC students face facilitates more empathy and understanding, advocacy and problem solving.

### **Recommendation #3: Increase visibility of QTBIPOC staff and faculty in student resource centers.**

Amplifying QTBIPOC presence on campus allows for greater opportunity for QTBIPOC students to meet in and out of the classroom which is crucial to support their overall transition and success here at UCLA. Offering hybrid options for programs or events, this creates more opportunities for QTBIPOC students to meet and connect with one another. This also can help increase accessibility of events by asking students if they require certain accommodations in order to attend the programs or events.

**Recommendation #4: Increase opportunities for QTBIPOC students to meet both inside and outside of the classroom.**

Promote events happening across different programs and departments that focus on the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality. This also requires purposefully organizing events that are centered around the interests of QTBIPOC students based on student feedback. This includes building connections across departments to expand programming.

**Recommendation #5: Utilize social media to create content such as “Walk With Us to XYZ Program/Event/Center” to help students navigate campus and promote accessibility.**

Since a significant proportion of students rely upon social media to obtain information about campus, it is ideal to lean into this through content designed to amplify the Center. For instance, a branded Instagram account can upload a video that shows viewers how to find the Center. This content can also align with the Center’s value of accessibility by using captions in videos and providing accessible maps in emails.

**Recommendation #6: Create a more respectful and inclusive environment for transgender, gender non-conforming, and nonbinary students.**

To begin creating a respectful and inclusive environment, awareness and knowledge-building is key. This includes education through trainings, speakers, media, and relationship-building with experts who work closely with trans, GNC, and nonbinary folks. Raising awareness of the experiences QTBIPOC students face on the day to day can lead to simple solutions, such as: adopting gender-inclusive language rather than defaulting to binary pronouns: For example, “people who menstruate” and “menstrual products” instead of “women” or “feminine hygiene products”. Do not assume someone’s pronouns based on how they present or their name. Instead, make a practice of using pronouns in introductions and asking folks to do the same. Another simple way to be more inclusive is understanding that some nonbinary folks identify as trans and some do not – avoid assumptions. Similarly, some nonbinary folks use “they/them” pronouns and some do not. Be aware of gender inclusive restrooms and encourage the construction of

more. Join listservs and newsletters designed for transgender, nonbinary, and gender non-confirming folks and amplify their programming. Be cognizant of the appropriate means to offer support: be aware when events are designed for specific gender identities and note when allies are welcome.

**Recommendation #7: Increase visible markers on campus to designate safe spaces for QTBIPOC students.**

Visible markers on campus that designate safe spaces for QTBIPOC, such as rainbow pins, helps to reduce uncertainty in community spaces and other physical spaces. Create and disseminate explicit declarations of allyship with the people of color and LGBTQ+ communities. Campuses may not always prioritize acceptance and affirmation for QTBIPOC students, which is why clear communication and intentional safe spaces remain vital. Promote safe space signage and details about open allyship trainings in department emails across campus; especially in the STEM departments, where this practice is less common.

**Recommendation #8: Address concerns of hyper surveillance of queer and trans Black students through collective and extensive implicit bias training.**

We recommend that comprehensive bias training, especially in regard to microaggressions and concerns of hyper-surveillance. This could be done in collaboration with a Black-led organization such as BlaQue or Afrikan Student Union. This is important because many academic institutions are rooted in anti-Black practices and often come with the presence of authority that have historically harmed Black communities. Identify and address anti-Black rhetoric to ensure the overall well-being of Black students, staff and faculty.

**Recommendation #9: Increase Basic Needs and Financial Resources for QTBIPOC students.**

Increase the provision of basic needs and financial resources, which disproportionately serve QTBIPOC students. These resources will include those that provide financial, emotional, physical, spiritual, and mental wellness. Collaborations between departments, such as the



Community Programs Office and Campus Resource Centers. A collaboration with Economic Crisis Response Team to reinstate the meal voucher program is another example.

**Recommendation #10: Increase programs and services that cater to intersections of race, ethnicity and sexuality.**

Increase programs and services that cater to intersections of race/ethnicity and gender and sexuality. QTBIPOC students deserve to have spaces and programs that allow them to celebrate their identities as a full person. expense of suppressing their other identities. Similar to mental health services and programs at the Center, when designing an event, try to create a space that is focused on students who inhabit intersecting identities. For instance, BlaQue and ShaQTI are LGBTQ+ spaces for Black and South Asian students hosted at the LGBTQ Campus Resouce Center.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND PRACTICE**

This study accomplishes two main things: it focuses on an understudied marginalized group and adds depth to the current literature on QTBIPOC students in higher education. Second, it offers tangible recommendations for hiring managers and decision-makers to improve equity and inclusion. This is in part because QTBIPOC students exist at the intersection of at least two marginalized identities that are systemically discriminated against: race/ethnicity and gender and/or sexual orientation. Research must consider how multiply marginalized groups at any given time must operate across boundaries and barriers in structures that rarely, if ever, center their unique needs. Choosing to spend time, effort and energy on advancing knowledge is a demonstrated way to facilitate change in a center, program, unit, or college campus. This research also recognizes the value of centering QTBIPOC folks by allowing QTBIPOC students to lead the report from conceptualization to completion of the report. This can serve as another example of research that disrupts normative and dominant modes of thought that discount the asset-based wealth that underrepresented researchers carry.

This report also incorporates analysis of how a global phenomenon shaped student wellbeing: the effect of COVID. Indeed, extended periods of isolation transformed social networks and schooling. The transition to online school altered the experience of this population that heavily relies upon LGBTQ+ peers and leaders to provide a sense of belonging. Numerous challenges and inequities abound for underrepresented and marginalized students, especially disabled and low-income students, many of whom share intersections with QTBIPOC students (50% of the study participants identify as disabled). Many social inequities were exacerbated, yet some of the effects can be mitigated with attention and careful planning by the appropriate administrators and faculty. The findings herein place an emphasis on the importance of accessibility and alternative resources. While some student centers offer online programming and virtual events, limitations remain as universities largely transition back to in-person. Future research must take into account how hybrid models of study, as well as folks affected with long-term complications of COVID may inadvertently exclude or erase multiply-marginalized students.

This research of course is limited by its design: interviews and focus groups with a small sample size was based on budgetary, staffing, and timeline limitations. Future students can expand the scope of the findings through a broader scope of data: surveys, follow-up interviews, interviews with administrators, and institutional data on retention, recruitment, and attrition can support triangulating a clearer picture on both long-standing barriers, actions, and solutions. While we increased participation overall, future iterations of the study will target increasing participants whose identities were least represented, especially trans graduate students.

## CONCLUSION

The continuation of studying the lives of QTBIPOC students is more than laying bare the challenges of being an LGBTQ+ person of color. This report is a powerful testimony highlighting the strategies and assets that QTBIPOC folks use to navigate a large, public elite university like UCLA. Despite the presence of structural and social barriers, the participants in this study still manage to carve out methods to make the years they spend as a student feel meaningful and livable. While there is no hierarchy of oppression (Lorde 1983), proper acknowledgement of the hierarchy is essential for change.

QTBIPOC students experience unique challenges in regard to their social and academic positionality: they may face stigma from their racial and ethnic identity as LGBTQ people and experience racism on the basis of their race. They may be forced to choose to attend events generally designed for the LGBTQ+ community, but deal with microaggressions unique to their sexual and gender identity. They may feel not quite right in any space because so few spaces attend to racial and gender identities simultaneously. Social networks that align with their marginalization as racial and ethnic minorities as well as gender and sexual expansiveness is critical to a sense of belonging and social inclusion – yet these spaces can feel few and far between. Black students face surveillance and discrimination deeply linked to histories of anti-black racism, which increases stress and sense of exclusion. Single-identity based spaces increase a sense of dissonance within students, further emphasizing the necessity of intersectional spaces such as Black Queer organizations or Asian LGBTQ+ groups. Further, commitment to training and education can also increase inclusion and belonging by reducing gender-based microaggressions related to assumptions about gender, sex, and romantic attraction.

There are leaders in the field, providing resources, practices, and a guiding light. This report seeks to contribute to the literature, and provide a legacy and pathway for allies to follow. There is no singular QTBIPOC experience – but there are experiences, and it is important to listen to, trust, and document those experiences to determine a path forward.

## RESOURCES

- CalFresh Initiative at UCLA is a resource for UCLA students that advocates for food accessibility by providing students assistance with the CalFresh application process. For questions, email [uclacalfresh@gmail.com](mailto:uclacalfresh@gmail.com) or schedule an in-person or virtual office hours appointment [here](#).
- CARE (Campus Assault Resources & Education) is a safe place for UCLA students who are victims or survivors of sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, stalking, and sexual harassment to get support, consultation, and counseling services. To contact a CARE Advocate, call: (310) 206-2465 or email: [advocate@careprogram.ucla.edu](mailto:advocate@careprogram.ucla.edu)
- Counseling and Psychological Services: (310) 825-0768 (24 hr line)
- Consultation and Response Team for Students in Crisis: is a group of professional staff members charged with responding to reports of students who may be in distress. Case Managers are available to meet directly with students. Please [fill out this form](#) with your request and someone will get back to you during business hours. Case Managers do not maintain 24-hour access to email or phone.
- Economic Crisis and Response Team (ECRT) provides support and guidance to students who have self-identified, or are identified by UCLA faculty or staff, as experiencing a financial crisis that impacts their academic success at UCLA. If you are in financial distress, contact ECRT via email at [ecr@saonet.ucla.edu](mailto:ecr@saonet.ucla.edu) or via phone at (310) 206-1189.
- Report an Incident of Bias here
- RISE Center for Campus and Student Resilience promotes resilience skills -- emphasizing connection and belonging, service, self-efficacy and mastery, and self-reflection.
- Sexual Harassment/Sexual Violence Resources at UCLA
- UCLA Basic Needs COVID-10 Resource Guide
- UCLA Equity, Diversity and Inclusion leads and advances UCLA campus strategies for enhancing equity, diversity and inclusion, combatting discrimination and achieving our shared values of upholding dignity for all.
- UCLA Student Legal Services provides confidential legal counseling and assistance regarding a wide range of legal issues to all currently registered and enrolled UCLA students.
- Black Bruin Resource Center (BBRC)
- Bruin Resource Center (BRC)
- Community Programs Office (CPO)
- The UCLA LGBTQ Campus Resource Center
- UCLA LGBTQIA Undergraduate and Graduate Student Groups
- UCLA & Local Queer and Trans Black, Indigenous, People of Color Specific Resources
- Questions or Inquiries: [lgbt@lgbtq.ucla.edu](mailto:lgbt@lgbtq.ucla.edu)
- Website: <https://lgbtq.ucla.edu>

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