IF NOT US, THEN WHO?: QTBIPOC GRADUATE RESEARCHERS' EXPERIENCES RESEARCHING QTBIPOC COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

Experiences of minority graduate student researchers, specifically graduate student researchers that identify as queer and/or trans and Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (QTBIPOC) have been largely underrepresented in current scholarship. Utilizing reflexive thematic analysis and semi-structured interviews, in the current study we explored the experiences of 20 QTBIPOC graduate student researchers who conduct QTBIPOC research. Results revealed five thematic patterns, including: (a) recognizing, resisting, and reforming systemic oppression within academia; (b) encountering interpersonal oppression within academic contexts; (c) personal well-being and the role of QTBIPOC research; (d) relations among one's personal identities and engagement in QTBIPOC research; and (e) navigating interpersonal relationships, identity disclosure, and community dynamics. Findings help highlight the psychological, interpersonal, and professional experiences endured by QTBIPOC graduate student researchers. Discussion highlights implications for QTBIPOC graduate student researchers and outlines suggestions for research advisors, training programs, and academic systems to support and empower QTBIPOC graduate student researchers.

Keywords: QTBIPOC, intersectional research, minority graduate students, training, academia

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Academic research has long been used to develop, implement, evaluate, and revise a variety of systems and policies (Glassman et al., 2013; Mallinckrodt et al., 2014). Despite the powerful role academia plays in driving social change, it simultaneously replicates oppressive dynamics present in broader society (Settles et al., 2022; Wright-Mair, 2023). Scholarship has begun to note ways higher education enacts various forms of systemic oppression that limit engagement from minority scholars (Settles et al., 2021; Settles et al., 2022). Over the past few decades, academic spaces have begun to witness a transformative shift. Minority identity scholars research have initiated a process of infiltrating, resisting, and reforming the traditional, neoliberal, Eurocentric research paradigms (Bowleg, 2021; Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017).

The presence and efforts of minority scholars has been instrumental in challenging oppressive structures and fostering an inclusive and radical educational environment; however, it is also crucial to highlight that these shifts pose several challenges for minority scholars (Bowleg, 2021). Budding literature has begun to outline ways minority faculty experience epistemic injustices (Settles et al., 2021; Settles et al., 2022). These findings provide a working framework to understand some of the costs minority scholars face as they study minority identity experiences, advocate for their own communities, and combat oppressive structures.

Nonetheless, we must also consider some of the limitations of these findings. Particularly, scholarship in this area has primarily considered the experiences of minority faculty and has failed to account for the experiences of graduate student researchers that

conduct identity-centered research within the same oppressive context (Park & Bahia, 2022). When compared to faculty, graduate student researchers lack administrative power, research independence, financial security, and the educational privilege that is granted via a completed graduate degree and tenure (Grady et al., 2014; Yamada et al., 2014). Given these power and systemic differentials between graduate researchers and faculty, literature exploring the experiences of graduate students as emerging researchers remains a necessary area of inquiry. Through such research, we can better understand contextual and role-related factors that may be uniquely shaping the experiences of burgeoning minority scholars (Park & Bahia, 2022).

Furthermore, research studying the nuanced realities of minority scholars has emphasized the need for more intersectional investigations into the experiences of multiple minority scholars, such as those of racial minority faculty that also identify as women (Settles et al., 2022) or LGBTQ+ (Mobley et al., 2020; Wright-Mair, 2023). Extending this consideration into the experiences of multiple minority graduate students, a growing body of literature has started exploring how racial, sexual, and/or gender minority graduate students experience the academic landscape (English & Fenby, 2019; Goldberg et al., 2019; Phelps-Ward, 2022). However, these studies are limited in their understanding of multiple minority graduate students, as their efforts solely magnify on their identity-based experiences *as* students and not their professional experiences *as* emerging scholars (Park & Bahia, 2022).

In sum, integrating the limitations and recommendations from previous literature, in this study we aimed to expand our understanding of multiple minority graduate student researchers. Specifically, we explored the psychological, interpersonal, and professional

experiences that are encountered by graduate student researchers that identify as (a) Queer and/or Trans and (b) Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (QTBIPOC) while conducting research with QTBIPOC populations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Decolonizing and Radicalizing Academia: The Role of Minority Scholars

The history of the academy is deeply intertwined with colonialism, white supremacy, and oppression, as these facets played a strong role in establishing the foundational structure of higher education (Bowleg, 2021; Buchanan et al., 2021). The construction of academic systems involved the exploitation and appropriation of Indigenous communities and their ways of teaching, learning, and knowing (Simmonds, 2013). These colonial themes of the academy continue to be reflected today, as we recognize its ongoing tendency to celebrate and acknowledge research methodologies and scholars that align with Eurocentric systems of thought and knowledge production, while subjugating minority scholars and identity-centered frameworks (Settles et al., 2021; Settles et al., 2022; Wright-Mair, 2023).

Resisting and deconstructing white supremacist and Western roots of academia has been challenging and cumbersome (Buchanan et al., 2021). The emergence of decolonial and radical frameworks within the academy can be attributed to the numerous efforts of Black, Indigenous, Brown, queer, and feminist scholars spanning several disciplines and decades (see Anzaldúa, 1987; Collins, 1998; Crenshaw, 1989; Lorde, 1984, Smith, 2012). These scholars have been successful at highlighting and critiquing the various ways academia pushes minority scholars and identity-centered education towards the margins. These critical theories have served as foundational frameworks for conceptualizing decolonial and radical research methods, such as community-based participatory action research (Israel et al., 2010), digital storytelling (Fish & Syed, 2021),

autoethnography (Chang, 2016), intersectional research (Bowleg, 2008), and radical healing frameworks towards research (French et al., 2020).

Although minority scholars have facilitated the development of such non-traditional, Indigenous, and culturally responsive research paradigms, the implementation of these frameworks within academic research continues to remain challenging due to a variety of barriers (Bowleg et al., 2021; Buchanan et al., 2021; Settles et al., 2021; Tung et al., 2023). For example, lack of training in decolonial research methods, minimal representation of non-traditional researchers and research methods in academic journals, overt or covert dismissal of identity-centered research paradigms, and absence of incentives. The lack of training in such non-traditional research methods is especially relevant when considering its impacts on the development of graduate student researchers. Literature reflects how various graduate training programs lack specific training in non-traditional research methodologies (Tung et al., 2023), such as qualitative inquiries, community-based research, identity-centered paradigms (Buchanan et al., 2021), and intersectional research (Shin et al., 2017). Despite this pedagogical barrier, a significant number of minority graduate students conduct non-traditional, identity-centered, and intersectional research. While these contributions from minority graduate students disrupt the traditional academic landscape, there is not much attention paid to how these scholars receive access to such modes of inquiry and knowledge production (Park & Bahia, 2022). Literature may benefit from gaining insight into the experiences of minority graduate student researchers while producing non-traditional research. Through this current study, we aim to add to this area of literature by exclusively examining the

processes that are adopted by QTBIPOC graduate student researchers as they conduct non-traditional, intersectional research with QTBIPOC populations.

Existing as a Queer, Trans, and/or BIPOC Graduate Student within the Academy

Despite persistent calls for diversifying academia and graduate programs (Sarr et al., 2022; Settles et al., 2019), most disciplines continue to be dominated by white, heterosexual, and cisgender faculty (Lassiter et al., 2023; Settles et al., 2019), students (Callahan et al., 2018; Sarr et al., 2022), and leadership structures (Bowleg, 2021; Henrich et al., 2010). This mismatch in intentions and statistics has forced institutions to reflect inwards and identify systemic factors that prevent minority individuals from enrolling and retaining in academia (Sarr et al., 2022; Settles et al., 2021; Shin, 2008). Budding research in this area has begun to outline ways racial minority, sexual minority, and gender minority graduate students encounter the academy.

Literature exploring the racialized experiences of graduate students has consistently echoed similar trends across various studies. In particular, findings from such research support that racial minority graduate students experience overt racism, racist policies, racial microaggressions, emotional labor, tokenization, and lack of interpersonal and professional support within the academy (Brunsma et al., 2017; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Phelps-Ward, 2022). These challenging realties have also been associated with negative mental health and well-being outcomes for racial minority graduate students. Specifically, studies emphasize that racial minority graduate students experience increased depressive and anxiety symptoms, adjustment concerns, vicarious traumatization, isolation, academic issues, and difficulties in completing their program (Clark et al., 2012; Miller & Orsillo, 2020; Truong et al., 2016).

Similarly, identity-specific patterns have emerged in investigations studying the experiences of graduate students that identify as sexual minority (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer+ or LGBTQ+) and/or as gender minority (transgender, non-binary, genderqueer+ or TNB). Research on sexual minority graduate students helps us understand ways these students experience the intersection between their sexual identity and higher education. Sexual minority graduate students encounter overt and covert heterosexism, heteronormative institutional practices, emotional labor, tokenization, stereotyping, pressures to engage in identity concealment and separation, and lack of community (English & Fenby, 2019). Furthermore, sexual minority graduate students report greater anxiety and depressive than their heterosexual counterparts (Jones-White et al., 2021). Gender minority graduate students reported significant concerns around physical and emotional safety, psychological well-being, access to affirming spaces and resources, misgendering, gender presentation, cissexist institutional policies, invalidating experiences, isolation, and academic/professional requirements in face of identity-based stressors (Goldberg et al., 2019; Knutson et al., 2022).

Literature reviewed here helps us gain an initial understanding into the role of social identities in shaping the academic experience of minority graduate students. However, we must acknowledge that the findings cited above primarily adopt a unidimensional lens to understand the impacts of one's identities; thereby, failing to explain the unique intricacies experienced by multiple minority graduate students. This limitation further echoes the dearth of scholarly research on the experiences of multiple minority graduate students. Although scholarship focusing on the experiences of women of color in graduate school has slowly started expanding (Combs & Cepeda, 2023;

Griffith & Ford, 2023), research exploring the experiences of QTBIPOC graduate students continues to remain an underdeveloped area of research that warrants further inquiry (Boyle et al., 2022; Means et al., 2017). Black queer scholars have begun to establish the foundation for research in this area, as they have adopted qualitative, culturally informed, and autoethnographic methodologies to highlight their intersectional experiences of navigating graduate school as a Black and Queer graduate student (Glover, 2017; Means et al., 2017). Reflections from these works highlight some of the ways Black queer graduate students experience intersectional oppression, singular identity spaces, community, meaning, identity development, and survival in academia. Additionally, these findings also help highlight the absence and need for research that examines the experiences of other racial/ethnic minority graduate students within the QTBIPOC umbrella.

Conducting Queer, Trans, and/or BIPOC Identity Research within the Academy

As reviewed previously, scholarship on minority and multiple minority graduate students has focused on capturing their identity-based experiences as students within their academic programs, universities, and disciplines. While continued research in this area remains necessary, we must also note that it overlooks the experiences of minority graduate students as emerging scholars and researchers (Park & Bahia, 2022). A gap persists in our understanding of how minority graduate student researchers experience academic structures such as, scholarly journals, professional conferences, publishers, research grants, scholarships, etc.

There is an evolving area of literature that studies the experiences of minority scholars as they navigate such academic structures; however, this area of research has

primarily focused on the experiences of minority faculty and is yet to capture the perspectives of minority graduate students. Scholarship exploring the experiences of minority faculty has helped centralize *epistemic exclusion* as another form of structural oppression encountered by faculty that identify as BIPOC, LGBTQ+, QTBIPOC, women of color, etc. (Settles et al., 2021; Settles et al., 2022; Veldhuis, 2022; Wright-Mair, 2023). Epistemic exclusion can be broadly understood as the devaluation, and discreditation of minority scholars, their research, and their contributions to the academy (Dotson, 2014; Settles et al., 2020). Researchers across disciplines have begun highlighting ways epistemic exclusion oppresses faculty of color (Roberts et al., 2020; Settles et al., 2021), LGBTQ+ faculty (Veldhuis, 2022), women faculty of color (Settles et al., 2022), and LGBTQ+ faculty of color (Mobley et al., 2020; Wright-Mair, 2023). Findings from these studies provide evidence for epistemic exclusion in the form of practices such as regarding minority identity-related research as less rigorous and scientific; receiving acceptances from niche and lower impact journals; associating success with impact factors, number of citations, and rejection rates; limited funding opportunities; challenges receiving tenure/promotions; lack of recognition and mentorship; lack of representation within leadership; prioritizing traditional/Western education; and lack of investment in identity-centered research from non-minority scholars.

These findings articulate the various practices that maintain epistemic injustice within higher education for faculty members. Nevertheless, an aspect that still lacks clarity is how these oppressive systemic practices impact minority graduate students and their training, research development, and academic well-being. To our knowledge, there

has only been one qualitative investigation that has explored identity-related experiences of graduate students in the context of conducting research. Specifically, Park and Bahia (2022) led a qualitative study on Canadian BIPOC graduate student researchers (*n* = 22) that were conducting identity-related research. The goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of BIPOC graduate students and their experiences as graduate students and as emerging researchers. Results from this qualitative study highlight that for BIPOC graduate student researchers, access to supportive and culturally responsive advisor-advisee relationships, research funding, and meaning making via research helps bolster their personal and professional well-being. However, inequitable access, tokenization, emotional labor, and internalized burden of having to represent one's own communities increases emotional distress for BIPOC graduate student researchers. The results of this study further emphasize the need for similar inquiries that simultaneously investigate the experiences of minority graduate students as both students and as researchers. Additionally, the study's limitations echo the need for such inquiries to adopt an intersectional lens to understand the experiences of multiple minority graduate students as budding researchers. For instance, in Park and Bahia's (2022) study, most of their sample was heterosexual and cisgender; and the participants that did identify as QTBIPOC (*n* = 4), their sexual and/or gender identity did not seem to be contextualized in their results and analysis. As such, the experiences of QTBIPOC graduate student researchers continues to remain an unexplored area of scholarly literature.

Current Study

In the current study, we sought to gain a foundational understanding of the psychological, interpersonal, and professional experiences of QTBIPOC graduate student

researchers as they conduct research with QTBIPOC communities. Our primary research questions were:

1. How might engaging in QTBIPOC-specific research impact the (a) research production process, (b) professional identity development, and (c) relations with academic structures for QTBIPOC graduate student researchers?
2. How might engaging in QTBIPOC-specific research impact the (a) psychological and physical well-being, (b) identity development, and (c) interpersonal relationships of QTBIPOC graduate student researchers?

Through this study, we hoped to elucidate ways QTBIPOC graduate student researchers navigate intersectional and interlocking systems of oppression, combat lack of affirmative structures and representation, and engage in scholarly activism for their communities. Results may deepen our understanding of how graduate programs, curriculum, and academic journals currently oppress and/or support QTBIPOC graduate student researchers in their professional trajectory. Consequently, results may also help us identify ways academia can reform systems to offer structural systems to bolster and retain engagement from emerging QTBIPOC scholars.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Intersectionality and Critical Race Theory

The theoretical frameworks that shaped the current study include intersectionality theory (Anzaldúa, 1987; Crenshaw, 1989; Combahee River Collective) and critical race theory (CRT; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 19982004). These theories have been widely utilized to understand the intricate and interconnected nuances of racism, heterosexism, and cissexism faced by QTBIPOC communities.

Crenshaw (1989) introduced the term, *intersectionality*, to highlight the interconnected impacts of race and gender in the lives of Black women, especially within systems such as healthcare, law, and education. A central tenet of intersectionality is that it conceptualizes social identities to be intertwined and multiple minority experiences to be shaped by interlocking systems of privilege and oppression (Bowleg, 2008; Buchanan & Wiklund, 2021; Shin et al., 2017). Following its introduction, intersectionality has been extensively used to highlight the experiences of multiple minority individuals. Within higher education, intersectionality has previously been adopted to highlight ways minority faculty members face systemic inequity and exclusion (Settles et al., 2021; Settles et al., 2022; Wright-Mair, 2013). By adopting an intersectional framework for our study, we hoped to understand how interlocking systems of oppression, including racism, heterosexism, and cissexism, shape the experiences of QTBIPOC graduate student researchers within the academy. Moreover, intersectionality allowed us to move beyond theoretical conceptualization and enact social justice (Chun, 2013).

To fully understand the intersectional experiences of QTBIPOC graduate student researchers, we must also understand the tenets of CRT. CRT centralizes race and racism and emphasizes that racialized inequities are inherently present within institutional systems (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT integrates an intersectional perspective to race, where it examines how one's racialized experiences intersect with other social identities to inform unique perspectives and challenges (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998). In the current study, CRT allowed us to understand the personal and professional experiences of QTBIPOC graduate student researchers through a lens of racialized inequity. Further, CRT emphasizes the importance of centering the experiences of minority identities, encourages the use of counter-narration to challenge dominant research methodologies and decenter whiteness and examines power imbalances among individuals and systems (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998). These tenets of CRT are reflected in our study's central aim to prioritize the experiences of QTBIPOC graduate student researchers, challenge traditional, Western research methodologies, and allow for collaboration with participants.

Participants and Procedure

Following protocol review and approval from our Institutional Review Board, participants were recruited through research announcements on professional academic listservs (e.g., American Psychological Association Divisions 12, 17, 44, and 45), departmental/program-specific listservs (e.g., counseling psychology, sociology, public health), social media (e.g., Academic Twitter, Facebook groups for graduate students), and other professional spaces catering to minority graduate student researchers (e.g.,

OUTGrads). Participants consisted of QTBIPOC graduate researchers (n = 20) who conduct research with QTBIPOC communities and met the study's inclusion criteria (i.e., 18 years or older, currently enrolled in graduate school/graduated from a graduate program within the last two years, identify as a racial and sexual and/or gender minority person, and currently reside in the United States).

The research study was advertised as a qualitative study exploring the experiences of graduate student researchers who identify as QTBIPOC and are conducting research on QTBIPOC communities. Prospective participants accessed the study through a link shared along with the research announcement. The link directed prospective participants to an online Qualtrics survey (HIPAA-protected online platform utilized for the study), where they were first asked to provide informed consent and report demographic characteristics for eligibility and data purposes. Initially, 68 prospective participants completed these online components of the study. Out of these 68 participants, 35 participants were excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria outlined above. The remaining participants were then contacted on a rolling basis to schedule interviews. Twenty-two participants responded to the interview scheduling requests and were interviewed as part of the study. However, from the 22 interviews, two were excluded from the final data set, as their respective interview responses suggested that they did not conduct research on the experiences of QTBIPOC communities. As a result, the final dataset consisted of demographic and qualitative data from 20 participants (see Table 1 for pseudonyms and demographic information).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the first author via a HIPAA-compliant Zoom account during the spring of 2022. Interviews ranged from 57 to 77

minutes (M = 67.50 minutes, SD = 5.74 minutes) and examined the experiences of QTBIPOC graduate student researchers in a variety of contexts, including (a) factors and values shaping their research, (b) psychological and physical well-being, (c) personal and professional identity development, and (d) interpersonal/community connections (see Appendix for interview protocol). The first and second author collaboratively developed the initial set of interview questions, which were then reviewed by the third author to ensure that the questions were broad and offered participants freedom in their reception, interpretation, and responses. The final protocol was also reviewed by three QTBIPOC graduate student researchers, who did not participate in the study, and provided feedback regarding the content and cultural fit of the developed protocol. Following their feedback, questions exploring the role of QTBIPOC communities were added. For completing the interview, all participants received a $25 Amazon gift card as a token of appreciation for their physical and emotional efforts. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed via Otter.ai (encrypted transcription software). The transcripts generated via Otter.ai were then reviewed by the first author to correct for any potential errors and deidentify participant information. These reviewed transcripts were used by the first and second authors for coding and data analysis.

Researcher Reflexivity Statement

The research team represented a diverse set of social identities in terms of race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity, generational status, residency status, and professional identity. The first author is a first-generation, doctoral student in counseling psychology who identifies as a South Asian/Indian, immigrant, queer, and genderqueer person. The second and third author are professors in counseling psychology, one

identifies as a white, fourth-generation Polish-German American, lesbian, and cisgender woman and the other as a Latina, white, heterosexual, and cisgender woman. The fourth author identifies as a doctoral candidate in counseling psychology who identifies as a South Asian-American, queer (bi+), and genderfluid woman. All authors have experience conducting quantitative and qualitative research with racial, sexual, and/or gender minority individuals.

To enhance the authenticity and credibility of the research study, members of the research team met to collectively reflect on their positionality, biases, and power (Levitt et al., 2018; Morrow, 2005). During the initial phase, the first author met with the research team to highlight how their own identities and experiences as a QTBIPOC graduate student researcher guide and inform their relationship with this study and the participants. Through this discussion, the first author was able to reflect on their own assumptions and feelings about whiteness within the academy, emotional labor endured as a QTBIPOC graduate student, and the complex process of researching one's own community and experiences. As a result, the first author engaged in self-reflective practices to help them remain aware of their own positionality, limits, and reactions to participant responses that either echoed or challenged their own experiences. Additionally, throughout the process, the research team remained mindful of how the second and third authors hold greater social power via some of their personal and professional identities. To develop an egalitarian relationship, the research team discussed ways to share power, practice humility, initiate intentional conversations, and access educational resources to learn and challenge assumptions to the extent possible.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

To analyze participant data and understand the experiences of QTBIPOC graduate researchers, we followed the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In the first phase of data analysis, the first and second authors of the study began immersing themselves in the data by reading the first two participant interviews and noting their reactions to participant responses. Then, the first and second authors discussed their views and assumptions associated with the first two transcripts and understand how their biases, identities, and roles interact with the data analysis process. In the second phase of data analysis, the first and second authors independently read through two transcripts at a time, generated their own initial codes by clustering related reflections together, and identified participant quotes that supported these codes. Then, during the third phase, the first and second authors conducted thorough reviews of their coded transcripts, discussed similarities and discrepancies, and sought mutual agreement on codes. The first two authors maintained their own records of emerging preliminary themes, and after each set of two transcripts, they discussed emerging themes in relation to the coded components. In the fourth phase, the first two authors discussed, revised, and condensed the complete list of preliminary themes to solidify a thematic structure for the dataset. Consequently, in the fifth phase, the first author named and defined the themes and coded participant responses using these solidified themes. The second author provided feedback to discuss discrepancies, alter themes, or add/remove themes to produce a finalized thematic structure. During the last phase, the first two authors selected participant quotes that most accurately reflected the essence of the selected theme.

To support the credibility, transferability, and confirmability of the study, the researchers integrated several components in the study's design and data analysis process. Specifically, credibility was maintained by integrating thorough and culturally-responsive feedback in the development of the study and protocol; implementing a variety of recruitment strategies; utilizing open-ended and broad interview questions; maintaining prolonged interactions with participants via virtual interviews; ensuring depth and clarity in participant responses; using initial low-level codes to stay true to the analytic method and data; and assessing for analyst triangulation (Creswell, 2007; Morrow, 2005). To support transferability of the data, researchers provided thick and detailed descriptions of data via participant quotes, shared sufficient information about the sample, and highlighted the context of our study (Creswell, 2007).

Confirmability was reinforced through memos, research reflexivity, and audits (Birks et al., 2008; Creswell, 2007; Morrow, 2005). Following the interviews and during the data analysis process, the first author maintained reflective memos to identify their personal reactions to the data, understand the impact of shared identities between the researcher and participants, and challenge their own biases and assumptions. Further, given that the third and fourth authors were not involved in the coding process, they served as auditors. The auditors independently reviewed four different transcripts each, the proposed finalized thematic structure, the results section, and the theme/frequency table. Based on their feedback, we revised some of the theme names to make them more specific, discussed how our participants challenge expectations around separating self from the research process, and highlighted the "intentionality" that our participants brought to their research work. The auditors verified that the (a) data analytic process

seemed logical, clear, systematic, and thorough and (b) the thematic structure generated by the first two authors accurately reflected the data and emerged from the shared transcripts.

Table 3.1. Participant demographic data.

Pseudonym	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Trans	Sexuality	Program	# of Research Years	# of Research Projects	First-Gen
Sonora	35	Latino/a/e/x	Man	No	Gay	Ph.D. Higher Education	3-5 years	2-3 projects	Yes
Saeed	29	South Asian	Gender Non-Binary	No	Queer	M.Ed. Counselor Education	3-5 years	2-3 projects	Yes
Kacen	24	African American/Black	Gender Non-Binary	No	Queer	Ph.D. Applied Psychology	3-5 years	2-3 projects	Yes
Shani	25	South Asian American	Gender Non-Binary	No	Queer	Ph.D. Applied Psychology	3-5 years	4-5 projects	Yes
Lamya	28	East Asian American	Woman	No	Lesbian	Ph.D. Applied Psychology	1-2 years	1 project	No
Emery	27	East Asian American	Gender Non-Binary	No	Gay	Ph.D. Graphic Design	3-5 years	2-3 projects	No
Tanwi	23	South Asian American	Woman	No	Bisexual	Ph.D. Applied Psychology	1-2 years	2-3 projects	No
Lorde	27	African American/Black	Gender Non-Binary	No	Queer	Ph.D. Applied Psychology	1-2 years	4-5 projects	Yes
Ashia	32	East Asian American	Woman	No	Asexual	Ph.D. Applied Psychology	3-5 years	2-3 projects	Yes
Kai	22	African American/Black	Gender Non-Binary	Yes	Pansexual	Ph.D. Applied Psychology	3-5 years	1 project	No

Table 3.1. Participant demographic data (contd.).

Pseudonym	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Trans	Sexuality	Program	# of Research Years	# of Research Projects	First-Gen
Dean	24	Latino/a/e/x Multiracial	Gender Non-Binary	Yes	Queer	Ph.D. Sociology	3-5 years	2-3 projects	Yes
Mariko	25	Southeast Asian American	Woman	No	Pansexual	Ph.D. Applied Psychology	3-5 years	2-3 projects	Yes
Ocean	29	African American/Black	Gender Non-Binary	Yes	Pansexual	M.Ed. Counselor Education	3-5 years	4-5 projects	Yes
Ayida	31	Latino/a/e/x	Genderfluid	No	Queer	Ed.D. Higher Education	1-2 years	1 project	No
Pulido	28	Latino/a/e/x	Man	No	Gay	Ph.D. Applied Psychology	3-5 years	2-3 projects	No
Nas	31	Latino/a/e/x	Man	No	Queer	Ph.D. Higher Education	1-2 years	2-3 projects	No
Mia	44	African American/Black Multiracial	Gender Non-Binary	Yes	Bisexual	Psy.D. Applied Psychology	1-2 years	4-5 projects	Yes
Tara	29	African American/Black	Woman	No	Bisexual	Ph.D. Counselor Education	3-5 years	1 project	No
Camryn	23	Latino/a/e/x Multiracial	Genderfluid	Yes	Pansexual	Ph.D. Applied Psychology	3-5 years	2-3 projects	Yes
Neel	27	South Asian American	Man	No	Gay	Psy.D. Applied Psychology	3-5 years	2-3 projects	Yes

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Results revealed five themes that highlight ways in which QTBIPOC graduate student researchers experience academia and the research process, including: (a) recognizing, resisting, and reforming systemic oppression within academia; (b) encountering interpersonal oppression within academic contexts; (c) personal well-being and the role of QTBIPOC research; (d) relations among one's personal identities and engagement in QTBIPOC research; and (e) navigating interpersonal relationships, identity disclosure, and community dynamics. Further, subthemes emerged within two of the broader themes. Table 2 depicts the themes, subthemes, and the number of participants that endorsed each theme/subtheme.

Recognizing, Resisting, and Reforming Systemic Oppression within Academia

In the first theme, participants illustrated ways they perceive colonialism, racism, and/or heterosexism to be deeply intertwined with the academy and academic research. Responses also highlighted strategies and paradigms adopted by QTBIPOC graduate student researchers to enhance equity and inclusivity through their work. This theme was endorsed by 100% (n = 20) of the sample. Further, participant responses reflected three subthemes within this broader domain, including: (a) highlighting epistemic exclusion of QTBIPOC research, (b) centering intersectional research within academia, and (c) abolishing traditional, Eurocentric research methodologies.

Highlighting Epistemic Exclusion of QTBIPOC Research

Participants reflected on a variety of components that are embedded within the academy and reinforce systemic and structural inequities and injustice towards QTBIPOC

research and researchers. Most participants (n = 19) reported feeling undervalued, dismissed, and underrepresented, within higher education. Describing a few forms of epistemic exclusion endured by QTBIPOC graduate student researchers, Nas said,

> Sometimes when you do share these results, other people might not be able to hold the space for it. When we submit to journals, other people might not see this research as valuable...And I'll be honest, I think sometimes this is what has kept me from getting first round interviews in the job process. Because I'm focusing on queer and trans people of color, and people want us to do race and ethnicity work from a very heteronormative way. And even me, and my peers talk about that, because…some of us are in the job market…we see who is invited and who's not invited, right, and it's like, our work very much is unapologetic. And sometimes search committees don't want that…they want people of color, who are going to do race work, but do race work that makes white people feel good. And comfortable.

Experiences shared by other participants help us understand how such systematic marginalization of QTBIPOC research manifests within specific institutional structures and practices such as, academic journals, academic departments, curricula, research methodologies, etc. For example, Kai reflecting on their experiences and feelings associated with the publication process, shared,

> Sometimes you will get comments that are negative…or like overly harsh or somebody who just clearly has not engaged with research on intersectionality or trans people or people of color, and dealing with those comments in a respectful way, so as to not lose the chance of getting a publication can also be

> frustrating…And also it can be challenging to get the visibility that you would hope for or want, because a lot of the journals that might take up this kind of research are usually smaller impact factor journals compared to the big ones in the field. So, it kind of creates a bit of a feedback loop where the same people who would already be seeking out this kind of research, see it when it is published in these journals, but the people who like need to see it, because of the...perhaps because of the lower impact factor or whatever they don't attend to those kinds of journals that are oriented towards social issues and socially marginalized groups.

Additionally, some participants identified experiences where their research methodologies and sampling techniques were scrutinized during the research review process. For example, Shani shared, "One of the other challenges, is [reviewers] take your work less seriously, if you're doing any type of diversity science, they just like think it's like less rigorous, they just think it's not as objective, not as good as like other research." Similarly, Ocean said, "Resistance over convenience sampling…which we all need to do it…maybe we should be fighting for convenience sampling to not sound so bad anymore or…fighting for better funding we don't have to use convenience sampling to reach [marginalized] people."

Participants also highlighted examples where they faced systemic barriers during the IRB review process. For example, Camryn shared,

> IRB…gave a lot of pushback, whereas, if the research was white centered, or didn't have marginalized identity centered, they would have just accepted it. But instead, with my thesis, I had to go to four full IRB meetings... And so just constant questioning of well, why you centering these folks. Also treating them

> like they're not strong individuals that can take care of themselves. I'm obviously going to provide resources and take care of my participants.... And I go back and forth. On one hand, it's like, okay, I understand that, and I appreciate the effort to make sure that research is being conducted ethically and it's not harmful. And also, I see that the way you're interrogating me about this project is way different than the way you would have interrogated if this was about white individuals.

Lastly, participants reflected on ways engagement from QTBIPOC scholars is in itself gatekept via admission processes, academic nepotism, and tools for knowledge production. For example, Kacen explained,

> Not having enough people with these identities to do this work within this field. Because there's so much gatekeeping involved…Because just thinking about the amount of people in this field who look like me, versus not, it's different…So, it's hard for people like me to even get into these spaces…it is definitely a privilege to be here.

Centering Intersectional Research Within Academia

Most participants (85%, *n* = 17) also highlighted ways QTBIPOC graduate student researchers encounter a lack of intersectionality in existing frameworks and are challenged to center and construct intersectional paradigms through their own research. Participants noted the lack of peer-reviewed, published intersectional literature that focuses on the experiences of QTBIPOC communities and the limitations of applying singular identity paradigms from either queer, trans, or racial-identity research to understand the intersectional and multiple minority identity experiences of QTBIPOC individuals. For example, Mariko said, “There is not a lot of intersectional research out

there on QTBIPOC communities…and it's because we're invisiblized, right. So, our problems aren't really in the spotlight." Camryn noted a similar frustration,

> It's still hard to find intersecting research…I can easily find queer studies, I can easily find POC studies, but it's hard to find that connection, that intersection, and so that's still a challenge, in terms of having to find the backing for a research study…you're having to grab from these things that are either very white-centered or very cis/straight-centered, and kind of make assumptions based off of that…which is kind of like the exact opposite of what Crenshaw says in intersectionality. It's pretty clear that you can't take findings from a queer/trans study that's white-centered, and a POC study that's cis/straight-centered…and approximate, just add, you can't add those two experiences together and be like this is how QTBIPOC people are experiencing things.

Emery emphasized the need for an intersectional lens when exploring the experiences of QTBIPOC communities,

> I think what I feel is a strength of being both a person of color and a queer person doing this research is the understanding that it would be kind of a mistake to approach this research through a singular lens of purely thinking about this from just a queer or trans or race perspective, because that just simply isn't how the world works, or society works, or discrimination and oppression work.

Lastly, participants advocated for the need to resist epistemic dismissal around the relevance of intersectional research. For example, Lorde stated,

> Feeling like our research is so niched, like others make it seem it. And it's like, no...no, like, why not studying white people is niche? That can be a niche…we

> inherently become so limited and narrowed when we study QTBIPOC...Because you hear, "This is such a small percent of the population," like fuck that, and it's a population that is experiencing a lot of distress and a lot of fucked up ways of being discriminated and oppressed.

Abolishing Traditional, Eurocentric Research Methodologies

All participants (n = 20) illustrated culturally responsive and identity-centered methodologies, frameworks, and orientations they intentionally adopt as ways to resist and reconceptualize the research process for QTBIPOC communities and individuals. The core of this subtheme is echoed in the following statement made by Ashia:

> I would almost kind of want to erase everything that we have to the ground and like build it up again. I know we just started, but in a way, I would love to have ethnic and racial points of view represented from the beginning in our base literature, in the frameworks that we're creating, in the measurements, and the instruments that we use.

Other participants outlined ways they intentionally integrate alternative, radical, and non-traditional research methodologies into their research design to better serve and understand their communities. For example, Ayida stated,

> Methodologies that are not your "traditional methods"…I use [testimonies]. I also conceptualized in my work [transl. queer gossip], as a way and tool to expose cisheteronormativity, and its violence and these structures…Again, to have a space for counter storytelling. So, these methodologies are also in itself in resistance to academia's way of doing and knowing. So, then it's not only am I doing research on this population, but now I'm also doing it this this way, that just

> is not usually what academia does. And for me, it's like, but that's what makes sense for the communities that I'm a part of.

Some participants dissented Eurocentric research methodologies by centering the values and efforts of QTBIPOC communities within their research practices. For example, Lamya said, “I did run through a few research questions with the community before I launched it. So, just like having consultation with community members, even in the initial stages, was really important to me. And that was something cool and interesting to them.” Similarly, other participants reflected on the ways they integrated their experiences and identities into the research process to challenge traditional research standards around objectivity, boundaries between researcher and participants, and separation of self from research. For example, Ocean said,

> During some of those interviews, I bonded with participants a lot. So, I did interviews, and I had two people code them with me, and we started the process, and they were like, “You add a lot of commentary I feel we shouldn’t count this…did you prime them?” and I was like, "Oh my God, all of this was wasted. I ruined all the interviews. I didn't do more training of myself on interview protocols.” I ended up finding a different methodology to account for the fact that I'm a Black trans person, I can't have an objective conversation with another Black trans person. I'm not going to pretend that we could have really done this any other way. I feel like the only way to not be too involved is to just miss things. I think the quality of the interviews was influenced by us being able to bond. They would have been more suspicious of me if we couldn't have had that sort of relationship. I would have gotten totally different information, heard less

> personal stories. So, I feel responsible for keeping the standards up or criticizing the standards, because there are those logistical, professional, methodological barriers to do this.

Lastly, participants discussed abolishing traditional research frameworks by challenging its boundaries and integrating advocacy and systemic reform into their research practices. For example, Kacen stated,

> I'm also interested in policy-oriented research and public health…and trying to make sure that broader policy can also be beneficial to LGBTQ+ people of color. So, I think that's kind of my moral reasoning for wanting to do that kind of research and that in the hopes that it can affect some kind of large-scale change, but I also do know that academia can kind of be a bit of an ivory tower, and research doesn't always make it to the people who want to hear it the most. So, I do try to get out on my own, and talk to legislators about things that I think are important, and also the importance of just being visible on places like social media and stuff as well. I hope that in the long term, there is a tangible impact on things like clinical practice and policy through the kinds of research that I'm doing.

Encountering Interpersonal Oppression Within Academic Contexts

Most participants (75%, *n* = 15) elaborated on instances of interpersonal marginalization within academic environments, particularly in relation to interactions with fellow white researchers and faculty members. For instance, participants reflected on experiences where their research was doubted, invalidated, and overlooked. Dean shared,

> I presented my work for my department, maybe two weeks ago…there's this one white faculty member, who made like a comment of being like, "Yeah, it's surprising, you got so many interviews…given the population..." And I was like, I don't think so…which is part of what my work is saying, is that there's actually a lot of us out there. But just that like level of like surprise of…Because [Faculty Member] assumes it's a niche population that you would never be able to find? Right when I did 30 interviews…which would have been an accomplishment in many other situations. And then someone else who does like [white research] and stats presented the next week, and her work is great, right? But it's very mainstream. But the way that faculty responded was so different, "Yeah, this is like career defining research. I can just see how this could just keep on expanding, blah, blah, blah." But this idea of [her research] being like career defining versus mine was just like, wow, that's so interesting that you did that.

In addition to interpersonal marginalization around their research programs, QTBIPOC graduate students recalled experiences of identity-based oppression they encounter by existing as QTBIPOC individuals within the academy. Particularly, in relation to conversations with white students and faculty, participants highlighted experiences of microaggressions, biases, isolation, and abusive power dynamics. For example, Lorde said,

> Every Student of Color has experienced microaggressions from [white students], every Student of Color has had a problem with white faculty, and how they get talked to. Why is this getting passed down? And something people just deal with? Like, why is there no change? I'm thinking specifically, there's a white, cis, gay

> man in my cohort who speaks like a Black woman, and I'm just like, that's not okay… And how often we've pushed back on that, and no faculty gives him pushback, but... I've heard some of my trans friends of color, go to disciplinary hearings and get things in their file. I'm constantly sitting in that worry of is that gonna happen to me? Do I have to talk this kind of way to this kind of white supervisor before I get in trouble? So, there's we carry… I feel like a lot of us carry these anxieties of like, "What can I say? And can I say it loud enough?"

Further, participants also reflected on the challenges they experience due to the assumptions, invisibility, and singular identity focus they encounter within academic interactions. For example, Tanwi shared,

> I also will say like, I'm not as open about my LGBTQ+ identity as I am about being South Asian, because you can see that as soon as you look at me, it's one of those spoken versus unspoken identity factors. There have been times where I have been, probably not intentionally, but excluded from doing research on LGBTQ+ folks, because I present in a certain way, and it led people to make assumptions that like, “Oh, that's like, that's not an area that [Participant's Name] would be interested in.” So, it's complicated…

Lastly, participants outlined the isolation and tokenization they encounter due to the lack of intersectional representation in their mentorship and departments. For example, Tara stated,

> It’s not like [my advisor] is not helpful. It's just because she doesn't have those identities. And she doesn't focus specifically on that. There are sometimes where I had to further explain why I'm doing things. And it's good in the sense that she's

> viewing me as the expert on this topic, but it's also a little frustrating, because she's doesn't have a wide and lived experience in this specific topic. It feels like her feedback is limited. So, sometimes I feel like when I get stuck writing the discussion or conclusion... I felt like there's not like any colleagues or anyone who I can, like really talk it out.

Personal Well-Being and The Role of QTBIPOC Research

Participants' narratives emphasized ways conducting QTBIPOC research is connected to their mental health, well-being, and interpersonal and community relationships. This theme was endorsed by 95% (n = 19) of the sample. Further, participant responses reflected three subthemes within this broader domain, including: (a) mental health impacts experienced via QTBIPOC research, (b) coping and support for QTBIPOC researchers, and (c) affirmation and validation through QTBIPOC research.

Mental Health Impacts Experienced Via QTBIPOC Research

Within this subtheme, participants (80%, n = 16) reflected on the psychological challenges and strengths of conducting QTBIPOC research within the academy. Participants described ways conducting QTBIPOC research provided them with meaning, value, and a sense-of-purpose. For example, Tanwi shared,

> I think especially with the way that graduate school and doing research is set up, it can often feel like, one step after another. And so, I think, one of the things that's popping up for me is the impact that this work can have.... And I don't think it is one of the things that I sit down and think about a lot, but when you hear things like that... I mean, it's, it's awesome. It validates the fact that this work is

> important to our communities, people want to be seen in this work and that it is worthwhile to be doing this.

However, some participants also noted how the positive impacts of engaging in QTBIPOC research can be weakened by graduate school-related stressors. Camryn explained,

> I think it's tied in with also being a graduate student, because I would say if we could put my research in a vacuum, not influenced by the other roles I play as a graduate student, I think it would have probably 90% positive mental health impact, it really like motivates me, gives me meaning, and fulfillment and all those things…But then if you take it out of that vacuum and put it into all these roles of doing clinical work, being a student, TAing, as well as just trying to live and pay rent and stuff, it can have more of a negative impact just in terms of stress…It's just very stressful, and so it leads to some nights where I have to stay up really late, I sacrifice some sleep or some social time, which is expected within grad school, but also I don't think grad school is a very sustainable way to live. And so, I think it does have those negative aspects when you put it all together.

Similarly, other participants elaborated on ways they experience negative mental health concerns within the context of graduate school and conducting QTBIPOC research. For example, Shani expressed,

> I mean…I've like struggled with depression and anxiety and disordered eating habits my entire life. So, I guess when I'm stressed out about grad school stuff. I guess it like exacerbates those physical health conditions. I feel like sometimes, I will, emotionally overeat when I'm really frustrated about something like

> research-related or revert back to drinking alcohol. But I think, I don't know, the research didn't necessarily like cause, because those were already physical health things that I struggled with beforehand. But it, like makes them worse on like, weeks that I'm particularly stressed out about research. And I guess like sleep too. So, like, when I'm really anxious about the whole research stressors, I think that also impacts sleeping…

Further, participants highlighted emotional labor, burden, and tokenization as stressors that are unique to their experiences as QTBIPOC graduate student researchers within the academy. For example, Tara stated, “Because there's less people who are doing this research, I feel like sometimes there's more of a magnifying glass on me. And I feel like if I don't get it right, then she doesn't know what she's doing.” Relatedly, Ashia said,

> There's kind of a pressure to be able to speak more towards my cultural identities in that space. So, kind of that like tokenism a little bit in a way. Which is like a lot of pressure, because it's not like I know everything there is to know about [Asian] American queer culture or anything like that. It's almost kind of like, we have to become double experts of our culture, as well as, our like sexual or gender identity experiences. And I think there, this might be the implicit pressure that I feel, if I'm not certain, I feel I shouldn't say anything then I might misspeak, or I could misrepresent, or I might be taken as like, "Oh, she doesn't know anything, actually." So, there's that kind of like double minority stress.

Lastly, participants reflected on the vicarious traumatization they experience via the realities shared by their participants. For example, Sonora explained,

> It can be a lot. I think it's taxing on the soul because you're reliving trauma. The responses can be triggering, it can impact you as someone who's listening to the story. And I started crying because I was reliving my triggers and traumas with my mom….

Coping and Support for QTBIPOC Researchers

Most participants (95%, *n* = 19) also described various interpersonal and institutional mechanisms that empower QTBIPOC researchers, serve as coping mechanisms, and foster wellness. For some participants, coping was experienced through prioritizing and validating themselves and their work. Mia shared,

> We might be more susceptible to burnout, or just taking on other people's pain too much…but that doesn't make us weak. It doesn't make us bad researchers…like it's human. And there's no shame in it, we can acknowledge it and work on it. Do not beat ourselves up for having struggles and finding it difficult in some ways that sometimes to do this research.

Similarly, participants communicated the importance of emotional boundaries and limits when engaging with QTBIPOC research. For instance, Saeed said,

> Since I've been doing it for about four or five years, it's gotten a little easier in terms of where I can compartmentalize, this is the work that I'm doing, and I can't bring that work with me when I come home. So, it was hard learning that. But it was important as well. And I've been working on that the past couple of years, just separating myself from the work that I'm doing most of the time, even though I have a lot of compassion and I love doing that work and everything. But there

> are still times when I need that boundary and I need that separation, otherwise, I will burn out.

Participant narratives illustrated the salient role research advisors can play in supporting QTBIPOC researchers and their research. Dean shared,

> I think I also am very lucky that I do have good advisors. I feel so much more empowered having advisors who really believe in my work and who will like to fight for me, because when I'm having issues with the chair of my department, like not wanting to approve something, they're like, we'll handle it. And like being able to have that support, I think has made me even more confident of being like, "Okay, I have that." Right…I think they've always validated my work. And I think that's been really good.

For some participants, community and interpersonal relationships helped foster care and wellness. Ayida shared,

> Building community. I've been so grateful and lucky and intentional about creating a QTBIPOC fam. Like, I have my [Cultural Term for Queer] sisters and we text, and we cry. I mean, we were just crying yesterday, right? Because a lot of them are receiving notes around like postdocs and fellowships. So, the rejection is a lot…And when you're doing this work, it's also hard not to think about am I not getting these things because I'm doing this work? When the literature told you that you're more likely to not get a lot of things in life. So, those communities that we built have been really important for us to survive and thrive and celebrate our wins. Because no one else will do it for us. So, we text each other, we FaceTime

> each other, we have Zooms, we have writing sessions established, and it's also translated into we're developing a research piece together.

Lastly, participants discussed the use of professional mental-health support to help them cope with the stressors they experience as QTBIPOC graduate student researchers. Emery said,

> When I was really attached to this research, my first two years of my Ph.D. program I was working so much, I just wasn't sleeping. I had to be like, reminded to eat, which was really concerning. And that was pretty tough. I think what's difficult is, it's hard to disentangle was I doing those things Because of the research, or because I was just starting grad school. And that was really scary. I was just really depressed. And then I started going to therapy, and that was helpful. And I wasn't thinking about the research, or grad school or my life in the ways that I do now. So, I would say that doing therapy has sort of helped me on my journey to get to this really healthy place.

Affirmation and Validation Through QTBIPOC Research

Participant responses (90%, n = 18) highlighted ways QTBIPOC researchers experience affirmation and validation through the process of conducting QTBIPOC research. Particularly, participants reported experiencing affirmation and validation through participant responses, fellow QTBIPOC researchers, other faculty and colleagues, literature, QTBIPOC community members, etc. For example, Lamya reflecting on their interviews with their participants, expressed:

> I think it was like positive to hear people talk about themselves and their experiences, and it helped me. I think that was a form of feeling validation,

> resilience in an indirect way...just knowing the different strengths that community members had. Whether it was like inner strength or strength from their families or strength in their spiritual practices or strength from the queer community. I think just hearing about how different people like drew on those resources felt really helpful. And so, yeah, I feel like if anything, it boosted my sense of community, "Okay, they're doing quite well. In a lot of ways."

Some participants reflected on the reciprocal nature of affirmation and validation they experienced with their participants. Dean shared,

> I think the other positive aspects are understanding that my experience is not isolated. But also, being able to interview people and say, like, your experience is not isolated. And be like, yeah, other people have talked about that. And the like the relief that people feel when they like, Oh, really? And I'm like, Yeah, a ton of other people said the same thing, right. And like, being able to have those moments, I think, was really meaningful to me.

Participants also reported experiencing support and reassurance of their research via encouragement shared by fellow researchers. For example, Sonora reflected,

> Guest lecturing in other courses and talking about *Jotería* as an epistemology and how to use it in higher ed research. And so just getting really dope positive feedback from folks saying, I incorporated this aspect, and it's really been helpful, or I read some of your work. And like, I would love to talk to you because I'm trying to figure out how to navigate my work. And I think the good and bad challenges have, reinforced my why, why I'm here, why I want to do this and, and humbled me.

Lastly, for some participants, affirmation and validation was experienced through the actual process of research production, publication, and dissemination. Camryn stated,

> I think it's very fulfilling to do this kind of work! It's kind of like, if you think about...this might not be the best analogy, but if you think about like something as a kid, that you were never given, and then as an adult, you're giving that to another kid, essentially. It's kind of like I feel like I'm fulfilling the role that I wish someone was there for me when I was younger or there for my communities when I was younger.

Relations Among One's Personal Identities and Engagement in QTBIPOC Research

Most participants (95%, *n* = 19) described experiencing interrelations among their social identities, professional roles, and the QTBIPOC research process. Participants illustrated ways their identities define and motivate their research programs. For example, Neel said,

> Yeah, my identities are like so inseparable from who I am, and they really inform the way I approach research in my own career… A lot of this is informed by my own personal experiences, obviously, not everybody's going to share my experiences. But as a queer person of color, it's a unique experience of being at the intersection of two marginalized identities…But I think it can be an isolating experience, when you experience stressors related to different parts of your identity that people might not understand…and how those things really impact my experiences on a daily basis. And I am motivated and curious to see how that's also affecting others who share similar identities as me.

Further, QTBIPOC researchers viewed this shared identity perspective to be beneficial to their practice. Participant narratives highlighted experiences of shared empathy, insight, and understanding from QTBIPOC researchers. For instance, as captured by Nas,

> So, I think, I think one of the things that I think about is, do you have to be queer and/or trans BIPOC in order to do queer and/or trans BIPOC research? And my answer, right now, is yes. Because there's so much nuance in these relationships and these narratives, that someone who comes from a heterosexual or white perspective is not going to understand. And as a community that continues to face so much exclusion and marginalization, I don't want straight white people telling our stories. In the same way that I as a non-Black person cannot do Black research, right?

Even though shared identities and experiences played a salient role for QTBIPOC researchers, some participants also recognized the importance of acknowledging room for within community differences and nuances among QTBIPOC researchers and their participants. For example, Emery said,

> Understand the limits to what I can claim in my research, in terms of the shared oppression that I think I have with participants. I can never claim to fully know their experiences because we have different standpoints, different identities, and different experiences. And so that helps me. I can relate, but I cannot say I fully understand what they're going through. And I think that's just a way better way of going, I would much rather have that, unsettled-ness, then to be like, I know exactly what's going on in this context. And like that to me kind of signals a level

> of…the caucacity of white researchers. But yeah, it takes a certain level of privilege to think and acknowledge that.

Additionally, participants discussed ways conducting QTBIPOC research allowed them to engage in their own identity development and reflections. For example, Saeed shared,

> Researching with the communities has also impacted my own understanding of my identities a lot because I remember when I started, in the very beginning…I wouldn't say what my sexual identity is, I wouldn't say what my gender identity is. I didn't always have the vocabulary to even know myself and what my identity was, and I wasn't very comfortable, especially in terms of my gender identity, I was very uncomfortable in exploring that. But when I started working with the community, it allowed me to see how other QTBIPOC are so comfortable in their bodies and in their identities, and they are using those identities to help other people and create a sense of belonging, so it did help me to be more open about exploring and understanding my own identities.

For some participants, conducting QTBIPOC research helped them experience congruence and integration among their sexuality, gender, and race. For example, Kai said,

> I think that…integration, I think that's very accurate, because I didn't grow up with very much of a sense of community with regards to my Black identity or like much identity salience in that respect, because I grew up in a pretty like white area. And then in college, I went to a much more diverse institution and got to meet a lot more LGBT people of color, but engaging in the research, I think has

> really helped cement my identity as a queer and trans Black person, not just like a Black person who happens to be queer and trans, or like a queer and trans person who happens to be Black, but doing research on intersectionality and seeing the way that these identities are inextricably linked in both negative ways, like discrimination and victimization, but also in positive ways, like the uniqueness of my community, specifically….And how motivated towards political and social change people who exist at that intersection are, it's definitely very encouraging.

However, for some participants academia felt unwelcoming to these intersectional identities and fostered incongruence among their sexuality, gender, and race. Pulido said,

> And I will like put myself in a category. Like, there's so many situations where I feel like I have to partition my full self so that I'm not like, too much, like too Latinx or too gay or like, whenever in certain spaces to effectively navigate academia.

Navigating Interpersonal Relationships, Identity Disclosure, and Community Dynamics

The last theme represents participants' (80%, *n* = 16) experiences navigating challenges around their identity as a QTBIPOC researcher within the context of familial relationships, other interpersonal relationships (friendships, partners, etc.), and sexual, gender, and racial minority communities. Participants reported feeling that engaging in QTBIPOC research distanced them from their interpersonal relationships and community spaces. For some participants, feelings of isolation and inauthenticity emerged out of not being out about their sexual and/or gender identity within their familial/interpersonal relationships. For example, Emery shared,

> I feel like I have to hide this work from my family. And that is really difficult. I just imagine, I'm planning on graduating next year. And I'm like, would I even invite my parents to my dissertation defense, because I don't know how to even have that conversation with you. Like, this is my queer research. Yeah, with the parents in the family, it's made things hard. I mean, it's already hard. But yeah, it's like, I don't really know how to have this conversation.

For some participants, sexual and/or gender identity concealment and outness influenced how they interacted with their racial/ethnic group(s). For example, Tanwi stated,

> I think especially thinking about like the resources that I used for data collection, I chose to use Facebook groups and Reddits and things that were a little bit further from my social circle, when I was collecting data on Asian bisexual+ women, compared to when I was collecting data just on the experiences of South Asians…there is severe stigma around the LGBTQ+ community within the South Asian community, so I just didn't feel like I had that permission to be able to send out my surveys and talk about my research as much on those topics.

Additionally, for some participants, distance in interpersonal relationships was attributed to factors such as being a 1st-generation scholar, inaccessibility of research/academic language, and incompatibility of research with one's community. For example, Ashia expressed,

> Think it might just almost be like kind of a distancing. As I grow more and more involved in my research, I find that it's harder to kind of bring my family along with it. …because so much of energy and time is being spent on research projects

> and stuff, that right now kind of feels like it's taking up a big part of my world. And then so for my folks who can't quite understand what I'm saying, they just feel like they're not able to understand 80% of what I'm doing, 80% of my day, 80% of my life.

Lastly, participants discussed difficulties in balancing the duality in their identities as a QTBIPOC researcher and as a QTBIPOC individual within QTBIPOC community spaces. Participants expressed the tension they experience in negotiating their academic power and role with the values and histories of their communities. For example, Lorde stated,

> There's a difference between being a community member and a community member who does research. And like that kind of identity and a new way of relating to that space is different. We have to build our own self-awareness around it, deal with it, and reflect on it on our own. I think that does become isolating to be like, I want to be in community, but then I'm a researcher. In reality, I want to be a participant, want to hang out with my community, and…be in community and no one research us. Trying to figure out those new boundaries and ways of being in community as someone who does belong to the academy is difficult and especially in organizing spaces because I've been in organizing spaces where it's a lot of abolitionists, and they're like, “Fuck institutions burn them all down.” I am just like fuck. I'm in one. And when it comes to like getting the work done for these communities, what are you doing with your doctorate becomes the question.

Table 4.1. Theme and Subtheme Frequency Table.

Theme/Subtheme	*n* of Cases	%
1. Recognizing, Resisting, and Reforming Systemic Oppression Within Academia	20	100%
Highlighting Epistemic Exclusion of QTBIPOC Research	19	95%
Centering Intersectional Research Within Academia	17	85%
Abolishing Traditional, Eurocentric Research Methodologies	20	100%
2. Encountering Interpersonal Oppression Within Academic Contexts	15	75%
3. Personal Well-Being and The Role of QTBIPOC Research	19	95%
Mental Health Impacts Experienced Via QTBIPOC Research	16	80%
Coping and Support for QTBIPOC Researchers	19	95%
Affirmation and Validation Through QTBIPOC Research	18	90%
4. Relations Among One's Personal Identities and Engagement in QTBIPOC Research	19	95%
5. Navigating Interpersonal Relationships, Identity Disclosure, and Community Dynamics	16	80%

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Burgeoning research has begun to highlight interpersonal, institutional, and structural systems that oppress engagement from minority scholars within the academy (Settles et al., 2021; Settles et al., 2022). However, the focus of this evolving research area has primarily been on the experiences of minority faculty and has overlooked the nuanced realities of minority graduate student researchers (Park & Bahia, 2022). To our knowledge, this is the first study to document the experiences and impacts encountered by QTBIPOC graduate student researchers as they conduct research on QTBIPOC populations.

From a sample of 20 QTBIPOC graduate student researchers, we highlight ways QTBIPOC graduate students construct and apply identity-centered, anti-colonial research paradigms; endure epistemic injustice; navigate interpersonal oppression; and understand the impact of their research on their psychological well-being. These experiences align with previous scholarship examining the experiences of minority faculty (Settles et al., 2021; Settles et al., 2022; Veldhuis, 2023; Wright-Mair, 2023) and BIPOC graduate researchers (Park & Bahia, 2022). Furthermore, our study goes beyond understanding the direct, individual, and professional-level impacts of conducting QTBIPOC research and explores how engaging in QTBIPOC research impacts the intrapersonal relationships QTBIPOC graduate students have with their own sexual, gender, and racial identities and the interpersonal relationships they have with their family, friends, and the broader QTBIPOC communities.

Challenging and Reconceptualizing Academia for QTBIPOC Research

Previous scholarship helps us understand ways current, traditional academic systems and research are rooted within Eurocentric, colonial, and white supremacist principles (Buchanan et al., 2021). Further, such scholars have also advocated for resistance towards Western research frameworks, reconceptualization of current research methodologies, empowerment of diversity science, and implementation of identity-informed research methods (Buchanan et al., 2021). Similarly, QTBIPOC graduate student researchers in our study found their presence, research, and methodology to be forms of resistance and activism against colonialism in the academy. As reflected by our participants, QTBIPOC graduate student researchers intentionally abolish Eurocentric research practices by adopting radical, non-traditional, and community-centered research paradigms; center the value and interests of their communities at the forefront of their research; and utilize research to inform systemic and policy changes.

Furthermore, previous research has also helped outline the scarcity of intersectional research, frameworks, and training within academia (Shin et al., 2017). Consistent with these findings, QTBIPOC graduate student researchers noted the current lack of intersectional research, tools, and frameworks that exclusively center the experiences of QTBIPOC populations. Further, participants in our study outlined ways they center intersectionality through their research, construct intersectional research paradigms, and use intersectionality to highlight and reform systemic barriers impacting QTBIPOC communities.

Oppression within Academia: Impacts and Coping

QTBIPOC graduate student researchers experience various forms of structural barriers that hinder their participation in the academy and suppress their scholarly efforts, i.e., epistemic exclusion. Previous scholarship has helped highlight how epistemic exclusion manifests and impacts minority faculty and their experiences within the academy (Settles et al., 2021; Settles et al., 2022). Similarly, our findings support and extend such literature by reflecting on forms of epistemic injustices endured by QTBIPOC graduate student researchers. For example, harsh and ignorant feedback from academic journals; unfair criticisms of sampling methods, research methodologies, and generalizability; rejections from journals, conferences, and jobs; and minimal representation in research, mentors, and programs.

Additionally, our findings highlight interpersonal forms of oppression faced by QTBIPOC graduate student researchers within the context of research production and academia. Previous scholarship has documented ways minority faculty experience tokenization, microaggressions, marginalization, and invalidation in response to their research and presence in the academy (Veldhuis, 2022; Wright-Mair, 2023). Extending previous literature, the current study outlines interactions where QTBIPOC graduate student researchers and their research were doubted, invalidated, suppressed, disregarded, and covertly marginalized by faculty and colleagues. These findings add to the growing literature on identity-based experiences of minority graduate students within graduate school (e.g., Brunsma et al., 2017; English & Fenby, 2019; Goldberg et al., 2019; Means et al., 2017).

In relation to conducting identity-oriented research within such oppressive contexts, previous research also highlights the impacts of systemic and interpersonal oppression on the well-being of minority scholars within academia (Park & Bahia, 2022; Wright-Mair, 2023). Consistent with such findings, QTBIPOC graduate student researchers in our study reported experiencing identity-based stressors within academia, such as emotional labor, tokenization, isolation, and lack of representation/community. Further, our participants explained how identity-based and graduate school-related stressors exacerbate preexisting negative mental health concerns.

Adding to previous literature on minority scholars' well-being, our study also focused on mechanisms adopted by QTBIPOC graduate scholars to receive support, foster wellness, and retain within academia. QTBIPOC graduate students outlined receiving support and empowerment through encouraging and inclusive research advisors, establishing strict emotional and physical boundaries, relying on interpersonal and community connections, and seeking professional mental health support.

Relationships with Identities, Family, and Communities

A unique contribution of the current study is its exploration of how conducting QTBIPOC research impacts QTBIPOC graduate student researchers and their relationships with their social identities, family, friends, and the broader QTBIPOC communities. While previous literature has studied the professional and psychological impacts experienced by minority scholars, research has primarily overlooked the relational impacts of conducting research with one's communities.

Park and Bahia (2022) outlined ways BIPOC graduate student researchers utilize their research to engage in resistance, scholar activism, and meaning making of their own

identities. Supporting and extending this finding, QTBIPOC participants in our study explained ways their identities and lived experiences inform their research practices, the perceived benefits they experienced via sharing identities with their participants, and the importance of self-awareness around biases and assumptions. These findings are parallel with literature studying the impacts of shared identities in therapy for QTBIPOC clients (Jumarali, 2022). Furthermore, our participants shared how engaging in QTBIPOC research allowed them to engage in their own identity development. Some participants experienced identity integration among their sexual, gender, and racial identities, whereas some participants experienced identity conflicts among their identities. These identity-specific findings echo the need for continued research in this area to better understand the interrelations between identity development and shared-identity research.

Furthermore, our study reflects the complexities experienced by QTBIPOC graduate student researchers within their familial, interpersonal, and communal relationships. Previous scholarship has outlined unique stressors experienced by QTBIPOC college students such as, integration and acceptance of multiple identities and communities, reconciliation of familial and bicultural values, and outness within the context of racial/ethnic cultures (Garvey et al., 2019). Affirming and extending these findings, QTBIPOC graduate student researchers also navigate complex, intersectional dynamics with their sexual, gender, and racial identities. Specifically, participants that were not out about their sexual and/or gender identity to their family and/or to their broader racial/ethnic community experienced emotional distance, isolation, incongruence, and inauthenticity within their familial and racial/ethnic community. Lastly, our participants outline how traditional research ethics complicate QTBIPOC researchers'

ability to engage with their QTBIPOC community members, as they fear dual, exploitative, and biased relationships.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite the unique contributions of this study, it is necessary to assess our findings in view of certain limitations. First, while our study provides a preliminary and overarching perspective into the racialized themes present in the experiences of QTBIPOC graduate student researchers, it is essential for us to consider that there is a significantly wide spectrum of racial/ethnic identities that fall under the QTBIPOC umbrella. Consequently, our study fails to provide individual attention to the nuances that may be present for specific racial/ethnic subgroups across the QTBIPOC spectrum. Previous research has begun to outline the distinct set of challenges and experiences endured by Black queer graduate students (Glover, 2017; Means et al., 2017). These unique experiences further emphasize the need for future studies to adopt an exclusive focus on different racial/ethnic identities present within the QTBIPOC community (e.g., Asian queer and/or trans graduate student researchers, Latino/a/e/x queer and/or trans graduate student researchers, etc.).

Second, similarly, our study provides a broader conceptualization of sexual and gender minority identity-based experiences for QTBIPOC graduate student researchers and fails to specifically analyze the differences in the experiences of transgender/gender non-binary BIPOC researchers from those of cisgender, queer BIPOC graduate student researchers. As cited previously, transgender/non-binary graduate students encounter unique gender identity-based stressors that shape their graduate school experience (Goldberg et al., 2019; Knutson et al., 2022). Therefore, future research endeavors may

benefit from specifically studying the experiences of transgender, non-binary BIPOC graduate student researchers.

Third, although our sample consists of participants from a variety of different racial/ethnic minority groups, our sample lacks representation of experiences encountered by Indigenous queer and/or trans graduate student researchers. Indigenous scholars have played a significant role in developing, highlighting, and/or implementing non-traditional, anti-Western research methodologies (Smith, 2012); thereby, future research should examine the experiences, perspectives, and contributions of Indigenous queer and/or trans graduate researchers.

Fourth, our study only included graduate researchers that openly identified as QTBIPOC and conducted research on QTBIPOC experiences; thereby, limiting participation from those that may not be as aware, comfortable, and out about their identities to conduct research on them. Future research may explore experiences of such students to potentially gain a better understanding into intrapersonal, interpersonal, and institutional factors that prevent QTBIPOC scholars from conducting research with their communities.

Finally, the study adopts a qualitative approach to gain an initial, contextual, and rich understanding into the understudied and overlooked experiences of QTBIPOC graduate student researchers. These findings may inspire future research that adopt mixed-methods and/or quantitative approaches to (a) assess the relation between involvement in QTBIPOC research and levels of internalized oppression or identity salience; (b) explore the impact of QTBIPOC research on professional identity development and career satisfaction for QTBIPOC researchers; (c) investigate predictors

of well-being, burnout, and activism for QTBIPOC graduate researchers; and (d) develop and evaluate interventions that provide emotional and structural support, mentorship, and resources to QTBIPOC graduate student researchers.

Implications for QTBIPOC Graduate Student Researchers

Findings from our study have direct implications for the broader community of QTBIPOC graduate student researchers within academia. Consistent with previous literature (Park & Bahia, 2022; Veldhuis, 2022; Wright-Mair, 2023), QTBIPOC graduate student researchers may also feel marginalized, unseen, isolated, and unsupported in the research production process. Consequently, these findings may serve to affirm, validate, and recognize the experiences of QTBIPOC graduate student researchers within academia. Extending beyond affirmation of experiences, QTBIPOC graduate student researchers may choose to utilize these findings to advocate for transformative changes within their training departments and academia.

Relatedly, this study also highlights some of the emotional, psychological, and identity-related impacts of engaging in QTBIPOC research and outlines some ways QTBIPOC graduate student researchers access coping and wellness. These results may inspire other QTBIPOC graduate student researchers to reflect on their well-being, understand the interrelations among their professional and personal identities, engage in self-care practices, and/or access professional mental health services. Further, participants also communicated the importance of community and shared identities in this process. Therefore, our findings may encourage QTBIPOC graduate student researchers to foster relationships, mentorships, and networks with other QTBIPOC scholars.

Implications for Research Advisors and Training Programs

QTBIPOC graduate student researchers in our sample emphasize the importance of inclusion, affirmation, and representation via professional relationships, such as research advisors/mentors. Consequently, research advisors may seek literature and training resources that help them analyze and challenge their biases and assumptions and adopt an identity-centered approach to mentorship for their QTBIPOC advisees. Further, for QTBIPOC graduate student researchers, lived experiences with their identities and communities play a vital role in informing their research. In other words, QTBIPOC advisees may view the personal to be integrated with the professional. As such, research advisors may benefit from developing a personal, emotionally supportive relationship with their QTBIPOC advisees; learning and respecting their cultural backgrounds; and empowering their lived experiences as valid sources of knowledge and research production. Further, results support QTBIPOC graduate student researchers' susceptibility to emotional labor, tokenization, vicarious traumatization, microaggressions, and other forms of interpersonal oppression. As a result, research advisors may wish to share their professional power with their QTBIPOC advisees by validating and affirming such identity-based experiences, advocating for their advisees, facilitating supportive networks and resources, and increasing representation and support for QTBIPOC advisees in their research labs.

Beyond research advisors, training programs and departments also bear responsibility to support and bolster QTBIPOC graduate researchers. Specifically, training programs and departments may provide emotional, equitable, and inclusive support through establishing cultural humility training for staff, faculty, and graduate

students; developing anti-discriminatory policies and procedures within departments; dedicating resources and spaces towards advocacy; and recognizing the value of the research produced by QTBIPOC graduate student researchers. Additionally, challenging and reconceptualizing Western research methodologies was a central theme that emerged through our participants' responses. As such, drawing from previous literature (Settles et al., 2022; Shin et al., 2017; Tung et al., 2023), departments may also work towards facilitating this value by providing structural support to QTBIPOC graduate student researchers. For example, training programs may reform their curricula to center their students' training in intersectional, non-Western, identity-centered, and/or Indigenous research paradigms; provide funding, compensation, and grants to QTBIPOC or other intersectional research projects; recruit and retain QTBIPOC graduate students and faculty members; and increase access to mentorship and collaborations among scholars sharing identities and interests.

Implications for Academic Systems

Finally, through our participants' narratives, it became evident that academic institutions and systems, such as IRB, academic journals/conferences, and national funding organizations, play a salient role in defining the experiences of QTBIPOC graduate student researchers. Extending recommendations outlined in previous literature (Buchanan et al., 2021; Settles et al., 2022), such academic structures may benefit from establishing continuous diversity, equity, and inclusion training; increasing representation of QTBIPOC scholars in review boards and leadership roles; developing opportunities that center intersectional scholarly work (e.g., academic journals that exclusively focus on intersectional research, conferences centering QTBIPOC scholarship, etc.); and

creating standards and procedures to ensure that communication of feedback and decision letters utilizes inclusive, culturally aware, respectful, constructive, and encouraging feedback.

Conclusion

Our qualitative study is one of the first to study the experiences of QTBIPOC graduate student researchers while conducting QTBIPOC research. For QTBIPOC graduate student researchers, their personal identities are intertwined with their research interests, goals, and experiences. Our results highlight ways QTBIPOC graduate student researchers encounter and challenge interpersonal and systemic oppression within academia, endure emotional and psychological impacts on their well-being, understand the fusion of their social identities with their research, and navigate interpersonal and community connections. Findings reflect on policies, practices, and structures that can be reshaped to empower QTBIPOC graduate student researchers and their work within the academy. Through this study, we hope to represent the lived realities of QTBIPOC graduate student researchers and inform systemic change from different academic structures.

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APPENDIX

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Research

1. What are your main research interests and populations of interest?
    a. What drew you to research these specific issues and populations?
    b. Why is this work important to you?
2. Tell me about how you first became involved in conducting research on LGBTQ+ Communities of Color.
3. As an LGBTQ+ Researcher of Color, what does it mean for you to do this work?

Experiences

1. What has your experience been like in conducting research on LGBTQ+ Communities of Color?
2. What are the positive aspects of conducting research on LGBTQ+ Communities of Color?
3. What are the challenging aspects of conducting research on LGBTQ+ Communities of Color?
    a. How do you personally cope with the challenges associated with doing this type of research?
4. Think about the process of conducting research. That is, proposing a research idea, conducting a literature review, recruiting participants, gathering data, analyzing data, writing the manuscript, and publishing. Now, thinking of your own identities as a LGBTQ+ Person of Color, and the type of research you

conduct, what aspects of the research process do you find the most challenging? What aspects of this process do you find the most rewarding?

5. As an LGBTQ+ Researcher of Color, in what ways do you feel that your experiences with research and conducting research are different than those of white LGBTQ+ researchers?
6. As an LGBTQ+ Researcher of Color, in what ways do you feel that your experiences with research and conducting research are different than those of heterosexual cisgender researchers?
7. How has conducting research on LGBTQ+ Communities of Color affected (or not affected):
    a. Your feelings, mental health, and/or psychological well-being?
    b. Your behavior
    c. Your physical health
8. In your experiences working with LGBTQ+ Participants of Color, how would you say these folks experience and feel about the research process?

Identity and Research

1. How has your experiences of conducting research on LGBTQ+ Communities of Color affected your own identities as a researcher and as a LGBTQ+ Person of Color? For example:
    a. Has it affected how you feel about these identities?
    b. Has it affected the salience of these identities?
    c. Has it created conflicts between identities?
    d. How has this changed over time?

2. As an LGBTQ+ Person of Color, how do your identities impact your view of the research process?
3. Has conducting research on LGBTQ+ Communities of Color impacted your own relationship with your identities in positive and/or negative ways? If so, please elaborate.

Community

1. Has doing research affected the way you connect or disconnect with the LGBTQ+ community, your racial/ethnic community, and other LGBTQ+ People of Color? If so, please elaborate.
2. Has conducting this type of research positively or negatively affected your relationships with other people in your life (for example, family, friends, colleagues, etc.)? If so, please elaborate.
3. In what ways do you feel supported for researching QTBIPOC Communities?
4. In what ways do you feel unsupported for researching QTBIPOC Communities?

Recommendations

1. As an LGBTQ+ Researcher of Color, what advice or recommendations do you have for the researchers conducting this research in your field?
2. In what ways would you want to change the way we currently conduct research LGBTQ+ Communities of Color?

Closing Question

1. Is there anything else you would like to share that would help us understand your experiences as an LGBTQ+ Researcher of Color?

VITA

Vardaan Dua was born and raised in New Delhi, India. In 2017, Vardaan moved from New Delhi to Maryland to receive his Bachelor of Science in Psychology from the University of Maryland, College Park. In 2021, Vardaan entered the Counseling Psychology Ph.D. Program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Vardaan is interested in research, clinical work, and advocacy experiences that center the lived realities of multiple minority populations. Most of their work has focused on the experience of BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and/or International/Immigrant individuals.