Blaqueer and Here: Black Queer and Trans Students’ Path to Thriving

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Blaqueer and Here: Black Queer and Trans Students’ Path to Thriving

Marvens R. Pierre

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Throughout my entire life, I have felt there have been times I have either felt invisible, not heard or understood. This study is a dedication and a love letter to all of my Black queer and trans family members around the world that may be lost and still searching for their oasis.
Abstract

In this study, I have investigated the ways in which Black queer and trans students have (or have not) fostered community, lived authentically, and benefitted from support of their identity development. I explored what support (or lack thereof) and identity development that exists within the realm of predominantly White higher educational institutions as well as San Diego community resources at large. This study approach consisted of conducting strategic outreach to universities in San Diego, California, and building community circles to facilitate processes of qualitative narrative analysis. This led to an intentional focus group dialogue space that allowed the participants to put their wishes for Black queer thriving into voice and practice. This study will provide a framework for future coalition building for Black queer and trans populations in the San Diego area. This grants the opportunity to pioneer innovative and strategic collaborative methods to move Black queer and trans students from a state of surviving to thriving.

*Keywords:* Black, queer, thriving, coalition building, community building, identity development, San Diego, California
Blaqueer and Here: Black Queer and Trans Students’ Path to Thriving

Throughout my education journey, I continue to be committed to be aware of my social location and positionality as it relates to the work in which I engage. In the scope of this field, I believe it is important to always attend to this internal work as if neglected, then we will not be able to push ourselves further to be dynamic and effective leaders. Identity salience has always been a constantly changing and evolutionary concept for me. The identities that are most present to me are being Black, queer, and my relation to gender. This fact has not always been the case: Several experiences have influenced me up to this moment.

I have an extensive background in student affairs work, community engagement, student advocacy, and leadership. I think beyond my professional background to what I see myself doing in the future. I look back at myself as an undergraduate student, excited and confused and at times feeling as if I had to put on a mask. I am Black; I am queer. I am many things, but I felt like I could not be my entire self at the same time. When I was in “Black” spaces I could not express my queerness. My queerness was seen as too odd and not Black enough. My sexuality was rejected from the culture because the culture is rooted in heteronormativity; only parts of me were free. I found this odd because Blackness itself is inherently queer, although it is not acknowledged as such within academia and broader society. When I was in queer spaces, these spaces were often too White-dominated to accept my Blackness. My Blackness was seen as a piece of property to take, manipulate, abuse, and colonize for White consumption. My Blackness was seen as secondhand. I want to be an advocate for the future students who will come into college looking for an escape but then find themselves having to hide most of the time that they are there anyway.
I remember participating in and cocreating a pilot community series at the University of Massachusetts Amherst called *At the Intersections of Queer & Black*, sponsored by the Student Bridges Agency and Stonewall Center, right before the infamous coronavirus global crisis had struck the masses. This event was an opportunity for Black queer students to come together and share their distinct experiences and connect with one another. Everyone at the first gathering told stories, but many of the narratives involved wrestling with the two identities of being Black and queer in different spaces that advertised themselves as being inclusive. There was a sense of comfort and hurt that came with realizing that you were not alone, but there was still much internal suffering that was left unhealed. This moment was a defining point that inspired me to want to work towards lessening the struggles of having to negotiate identities.

I would argue that Black queer and trans students often have to negotiate with their identity, not only in nonBlack spaces but also in Black communities. There is also a lack of strategic initiatives for student development and support at higher levels of education administration; intersectionality is often overlooked or misconstrued. This leaves individuals with multiple existing marginalized identities with more difficulty in developing navigational and social capital in a higher education setting. Poet Tianna Bratcher (personal communication, February 15, 2021) during an event called Black LGBTQ+ Poetry in Motion, hosted by the Black Student Union and LGBTQ+ and Allies Commons at the University of San Diego put into plain terms that: “Homophobia and transphobia do not belong to us; they are constructions of white supremacy.” Higher education institutions and community organizations now claim to look for ways to be antiracist and actively work to dismantle white supremacy. However, they must more deeply examine and analyze how they serve marginalized populations. Educational institutions were not made to serve marginalized communities in the first place and community
organizations must remember their missions at the core. Part of that work is incorporating a more intentional intersectional lens into initiatives. In order to stay true to dismantling white supremacist structure then we must make sure we are not leaving Black queer and trans students out of the conversation when we want to advocate for more inclusive practices and policies.

Being previously employed at a predominantly White private Catholic institution was tiring with the identities I hold, but my circumstances were what lit a fire within me. My family was devoutly Christian, but, because of these beliefs, I was shut out because of my queer identity, and I used the university as an escape. I am passionate to serve those students who look for the same escape but still encounter obstacles in a place that was supposed to be their oasis. My calling is what I see in the future and that calling is truly serving those I see myself in. I hope in this work to challenge the norm and to go beyond what is deemed as respectable or acceptable in academia. I yearn for voices and experiences to be given a space and to be amplified to a degree they have not been amplified before. I want the overlooked to be seen and to be deemed as valid. I desire for the work and knowledge I produce to serve as inspiration for practitioners at 4-year institutions as well as community organizers regarding how they approach intersectional work when it comes to intentionality around support for Black queer and trans students. I challenge those who want to engage in true social justice work to consider what support looks like beyond just providing sporadic and inconsistent space for Black queer and trans students. I envision a future in which we work to transform spaces, values, and missions that center and accept multi-existing identities.

In this study, I explored existing Black queer and trans affinity spaces or groups and their structures for building community and support. I examined the ways in which these spaces are and are not supported. This led to me being in community with a collective of Black queer and
trans students in San Diego, California, where in this space we started to foster belonging and support for one another. The problems I have addressed are the lack of access to suitable spaces for Black queer and trans individuals, old ideas and practices that contribute to identity erasure and white supremacy, the impact of ignoring intersectionality when it comes to Black queer and trans individuals. I also engaged in conversations to discover how genuine community can be built among Black queer and trans individuals.

**Background**

Because I address student support, it’s imperative to take into account student developmental theories that have been revisited over the years. I put the Black student development model (Cross & Phagen-Smith, 2001; Cross et al., 2002) in conversation with queer theory in education (Kasch, 2013) to support Black queer and trans students. I focus on using *queer* specifically because of the critical political and historical background the word provides for Black people versus LGBT+ people. In this study, I use queer as a tool of resistance against the Whiteness that has seeped into the language of the LGBTQ+ community. This working definition comes from personal lived experiences and prominent activists in the Black queer and trans community. Queer centers the Black experience as it is inherently queer as aforementioned. Afterwards, I introduce a queered model of Black racial identity development (Johnson & Quaye, 2017) to tie and solidify these concepts together. Because Black and queer exist at an intersection, I would be remiss not to include background regarding holding identities simultaneously. I reintroduce intersectionality as a grounding concept but provide context to help advocates move beyond base use of this theory to use of a *postintersectional* lens. For context, I will include not only an overview of the origins of intersectionality work (Crenshaw, 1989) and its importance (Duran et al., 2019) but also additional scholarship regarding productive
postintersectionality framework (Cho, 2013) and its application within an education context (Coleman et al., 2019). Then, I examine literature and material evidence of practices (Blockett, 2017) that contribute to Black queer and trans individuals thriving (Schreiner, 2010) as a means to suggest creating radical spaces of support (Rodriguez, 1998) that lie outside of the realm of an institution. Then, I will explore the limited scholarship on blaqness/blaqueerness (Wilson, 2020) as a means of further examining the ways in which Black queer individuals exist. I use the literature to unravel a guiding question of how effective and exceptional support can be generated inside of a continuing oppressive system for Black queer and trans students.

**Black Student Development in Conversation With Queer Theory**

In their Black student development model, Cross et al. (2002) revealed that Black identity is composed of generational transfers of learned experiences and identity that facilitate Black adaptation and humanity under conditions often formed by race, racism, and the complex dimensions of Black culture.
Queer theory does not focus on the identity that is queer but rather undergoes an analyzation of criticality as it relates to intersectional identities and provides a framework of resisting oppressive systems influencing sexual orientation and gender (Kasch, 2013). Kasch (2013) suggested a more vigorous use of queer theory to reimagine the model of multiple dimensions of identity derived from critical race theory and intersectionality to offer a perspective on identity and interactions within as ever changing, evolving, and complex. Using queer theory and the logic of Kasch (2013) as a basis, this model can be used in tandem with...
Black student development to gain a more analytical and critical understanding of Black queer and trans student development in higher education. In recent scholarship, Johnson and Quaye (2017) declared the popular Black racial identity development model (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001) is very linear and advocated for the use of queer theory to understand the nuances and fluidity in Black student development rather than just through direct life progressive stages. Johnson and Quaye (2017) went on to establish a queered model of Black racial identity development in higher education, adopting themes from critical race theory, queer theories, and varying racial/intersecting identity models. A queered version of Black student development looks at race performance, socialization, assimilation, adaptation to contextual environments, the process of becoming, and resistance of societal norms (Johnson & Quaye, 2017).

Figure 2

Queered Model of Black Racial Identity Development

Note. From Johnson and Quaye 2017.
Imagining With and Beyond Intersectionality

As previously suggested, intersectionality reflects the multiple dimensions of identity that exist in one’s life. Intersectionality as a concept exposes the ways in which those with multiple marginalized identities are impacted uniquely and distinctly by an assemblage of oppressive systems (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality over the years has been reimagined and reapplied to identities beyond Black women in the legal context. However, there is limited scholarly work done on Black queer students in this manner. The work that has been done tends to depend on a power-neutral perspective diminishing the realities of the impact that oppressive systems have on Black queer and trans individuals in a higher education context (Duran et al., 2019). In order to move beyond a power-neutral lens as an effective base for understanding Black queer students, structural intersectionality and postintersectional thought is required. Through domains of power and matrix thinking, intersectionality reveals that lived experiences, structural systems, marginalization, power, and resistance all interact simultaneously in complex ways (Duran et al., 2019). There have been many conflicts in terms of intersectionality as an effective means to incorporate sexuality and suggestions that critique limits intersectionality application (Cho, 2013). Intersectionality has been critiqued to be heteronormative but work has been done for the application of the concept to transcend heteronormativity (Cho, 2013). However, there is a critique of how intersectionality is not being prioritized in the aspects of higher education as it pertains to Black queer and trans students; thus falling into a path of viewing a group of Black students or queer students through a monolithic view (Coleman et al., 2019). This suggests that scholarship critique of intersectionality in tandem with race and sexuality should be focused more on the application of the concept rather than its effectiveness.
Understanding Blaqness/Blaqueerness

The construction of Blackness as an opposing concept is used in order to legitimize and position whiteness on a spectrum of superiority and power (Guess, 2006) but also to understand the ways in which Black culture and means of existing play a critical role in society. The existence of queerness exists to interrupt heteronormativity and the institutions/channels that continue to give it power as a political force (Kasch, 2013). Black queer community members have created the term “Blaqueer” as an alternative identification (Levounis & Yarbrough, 2020), but Wilson (2020) gave us a preview of what will it mean as a concept and/or theory developed within the academy to better inform how Black queer individuals exist and navigate in the world and the ways they are uniquely impacted by it. Wilson (2020) introduced how Black and Black queer (BlaQueer) people exist both in and outside of law. Similar to Crenshaw (1998), Wilson (2020) used intersectionality as a theoretical framework to shed light that law must be viewed multidimensionally using Black thought, Black queer and feminist theory, critical race theory, and performance theories. All of these intersecting and critical frameworks are used to provide the argument that within law, Black queer people are deemed are furtive, in other words, overlooked and avoided and easily subjects of criminalization in judicial institutions (Wilson, 2020). Thus, using similar logic, Black queer students in higher education, another form of an institution, are also often overlooked and come across as an afterthought when looking to provide concrete support for their development and collegiate experience.

Path to Black Queer and Trans Students Thriving

Thriving as it pertains to college students falls in between the areas of having aspirations, increased engagement in academic environments, commitment to self-reflection and learning,
establishing sustainable and substantial connections and willingness to diversify their communities (Schreiner, 2010). For queer communities of color, more specifically Black queer individuals, Darling-Hammond (2019) found that there were five main dimensions of thriving: Community, Selfhood, Sufficiency, Relief, and Pleasure. These five dimensions that Darling Hammond (2019) discovered had a recurring theme that when Black queer students “were able to show up as their whole selves unapologetically, without bowing to social norms, they enacted the logic of simply being, even though the threat of oppressive retaliation from society at large hovered at the periphery” (p. 424). Blockett (2017) found that sociopolitical circumstances that specifically Black queer and transgender college men are forced to navigate often discourage them from fully engaging with the rest of a heteronormative predominantly white campus. It was suggested that Black queer men are labored into creating alternative spaces to resist social exclusion (Blockett, 2017) and the same could fairly be generalized and applied to all Black queer individuals who exist among the entire gender spectrum. These spaces were found to be created outside the scope of an institutionalized resource and mainly peer-supported (Blockett, 2017). Rodriguez (1998) stated that within education systems, queer students must be viewed beyond just a social category but as a site of politics and critical pedagogy. There must be opportunities for queer students to be able to engage in their own dialogue and understanding of themselves in relation to queerness as a form of radical progress (Rodriguez, 1998). For these opportunities of dialogue and understanding to be effectively in place, these interrelations of queerness must be connected to other subcultures, groups, and identities as queer theory at its core centers intersectional impacts of varying oppressive structures (Kasch, 2013; Rodriguez, 1998). Once critical examinations of how queerness can be linked to other struggles of other social categories is done, then processes of imagining what necessary coalitions need to exist can
commence (Rodriguez, 1998). Darling-Hammond (2019) supports this claim through queer of color epistemologies that reveal dimensions of FUBU (“for us by us”). To further expand on what Darling-Hammond (2019) means by this is that there is a need for “sensibility; application of mutuality, collectivity, and activism as community practices; critical consciousness; and disruptive modes of self-assertion and refusal that promote relief, pleasure, and healing” (p.425). Since critical examinations of how queerness is linked to other struggles rarely happen within education institutions, this brings the question of whether effective support can exist within the realms of an institution but rather as an entity that lies outside of it.

**Context**

Although the background provides a framework for understanding the ways in which Black queer students exist in this world, it is not entirely stable and is surface level in terms of finding the core of what true support looks like for Black queer students. Scholarship has explained that institutions were not made to serve marginalized and oppressed populations especially in the realm of higher education. For years, practitioners have struggled to provide exceptional support for non cis-hetero white students within higher education institutions, and thus we may have to look elsewhere. Black queer students often find themselves struggling developmentally and with the added oppressive powers that exist within higher education, that development will continue to be hindered across the board. I went into the research with many assumptions about what I will find and was honored to be given a wealth of information that brings this scholarship even further. I originally had the focus be on only what higher educational institutions can do but the problem goes beyond that and involves community support as well depending on geographic region. Throughout my findings I had the opportunity to engage in
conversations around support for Black queer students’ sense of belonging and ability to be present authentically.

Project Rationale

My target participants is Black, queer, and trans students attending a predominantly white/nonhistorically Black college or university institution in San Diego County, California (University of San Diego and/or San Diego State University). I initially came up with the idea of forming an intercollegiate collective in October 2020 under my former role at the University of San Diego and introduced it to the San Diego State University Blacq Space student leadership. Blacq Space (2019) is a student-led initiative that “foster[s] community, dialogue and healing for Black lesbians, gays, bisexuals & trans and questioning folxs w/ additional identities in the LGBTQIA+ [community].” The students articulated this has been a need for some time but there is not much support to make it happen. I have measured my participants’ ability to be authentic in varying space and was able to investigate the ways in which community has been (or not been) formed and any preexisting connections to other Black queer and/or trans students in the San Diego area more deeply than I anticipated. Lastly, I measured the level of support given by their current institution. The metrics of support are as follows: spaces for community, commitment to intersectionality/anti identity-erasure, wellness resources, referrals to institutional and/or noninstitutional resources.

I began the process by getting in contact with staff and administrators of the Black resource centers, multicultural centers, and LGBTQ+ resource centers on guidance before starting my official study (and/or distributing a pre-initial interest survey for participants with an incentive). I made myself as vulnerable, accessible and authentic as possible to gain trust and build real relationships with my participants. Figure 3 outlines my relationship building process.
My overarching design relied on qualitative data. This method was most valuable specifically to my study as I was able to gain information through real life narratives. After collection of these narratives through the community circles from the preceding section, I engaged in deeper reflection as well as some additional review of literature to support and understand my findings.
My epistemological stance for this study has been done through a balance of critical theory and constructivism. I used critical theory as a foundational base of learning for the population I am studying about, while making myself, the principal investigator, visible in the process. I leaned on constructivist methods as I was gaining new knowledge of others through their personal narratives and experiences and how it has shaped their realities. My methodology centered real life student experiences and a practice of community learning/coalition building based on logic of Rodriguez (1998) that within education systems queer students must be viewed beyond just a social category but as a site of politics and critical pedagogy.

**Data Collection and Interventions**

First, I conducted a preliminary needs analysis with San Diego area administrators and staff. Then I hosted an initial community-building event as a part of that process through my position at the University of San Diego. From there, I extended invitations to speak with different Black queer and trans students in the San Diego area through a more intentional qualitative data collection process. I created a focus group and collective that created a basis for other organizations to follow for a coalition-building space in the future.

I used a slightly modified version (see Figure 5) of Kolb’s Experiential learning cycle (see Figure 4). Within this cycle included the following: Active Experimentation, Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualisation. Kolb’s Experiential learning cycle defines the different levels of engagement as the following (McLeod 2017):

1. Concrete experience is where a new experience occurs, or a reinterpretation of an existing experience.

2. Reflective observation of the new experience to distinguish if there are any
inconsistencies between experience and understanding.

3. Abstract conceptualization reflection proposes a new idea, or an alteration of an existing abstract concept.

4. Active experimentation is where the learner applies their idea(s) to the world and their environment to observe the outcome.

**Figure 4**

*Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle*

![Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle](image)

*Note. Retrieved from McLeod 2017*

I carried out active experimentation (phase I) by planning my project through an extensive literary analysis, conducting initial preliminary needs assessment with San Diego campus representatives and event planning for the next step. In concrete experience (phase I) is the initial event that exposed students to each other as well as me as a co-participant. Next, I informally did a reflective observation (phase I). From this point, I went back to active experimentation (phase II) where I planned for outreach to select participants for more intimate qualitative data collection.
After I recruited interested participants, I moved back into concrete experience (phase II) as well as reflective observation (phase II) simultaneously (see Figure 3 for community building practices). During this stage I used strategies obtained from a licensed psychologist about trauma informed practices that initiated safe and vulnerable conversations as data collection. After doing qualitative data collection, I did an extension of reflective observation (phase III) and reviewed some literature to further support the qualitative data collected beforehand. Once I gathered all the data, I shared the data with core participants of active experimentation phase II (Black Queer Trans Circles) to begin a process of collective abstract conceptualisation of what is needed to support the Black queer trans community further.

**Pre-Study Anticipated Outcomes and Assumptions**

Assumptions I held before the study is that the narratives and experiences Black queer
students are facing are going to be similar to mine. Because I am connected to this project holding the identities I hold, it was a challenge for me to not impose what I am already coming into the process with. How I challenged these assumptions was by going into the focus group with an open mind and reminding myself that I am co-creating knowledge with my participants. I did not come in with a mindset that I am better informed simply because of my status as a principal investigator. By doing this I was able to build rapport and relationships more organically.

I frequently checked in with my colleagues and personal community to hold me accountable and discussed any challenges I was facing so I was not doing this completely on my own. My anticipated outcome of the experience is that it will plant a seed for future coalition building between Black queer and trans students in the San Diego area. I initially anticipated the study would start off small with the relation building through programming and then afterward it would be used as a template and guide for how to envision concrete support for Black queer and trans students to contribute to their thriving.

**Timeline**

The timeline of this study predates this paper to November 2020, which in part contributed to the Project Rationale. An initial needs assessment was determined when I connected with San Diego State University’s Blacq Space student leadership about my vision of connecting Black queer and trans students in the San Diego area. Between then and April 2021 was a period of expanding my network and colleague relations in the San Diego area and developing more of the idea of what this project process and proposal will look like. I conducted another needs assessment in the same month by attending the San Diego area LGBT+ Community Days zoom conference to better familiarize myself with the existing
resources in the area.

Up until June 2021, I have done outreach to campus representatives at the four institutions using my status as a Graduate Assistant working in Student Affairs at the University of San Diego. I also used this time to apply for funding to use for incentives for my focus group participants. While I waited for IRB approval, I edited existing program development material to tailor to my study that I first began during my first months working in the Black Student Resource Commons. Along with this, I created a marketing plan and reached out to various San Diego campus stakeholders about my initial community-building event.

In November 2021, I hosted a mixer social event for all Black queer and trans students in the San Diego area. From the participants of that event, I extended an informal invitation to participate in Black Queer Trans (BQT) circles. After collecting this data, I reconnected with participants of BQT circles in March 2022 about future envisioning of the space and discussed future ideas of coalition building or other forms of sustainable support. April-May 2022 was dedicated to data analysis. My hopes for the future is that the group will continue to meet, build relationships, and imagine collective support for the Black queer and trans community here in San Diego, California beyond the study.

**Results and Findings**

The study yielded lots of rich information and data that I was able to work with. The original timeline of the study had to be extended approximately 3-4 more months than anticipated due to a delayed IRB process and extended recruitment period for my participants. This modification to my timeline did not have any large hindrance on the analysis of my data. All of the following data occurred during a focus group that was held in March 2022 in the Black
Student Resource Commons at the University of San Diego. The space was reserved and closed off for only study participants for the entirety of the focus group. The focus group consisted of five participants (with one withdrawing prior to the process) with each member contributing a different amount of vocal air time to the space. A pre-study survey of their demographic information was distributed for them to complete in order to consider for the analysis of the data. Each participant was given the opportunity to select their own pseudonym to protect their identity.

The group was made up of a variety of different students that varied in age (see Table A). Most of the participants were in their 20’s (with the exception of one participant) falling within either the Generation Z or Millenial category.

**Table A**

*Participant Information & Age*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. JT</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameron West</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasha Martin</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eve</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dashaun</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant X</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Created by author

The original focus of the study was going to be tailored towards only undergraduate students but was then later decided to expand to all types of students prior to IRB submission. This allowed me to recruit more participants. I found that more graduate students felt called to participate versus undergraduate students (see Table B). This may be directly related to where
students may be on their identity development journey as in the original Black Racial Identity Development model suggests that these developmental stages come with time, age in tandem with ongoing occurrences and experiences an individual may encounter. This could also be the explanation as to why “Participant X” withdrew from the focus group portion of the study.

**Figure 6**

*Participant Student Status*

Note: Generated information from survey results

Although the study called specifically for Black queer and/or trans individuals it’s important to note how the participants noted their race/ethnicity. Each participant either identified as Black, African-American, or Black alongside a specified ethnicity. This goes to show how even within the Black community when it came time to identify under a race there are still nuances at play in terms of language or someone’s personal background/connection to race and ethnicity.
Table B

*Participant Race/Ethnicity Makeup*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black &amp; Haitian-American</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, Ethiopian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Generated information from survey results

Having this be a study grounded in queer theory, gender is also at play here. The study had a diverse makeup of how people identified themselves in terms of gender. There seems to be a balance of individuals who identify as a man or a woman along with those who see themselves as more gender fluid/gender expansive. What is notable in this data is that only one person selected cisgender even though six people took this presurvey. This data suggests that there may be more gender fluidity or questioning of gender within the group than what the data explicitly tells us. Nobody had selected transgender or nonbinary even though this was proven to be false as some individuals touched on the possibility of this being true during the focus group.
What was really interesting to see that when it came time for asking about sexual identity the majority of the group had identified with the more umbrella term “queer” rather than another identifier on the LGBTQ+ spectrum. This goes to show that sexual identity is very fluid especially when speaking to the sexual identity of Black queer and trans individuals. The students from this study seemed to find that this was a way to embrace the fluidity that came alive during some of the conversations in the focus group that occurred.

Table D

Participant Sexual Identity/Orientation Makeup

Note: Generated information from survey results
Notable Themes

When breaking down the focus group notes were done in five distinct categories. The categories being: What participants need, What people did in the space, What was noticed, What were named obstacles, and what were named values. I also took notes based on the metrics I had stated in my project rationale: spaces for community, commitment to intersectionality/anti identity-erasure, wellness resources, referrals to institutional and/or noninstitutional resources.

Starting with the needs of the participants, this spanned across lots of different categories. Participants expressed a lot of specifics but when you take what was said it came down to two sub categories of what people need for themselves and what people need from others. For themselves participants expressed need for romance & pleasure, having wealth of safety and social connections and having their own connections and relationship with spirituality.

“Wealth and healing. Not financial wealth, but social wealth, friendship wealth, and safety wealth and an abundance of safety in different spaces that I'm in because I don't necessarily feel like I feel an abundance of safety and support. For healing not only hours of therapy but being able to personally heal my injured inner child if that makes sense. Because I feel like that's never going to heal though if I take the time to make that happen personally” - Dr. JT, personal communications, March 2022

The essence of what JT is saying here follows a recurring theme throughout the focus group conversation: the dual need for genuine community and safety. As a queer, Black person its difficult to have access to safety and community. When given opportunities to build community in a safe way, then a process of envisioning a thriving future can occur.
With these needs the individual will be able to have the opportunity to develop their own sense of selfhood which was a requirement of thriving as defined by Darling-Hammond (2019).

**Figure 7**

*Requirements of Self vs External*

Note: Created by author

From others, it was identified that participants seek affirmation, solidarity and sustainable support networks. Affirmation was a big thing among the group as participants spoke to not being able to have a lot of that validation growing up. Eve spoke about their relationship with their father and how affirmation was really important to them and it translates to other parts of their life. This is really important when it comes to solidarity when initiative is taken by non queer Black folks to offer support without them having to be told to do so.
“I felt really appreciated and really validated when [my father] goes back, and apologizes for past and current traumas. And he, like, brings it up himself. It's like, I'm not directing the conversation. He'll just call me one day and randomly say, I'm sorry, or is this how you feel, or just how it happened? I think that that, for me, really makes me feel very appreciated in that identity” - Eve, personal communications, March 2022

What was happening for Eve in this moment were expressions of gratitude for how much affirmations were valuable to her in feeling solidified in her identity. This worked hand in hand for a need of having an opportunity for healing her inner child especially since these specific moments had to do with past traumas.

One unexpected finding that came from the group was that a very big thing that was needed was time. This meant time to figure yourself out, time to find community, time to heal. Time seemed to be a concept that the participants didn’t have a grasp of because of all the many things they have to juggle on a daily basis for survival.

“…I've been dividing or compartmentalizing everything…one of the things that I challenged myself to do is bring it all together…queer, romantic stuff was at the bottom, because, I mean, it just takes a lot of time that I don't have. So for me to imagine, being black and queer all day long [and] everybody being fine with it, and it's just a natural thing…I can't conceptualize that.” - Cameron West, personal communications, March 2022

Cameron shared during the focus group that he was constantly on the move and trying to figure out what was next for him. It appears that Cameron, due to his unique experience, has to prioritize things in his life that may not necessarily give him relief or pleasure, which is a defined category of thriving by Dr. Darling-Hammond. From this, it can be concluded that Cameron is
searching for a way for all of his identities to co-exist and blend together as one without it feeling like a burden.

From the conversations that happened I was able to discover what people valued the most and some obstacles to thriving. Some people’s values were community, being validated in academia, when “allies” take initiative, and non performative gestures. When these are at play this feeds directly into the requirements of external support that were expressed multiple times throughout the focus group. However, obstacles come up that can interfere with this. Class disparities are one of them which has a direct connection to the San Diego area. Within education spaces, white supremacist thought has a direct negative implication of Black queer students being able to thrive and feel like their values are being met. When values aren’t being met then there is a need for healing however limited access to wellness resources within the institution and outside of it poses a challenge to that. On top of that gender dysphoria was also mentioned as there isn’t enough space to explore gender fluidity and identity within spaces that prioritize cis-gendered norms. Finally, there was also an expression of tensions with the hypocrisy of Christianity and how this had a negative impact on the participants’ connection to spirituality.

Lastly there is the observation and analysis of what participants did in the space and what I noticed as a researcher. On questions that asked the participants to reflect on positives it was somehow changed to think about the negatives which is an indication of how queer Black people aren’t given much opportunity to reflect on the what could be and imagine a future of possibility. When discussing authenticity every single participant had their own definition. They spoke to where they had to adapt in different environments for survival which meant they had to sacrifice their authenticity. This is a direct indicator people were able to express their own authenticity within the group and not have to do any cultural assimilation. It’s also important to note in the
midst of all of this is that every single participant is originally not from San Diego. Every participant indicated that being in San Diego and its environment has done a lot of harm to their own identity development and exploration as a Black queer person and wonder about geographically relocating.

“I just felt like, there's been so many times in my life where I had to question my own authenticity, and I feel like it's still like developing to this day…when I revealed I'm queer it's like, oh, no, we can't have that here (hometown). Even to this day, like, you know, being in San Diego, it's kind of like how I show up here. And like, at this, school, or just in the city is like way different than how I was showing up on the east coast. So it's kind of like, yeah, I still have a big question mark of like, what is authentic? For me, in the context of San Diego as a black queer person” - Dashaun, personal communications, March, 2022

Authenticity and location cross at an intersection here for Dashaun. It is hard for Dashaun to define authenticity as Dashaun expressed that he shows up differently in each space. What would be beneficial for Dashaun is the opportunity for him to explore more of his identities no matter where he is while having the safety and access to do so.

In a beautiful final analysis is what participants actively did in the space. The theme of the research was how do we get Black queer and trans individuals to a state of thriving. What the participants expressed what they needed to get there mirrored what happened within the focus group. There were lots of laughter breaks, affirmation of one another, respectfully challenging each other, celebrations of one another and the willingness to want to connect with others they don’t know. After the official study was done there was a desire to still connect afterward
because that is how much people were yearning for community and to be able to connect with others they share commonalities with.

**Limitations**

One major limitation to the study is that the exact script was not followed. The general premise of the questions were asked but in a way that continued the natural flow of the focus group. As the researcher, it was deemed more acceptable to let the focus group run its natural course as it was supposed to be a reflection of what thriving could be. This limitation could also be seen as a strength for the study as this method allowed for more rich and authentic data to be revealed.

Another limitation of the study is that it was composed of a small intimate group that had met only once. During the focus group that was used for this study, the participants wanted to stay for longer and converse more. This would have most likely led to deeper and more rich conversations. Due to the nature of the timeline and the study, this didn’t allow for any more cycles to be added to the research design. The goal and hope of the study is to be able to create more of those spaces to be accessible for Black queer and trans individuals to pratice thriving, freedom and authenticity with one another.

One last limitation to the study is that there could have been more of a balance of the age range/student status. I believe because of this it could have had a huge impact on how the data is presented especially since individuals may be at different stages in their identity development. However, because of this it allowed more dynamic conversations to occur and participants were able to learn from each other’s experiences which in return should have a positive impact on their own individual identity development.
Recommendations

One major recommendation for higher education professionals specifically is to have more programming for Black queer individuals that are student led. The student-led piece is important as it may be easier to establish trust and be comfortable with a peer versus someone in a formal authority. This was well received when the informal mixer happened and when I led the focus group and included myself within the study rather than as an observer or an isolated facilitator. In order for higher education professionals to pull this off, being able to build up student leadership that are able to create these groups are key. This isn’t to say to put all the labor on to students but rather give them ample opportunities and guidance in doing so. This plays into the solidarity aspect especially if you are not a member of this community. This all goes with building relationships, if you’re able to establish the connections and show your authentic self then they will too.

For community organizations, it is important to note how the dynamic of your organization is and how it is being received by the public. Your organization makeup should closely mirror the population you are serving and in this case, Black queer trans people. In addition to that, you must be willing to be open and accepting of new members. It is easy once someone finds a community they want to keep this community close knit. In order for people to get to a state of thriving, a genuine community needs to be formed and this includes being welcoming to new members. This should be followed up with messages, social media outreach, community events that have intentional community building activities in them. Community organization events should encourage people to step outside of their comfort zones that don’t jeopardize their safety.
“I want my life to be a **reflection of my values**. And I want, you know, and so for me, that looks like having a life where not only am I, you know, professionally satisfied, but there's a balance of ease, you know, where I'm in integrity with, you know, creating **sustainability for black people**, but I'm also creating it for myself to enjoy, you know, and where **I have relationships** in, in my life that yeah, are **well connected**, but also are **fulfilling** to me.” - Tasha Martin, personal communications, March 2022

Having shared values and building sustainable relationships is what is key here. What often can happen is that there may be opportunities available but they are not sustainable. There needs to be systems in place for people who share similar identities and can build with one another on their values in order to keep relationship building opportunities alive. This doesn’t take one person or group but rather a whole community to come together to make this possible.

For both education professionals and community advocates, a big thing to keep in mind for Black queer thriving is making sure you are having wellness resources readily available or atleast knowledgeable about which resources to take up on. Wellness and building on spirituality is a big theme that emerged within this study. Black queer and trans individuals are a very vulnerable population and it must be taken seriously when it comes to wellness and engaging in spiritual practices.

**Conclusion**

This study was a much needed study and it is safe to say that it is not complete. Like the participants indicated there is a need for more time. More time to think, brainstorm, organize, build with each other on how to imagine a better future to freedom for Black queer individuals. We can take away that in order to imagine a better future, we must be willing to put in the work to support one another in our identity development. It doesn’t take one person but all of us to
co-liberate with each other. “When we live in a world where dehumanization is normalized, we are all at risk” (Alva, 2021).’ We shouldn’t be left to resort to survival but rather thriving. Thriving must come naturally and having the ability to “cultivate genuineness in day to day things” (Tasha Martin, personal communications, March 2022). My hope for the future is more movement on making secure thriving communities of Black queer trans individuals sustainable.
References

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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT EMAIL EXAMPLE

Dear Student,

I am beyond excited for your interest in participating in this study. In this letter I will include the following:

- A little bit about myself
- The nature of the study
- Logistics and next steps

Please don’t hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns. I look forward to potentially working with you!

About Me

I am an unapologetic gender-fluid Black queer graduate student in the Higher Education Leadership program at the University of San Diego. I also work in the Black Student Resource Commons as the Graduate Assistant and co-run the space with the director. I hold a strong interest in advocating for equity in educational settings and success for underrepresented populations. In the past I've studied topics of structural inequality in the economy, work relations, Western and non-Western contrasts, intersecting systems of oppression, politics, and theories of social change. I am originally from Boston, Massachusetts and moved to San Diego in the summer of 2020 during the peak of the COVID 19 pandemic (talk about timing).

I’ve held leadership positions that focused on student recruitment/retention, community building, academic success, student wellness and civic/community engagement. I have also played a pivotal role in student activism and organizing my past circles. I like to listen to music and grab on to any opportunity that allows me to laugh and smile. I enjoy being around my chosen family and intentionally surrounding myself with company that serves me and my spirit. I imagine a world where all Black queer and trans folks are able to live in bliss and be carefree without the weight of the struggles that may come our way. I see a future where we are able to be at a place where our minds, bodies and spirits are not only at ease but liberated.

Nature of the Study

I will be inviting a group of students attending either the University of San Diego or San Diego State University who identify as Black and within the LGBTQIA2S+ spectrum to a what I will call “Black Queer Trans Circles” or BQT Circle for short. In these spaces I hope for us to dialogue, laugh, dream and build with one another as we start to think about what it means to thrive as a Black queer and or trans student in this world. I intend for this group to be small and have no more than 10 participants. This will be composed of 5 minutes of completing a pre-survey, 60 minutes of community building, 60 minutes for the focus groups. The total time commitment will be no more than 125 minutes. Food will be provided and you will be compensated with a $15 gift card for your time if selected to participate. You will receive
this compensation even if you decide not to complete the entire focus group. This will physically take place on the University of San Diego campus.

**Statement of Transparency**
In full transparency, I am fully aware of the realities of convening an event focused on Thriving for the Black Queer community on this campus predominantly white, private and Catholic). As a Black queer person myself, I acknowledge any hesitation to engaging in this process given the external environment. However, I see this as an opportunity for our community to come together to reverse the idea that we are not meant to experience Thriving. Rather, our collective work will make room for us to reclaim and co-design a definition of Thriving. This definition will be based upon our community’s resilience, power and joy as we envision a future of us being free.

**Logistics & Next Steps**
The deadline to sign up and participate in the study is **February 15, 2022**. If this is something you would like to participate in please complete the attached consent form and email it back to me. While you are doing that please fill out this pre-survey that will take about 5 minutes to complete. After this deadline the following will take place.

1. I will review the pre-survey forms and reach out to each person who submitted with either  
   a. an acceptance into the study  
   b. an invitation to collaborate with me in other capacities outside the study
2. For folks who are accepted into the study, I will reach out to you with further information about when the study will take place.

Much gratitude to all of you who took the time to read through this and consider participating in this study. I can wait to build community and futures with you all.

In Solidarity,

Marvens Pierre  
MA Higher Education Leadership Candidate  
School of Leadership and Education Sciences  
mpierre@sandiego.edu
COME BE A PART OF ENVISIONING A FUTURE OF THRIVING WITH OTHER BLACK QUEER & TRANS COLLEGE STUDENTS IN SAN DIEGO!

BLACK QUEER & TRANS CIRCLES

Interested in participating? Contact Marvens Pierre at mpierre@sandiego.edu

Must Be:
- A student at USD or SDSU
- Identify as Black and LGBTQIA2S+

Nature of Study: Complete an online pre-survey, participate in community building and an audio recorded focus group. Compensation includes a $15 gift card
Black Queer & Trans Circles Interest Form

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your interest in participating in this experience. I am so excited to get to potentially work with you. Please fill out this interest form to the best of your ability. If selected to participate in the study, I will contact you with further instructions. All information submitted to the form will be kept confidential and will be deleted upon completion of the study. Please read this recruitment letter in its entirety before submitting this form: 
https://docs.google.com/document/d/11DLFa75FpqFP0DwYTDLdUL7UEV0NhA9_ntHdVfTptUl0/edit?usp=sharing

If you have any questions or concerns about the form, please feel free to contact Marvens Pierre at mpierre@sandiego.edu

**Full Name**  
*Please enter the full name you identify with.*

________________________________________________

**Pronouns**

________________________________________________

**Email**  
*Please enter a valid email address.*

________________________________________________

**Age**

________________________________________________

**Current undergraduate student status**  
*Mark only one oval.*

- 1st year
- 2nd year
- 3rd year
- 4th year
- 5th year
- Continuing
How would you describe your race and/or ethnicity?
________________________________________________

How would you describe your gender identity? (Select all that apply)

- woman
- man
- transgender
- nonbinary/gender nonconforming
- genderfluid/gender expansive
- cisgender
- agender
- other:____________________

How would you describe your sexual identity/sexual orientation?

*Check all that apply.*

- lesbian
- gay
- bisexual
- asexual
- pansexual
- queer
- Other:

What are your hopes, dreams, fears, etc for participating in this study? Please feel free to let me know as much as you want!

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX D: STUDY ACCEPTANCE LETTER EXAMPLE

Dear Student,

You have been selected to participate in my study titled “Blaqueer & Here: Black Queer & Trans Students Path to Thriving!” I am beyond excited to get to participate in this work with you. We are one step closer to imagining a future where our Black queer and trans community of students can move towards thriving. I am looking forward to building and connecting with you.

Below I have included some next steps towards moving forward.

Logistics & Next Steps
1. Please email me back at your earliest convenience, confirming that you would like to continue with the study. If you have decided to not move forward please feel free to indicate that as well.
2. Please fill out this doodle poll of when you are available to participate in this study. Once everyone has answered, I will send out the details of when we are meeting.
3. I ask that you please fill out the attached consent form to this email prior to attending the focus group once that has been scheduled. Once you are done signing, feel free to send it back to me. If you have trouble with the form please feel free to let me know.

Much gratitude to you in your interest to participate in this study. I can’t wait to build community and a future towards thriving with you.

In Solidarity,

Marvens Pierre
MA Higher Education Leadership Candidate
School of Leadership and Education Sciences
619-260-4600 x. 4173
mpierre@sandiego.edu
Dear Student,

Thank you for your interest in participating in my study titled “Blaqueer & Here: Black Queer & Trans Students Path to Thriving.” Unfortunately, at this time I am unable to accept you into this study due to [insert reason here]. With that being said I offer myself in the following ways as I still would love to leave room for collaboration.

1. Please feel free to utilize me as a resource through my position as a Graduate Assistant of the Black Student Resource Commons at the University of San Diego and set up a meeting any time to talk about anything you’d like.
2. You are more than welcome to attend any future events centered around Black queer and trans students that come out of my department

Even though I cannot formally accept you into this study, I still would like to continue building community with you and be a resource to you throughout your college journey. Much gratitude to you in your interest to participate in this study. Hope to hear from you soon.

In Solidarity,

Marvens Pierre
MA Higher Education Leadership Candidate
School of Leadership and Education Sciences
619-260-4600 x. 4173
mpierre@sandiego.edu
University of San Diego  
Institutional Review Board  
Research Participant Consent Form

For the research study entitled:  
Blaqueer & Here: Black Queer & Trans Students’ Path to Thriving

I. Purpose of the research study
Marvens Pierre is a graduate student in the School of Leadership and Education Sciences at the University of San Diego. You are invited to participate in a research study they are conducting. The purpose of this research study is to study the ways in which Black queer and trans students have (or have not) fostered community, lived authentically, and benefitted from support of their identity development.

II. What you will be asked to do
If you decide to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Accept an invitation to participate in a focus group called Black Queer/Trans Circles
- Build community with other Black queer and trans students in San Diego
- Engage in dialogue and answer questions about what it will look like to thrive as a Black queer trans student
- You may be audio recorded during this focus group

Your participation in this study will take a total of 120 minutes.

III. Foreseeable risks or discomforts
Sometimes when people are asked to think about their feelings, they feel sad or anxious. If you would like to talk to someone about your feelings at any time, you can call toll-free, 24 hours a day:

San Diego Mental Health Hotline at 1-800-479-3339

Below are additional resources you can take advantage of

University of San Diego Counseling Center Counselor on Call at 1-619-260-4655
San Diego State University Counseling & Psychological Services at 1-619-594-5220

San Diego Access and Crisis Line at 1-888-724-7240

TrevorLifeline available 24/7 at 1-866-488-7386

Gay and Lesbian National Hotline at 1-888-843-4564

IV. Benefits
While there may be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, the indirect benefit of participating will be knowing that you helped researchers better understand the ways in which Black queer and trans students can be better supported in predominantly white institutions and build pathways towards thriving.

V. Confidentiality
Any information provided and/or identifying records will remain confidential and kept in a locked file and/or password-protected computer file in the researcher’s office for a minimum of five years. All data collected from you will be coded with a number or pseudonym (fake name). Your real name will not be used. The results of this research project may be made public and information quoted in professional journals and meetings, but information from this study will only be reported as a group, and not individually.

The information or materials you provide will be cleansed of all identifiers (like your name) and may be used in future research.

VI. Compensation
If you participate in the study, the researcher will give you a $20 e-gift card reward in the following way: through email.

You will receive this compensation even if you decide not to complete the entire focus group

VII. Voluntary Nature of this Research
Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You do not have to do this, and you can refuse to answer any question or quit at any time. Deciding not to participate or not answering any of the questions will have no effect on any benefits you’re entitled to, like your health care, or your employment or grades. You can withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

VIII. Contact Information
If you have any questions about this research, you may contact either:

1) Marvens Pierre
   Email: mpierre@sandiego.edu
   Phone: 1-619-260-4600 ex. 4173

2) Kecia Brown
Audio Recording: Additional Consent
An audio recording will be made of the focus group during your participation in this study. The audio recordings will only be used for data collection purposes and transcript analysis. Records will not be shared and will be deleted upon completion of the project. In addition to consenting to participate in the research study, you may choose to sign or NOT sign the statement below. I hereby give permission to the audio recording for this research study to be used only for data collection purposes. I understand that this audio recording will not be publicly released or shared and will be deleted upon completion of the project.

I have read and understand this form, and consent to the research it describes to me. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.

________________________________________
Signature of Participant
Date

________________________________________
Name of Participant (Printed)

________________________________________
Signature of Investigator
Date
September 27, 2021

Dear Dr. Kia Darling-Hammond:

My name is Marvens Pierre and I am earning a Master of Arts degree in Higher Education from the School of Leadership and Education Sciences at the University of San Diego. I am currently working on my capstone Action Research project in partial fulfillment of my degree requirement. As I was reviewing the literature, I learned about your Interview Guide instrument in Appendix D of your dissertation titled “To Simply Be: Thriving as a Black Queer/Same-Gender-Loving Adult.” This instrument is aligned with my research and I would like to request your permission to use it for my study.

My research titled “Blaqueer and Here: Black Queer and Trans Students’ Path to Thriving” examines the ways in which Black queer and trans students have (or have not) fostered community, lived authentically, and benefitted from support of their identity development. I will seek to explore support (or lack thereof) and identity development that exists within the realm of predominantly White higher educational institutions. I am excited about this deeply personal work given my experience as a Black queer individual myself and my passion for higher education.

I am requesting your permission to incorporate partial use of Appendix D: Interview Guides for my methodology process. If you will allow me to use your instrument, I will cite your work and name according to APA 7 standards and, if you would like, share my findings with you.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,
Marvens Pierre
MA Higher Education Leadership Candidate
School of Leadership and Education Sciences
619-260-4600 x. 4173
mpierre@sandiego.edu
APPENDIX H: INFORMAL PERMISSION NOTICE

This is a note to indicate that informal verbal permission was given by the author of the original instrument that was used to design the instrument for this study on June 17, 2021 via Zoom between 2:00 PM and 3:00 PM PT. Attached below is the email chain with the author providing me access to their instrument that was a part of their dissertation.

---

Marvens Pierre <mpierre@sandiego.edu>

---

QTPOC Definitions of Thriving Work

Kia Darling-Hammond <darlinghammond@gmail.com>

Mon, Jun 7, 2021 at 1:55 AM

To: Marvens Pierre <mpierre@sandiego.edu>

Dear Marvens,

I would love to be in conversation with you! Here is my updated thriving framework a few different ways, in case it's helpful: you can see a 5-minute video about it [here](#), listen to a podcast about it [here](#), and read a bit about it [here](#). I can also share the 2018 dissertation, if you'd like. I'm pretty booked up this week, but next week, I have Thursday wide open from 10:00-3:00 Pacific Time. What do you think?

Best,
Kia

[Quoted text hidden]

--

kia darling-hammond

she / her
Founder & CEO
@DrKiaDH
@KiaDarling

This email was written and sent from Muwekma-Ohlone Land.
Please consider supporting Sogorea Te' Land Trust, the first Indigenous women-led, urban land trust.

---

Marvens Pierre <mpierre@sandiego.edu>

Mon, Jun 7, 2021 at 9:19 AM

To: Kia Darling-Hammond <darlinghammond@gmail.com>

Bcc: Kecia Brown <keciabrown@sandiego.edu>
Hello Again!

I am very excited to be in conversation with you! Next Thursday would be perfect as I am booked up this week myself. How does 2 PM Pacific Time sound? I'll make sure to make time to review the content you sent me and I would love to take a peek at the 2018 dissertation as well!

Grateful for your response! Looking forward to connecting.

Best,
Marvens

---

**Marvens R. Pierre**  
University of San Diego  
mpierre@sandiego.edu  
Higher Education Leadership, M.A. Candidate  
Graduate Assistant, Black Student Resource Commons  
[www.sandiego.edu/bsrc](http://www.sandiego.edu/bsrc/instagram/twitter/facebook)

**Schedule a Meeting With Me!**  
Safe Space Ally  
Pronouns: He/Him/His or They/Them/Theirs

---

**Kia Darling-Hammond**<darlinghammond@gmail.com>  
Tue, Jun 8, 2021 at 2:52 PM  
To: Marvens Pierre <mpierre@sandiego.edu>

Hi Marvens,
I've attached my dissertation and sent a [calendar invitation](#). Looking forward to connecting!
- Kia

Consider supporting the Indigenous women-led [Sogorea Te' Land Trust](#).

---

KD DarlingHammond_To Simply Be_082018-augmented.pdf  
3262K
APPENDIX I: INSTRUMENT/FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

Focus Group Guide & Script

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pseudonym</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Location:
Date:
Time:

How are you all doing today?

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The plan is to briefly review the consent form, then move on to the focus group itself.

Before we begin, I’m going to invite us to create some community guidelines and ask the group some questions, but is there anything you would like to know about me, my background, or my work?

As you read in the consent document, I am hoping to use these interviews to begin understanding how today’s Black queer students establish their own definitions of thriving and how that is applied in predominantly white institutions (or outside of it).

(Review consent terms here and share crisis numbers here and check for nearby support people.)

As we engage in this discussion, please let me know if you need to pause or step out for any reason. We may be participating for as long as an hour and a half, maybe even longer. It’s very important that you feel comfortable during this group.
This is a reminder that this group is completely voluntary. You can choose not to answer any question that I ask or can decide to return to one later if you want to. This focus group is about your voice and your needs as a collective. Feel free to stop me at any time.

---

*My first round of questions asks you to share how you discuss your identity salience and value. Are you ready to begin?*

1. First I’d like everyone to introduce themselves with their name, pronouns, and how they are feeling in this current moment. Your real names will be changed to pseudonyms and your identity will not be revealed beyond this group.
2. At this time, what are some community guidelines you would like to put in place? Community guidelines are important to ensure that every person is heard, respected, and is able to participate in a safe manner.

*At this time create guidelines with the group*

We will continue with the questions.

1. What are some aspects of who you are that seem most important to you? Feel free to include either personal and/or social identities.
2. When have been some times where your salient identities have been most valued and appreciated? How did you feel?

*These next questions are about your passions and joys*

1. Do you have anything in your life you would consider your passion(s)/something you care deeply about? How does this “thing” make you feel?
2. Who or What gives you inspiration? Why?
3. Who or what gives you joy? Why
4. **Optional**: Under what circumstances do you feel peaceful or safe? [this could include emotionally, physically, spiritually, and intellectually]

*These next questions are about your authenticity and self-actualization*

1. When or where are you able to feel your most authentic self? Do you feel like you’re able to be authentic in this space?
2. How would you define freedom? How do you get there? What’s preventing you from getting there?
3. Where do you feel that more is needed in order for you to be whole / fully realized / self-actualizing?
4. What strategies do you implement in order to be better than okay? What resources do you have?

**These next questions are about your perceptions and experiences.**

1. What do you think it takes for a person to thrive? Is there someone in your life that you think is really thriving?
2. What does it take for you to thrive?
3. Can you tell me about a time in your life when you were experiencing the opposite of thriving?

**These next questions are about envisioning your future**

1. Imagine you could design your own personal utopia right now. If there were no limitations, what would it be like? (Utopia: an imaginary community or society that possesses highly desirable or nearly perfect qualities for its citizens)
2. How do you imagine your future self? Where are you? Are you in your utopia? Why or why not?

As we close this focus group, I want to say I am so grateful to have learned about you all and your experiences. I hope this is the start of being able to build something transformative together so that Black queer and trans students can arrive at a place of constant thriving. Before we close, I would appreciate your feedback about this process.

- How do you feel now that the focus group is done?
- Was reflecting on these questions helpful in any way? Why or why not?
- Any additional feedback?

At this time we are going to do a collective breath exercise. If you are able I ask you to place your right hand over your heart and repeat after me

*I am worthy.*
*I am whole.*
*I am enough.*
*I can thrive*
*I will thrive.*
Now at this time with your hand still on your chest, we are going to do a collective inhale. Now exhale.

Thank you everyone for participating. Much gratitude to you all.
APPENDIX J: MEMORANDUM OF LANGUAGE USE

This is a memo to explain that the letter sent to scholar Dr. Kia Darling-Hammond in Appendix G asking for permission to use elements of their instrument from their study uses language referring to this study as “research” predates the notice from the Institutional Review Board about the use of research in “Non-Human Subject Research.” For Appendix F: Study Participant Consent Form, this is the form template that was provided by the Institutional Review Board so the language of “research” was kept the same.
APPENDIX K: SITE PERMISSION LETTER

October 20, 2021

Dear Marvens Pierre:

In my capacity as the Director of the Black Student Resource Commons at the University of San Diego, I fully support the research project titled “Black Queer & Here: Black Queer and Trans Students Path to Thriving.” I am prepared to support your research endeavors, which includes giving permission to recruit participants and outreach through the Black Student Resource Commons. I am also granting you permission to conduct your focus group sessions in our space which is located in the Student Life Pavilion building room 410.

I understand that this research will be carried out following sound ethical principles and that participant involvement in this research study is strictly voluntary and provides confidentiality of research data, as described in the consent forms.

Sincerely,

Ashley Barton
Director, Black Student Resource Commons
acbarton@sandiego.edu
www.sandiego.edu/bsrc