

Mending The Divide: Exploring the impact of Belongingness, on LGBTQ+ Students Well-Being, and Student Engagement at HBCUs

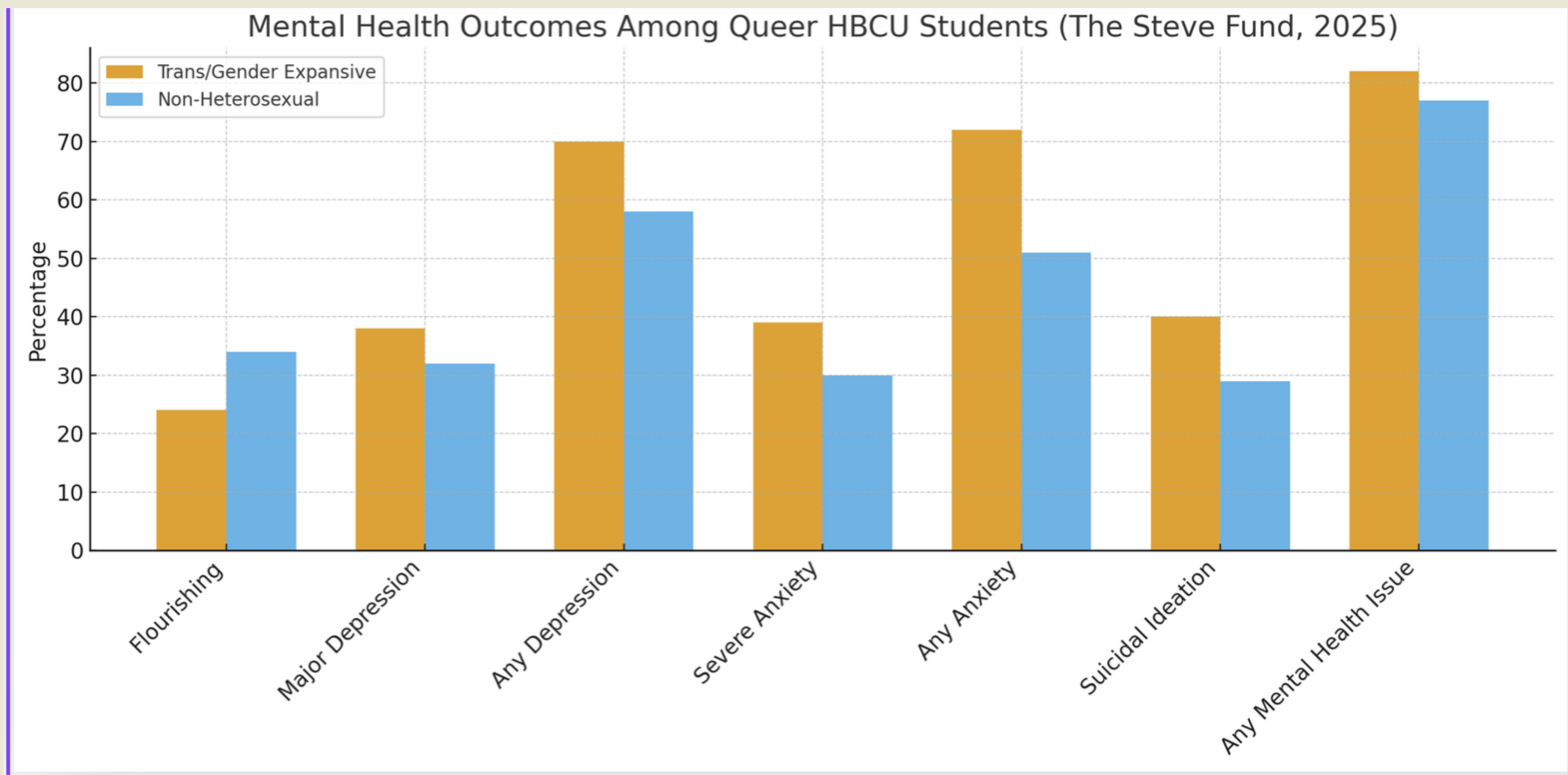
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Introduction

Abstract

HBCUs were founded to expand educational access for Black communities and continue to promote racial uplift and culturally affirming environments (Hilton et al., 2024; Ewing, 2025). They are often viewed as safe havens that foster belonging and personal transformation (Park, 2025; Mobley & Hall, 2020). However, challenges such as sexism, heterosexism, and cissexism persist, often reinforced through respectability politics and environmental press (Patton et al., 2020). As a result, Black Queer students may experience isolation, a reduced sense of connection or belonging, and increased mental health concerns such as stress, depression, and anxiety (Breshell et al., 2024).



Aims of the Research

Considering community connectedness as a vital aspect of social support, this study intends to observe the three variables: community connectedness, psychological well-being, and student engagement. The works employed within this study will help to explore the relationship between community connectedness, psychological well-being, and student engagement at HBCUs; focusing on how a lack of community connectedness potentially contributes to negative psychological and academic outcomes for Black Queer students.

Participants

The participants in this study will consist of HBCU students (Undergraduate & Graduate) and alumni who identify as either Queer (LGBTQ+) or non-Queer . 11 HBCUs across the United States have been asked to participate in this study. The average age of participants will likely range from 18-24 years old, matching the general age bracket of undergraduate students (Welding & Bryant, 2025). Although individuals of various racial backgrounds attend HBCUs, this research will specifically be analyzing the responses from students who identify as Black/ African American.

Method

Research Design

The proposed study is a non-experimental, correlational design that examines the relationship between both (1) community connectedness and psychological well-being and (2) community connectedness and student engagement, amongst Queer & Non-Queer Black HBCU students and alumni. Participants will be asked to complete a self-report questionnaire that includes demographic questions and three subscales measuring: community connectedness, psychological well-being, and student engagement. To obtain responses that most accurately reflect participant’s natural and honest perspective, best capturing the scope of answering our questions.

Research Questions

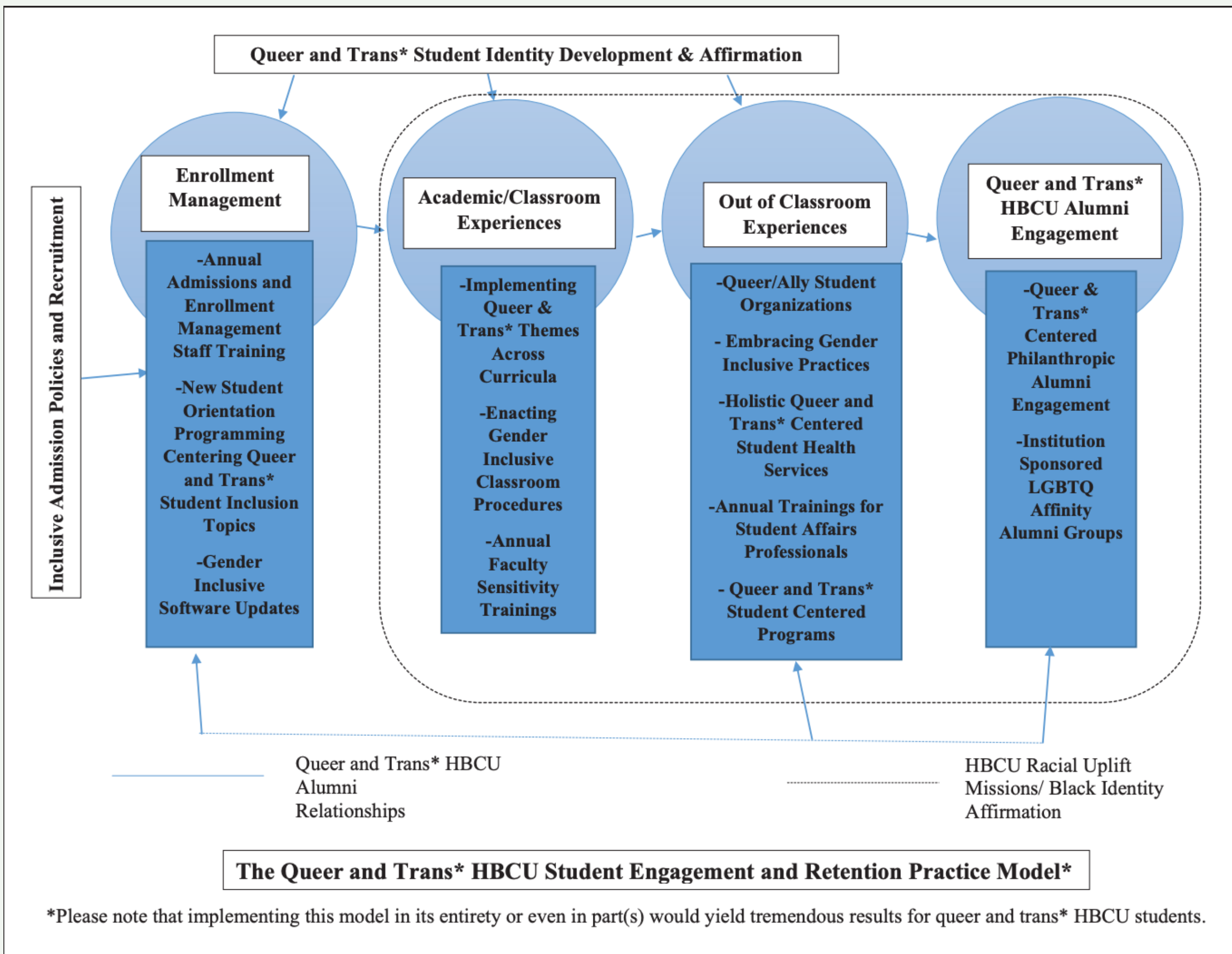
- 1) How is community connectedness related to Black LGBTQ+ students’ student engagement at HBCUs?
- 2) How is community connectedness related to Black LGBTQ+ students’ psychological well-being at HBCUs?
- 3) Is there a difference in levels of sense of belonging, as gauged by community connectedness, between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ students?
- 4a) Do student engagement levels differ between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ students when considering community connectedness levels observed?
- 4b) Do psychological well-being levels differ between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ students when considering community connectedness levels observed?

Data Collection and Analysis

Prior to analysis, the dataset will be screened to include only participants who (1) fully completed the questionnaire, (2) self-identify as Black or African American, and (3) are currently enrolled or have graduated from a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). Participants who do not meet this criterion will be excluded from analysis. The data will then be separated into two groups: Queer and non-Queer students. Next, a Pearson’s correlation analysis will be conducted amongst the two groups, examining the relationships between (a) community connectedness and psychological well-being, and (b) community connectedness and student engagement. Next, an ANOVA-T-test comparison will be completed to see if there is a difference in levels of community connectedness, measured by a sense of belonging, between Queer and non-Queer students. Finally, a MANOVA means comparison analysis will be conducted to observe whether there is a difference in Queer and non-Queer students' sense of belonging and psychological well-being.

Results

Conclusion



Discussion

Preliminary findings support all four hypotheses, showing that community connectedness plays a key role in the well-being and academic engagement of Black LGBTQ+ students at HBCUs. Students with stronger belonging reported better psychological well-being and higher engagement, consistent with prior research on Black Queer communities and student experiences at HBCUs. In contrast, Queer students with lower levels of connectedness showed poorer mental health and reduced engagement compared to non-Queer peers. These patterns highlight the ongoing need for HBCUs to foster more inclusive, affirming environments that support the success of all students.

Key References

