



# The Costs of Staying: Experiences of Racially Minoritized LGBTQ+ Faculty in the Field of Higher Education

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Accepted: 27 July 2022 / Published online: 10 November 2022  
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## Abstract

This critical qualitative study illuminates how racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty in the field of higher education navigate racist and heterosexist systems, leading to inordinate challenges related to tenure and promotion and deteriorating health and well-being. This system of higher education fosters isolation, hostility, racial battle fatigue, and LGBTQ+ erasure offering limited support, negative institutional environments, and insufficient mentoring for faculty with multiple minoritized identities. With intersectionality as the theoretical foundation of this research, three themes emerged from the data including *problematizing productivity*, *exposing tokenization*, and the *costs of staying in the academy*. I posit that refusal is a necessary strategy for racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty who navigate the neoliberal institution.

**Keywords** LGBTQ+ Racially Minoritized Faculty · Multiple Minoritization · Higher Education

The academy has always been a difficult place for faculty with multiple minoritized<sup>1</sup> identities, particularly those who are racially minoritized and LGBTQ+ (Aguilar & Johnson, 2017; Misawa, 2015; Morales-Diaz, 2014; Nadal, 2019; Stewart, 2015). These faculty members experience hostile campus environments and discrimina-

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper the term minoritized is used to explain the action of ‘minority’ status imposed upon populations who are not white and heterosexual strictly because of the social construction of race, sexual orientation, and gender identity, which dictates who holds power and who does not. The term ‘minority’ does not necessarily relate to quantity, but rather to a social status given to a group of people determined to be ‘less than’ based upon assumptions of those in power (Benitez, 2010; Stewart, 2013).

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tion which can look like marginalization in academic departments, isolation, tokenization, and delayed or denied opportunities for tenure and promotion (Garvey & Rankin, 2018; Mobley et al., 2020; Osei-Kofi, 2012; Pitcher, 2017; Renn, 2010; Stanley, 2006). While a growing body of literature is documenting and accounting for the experiences of racially minoritized and LGBTQ+ faculty, seldom have researchers inquired about the experiences of those who have multiple marginalized identities, meaning, both LGBTQ+ and racially minoritized. This study explores the experiences and perspectives of racially minoritized faculty who are LGBTQ+ and who teach and create scholarship within the field of higher education. In many cases, these faculty experience racism and other forms of marginalization, while also on the front lines in the fight for social justice, still remaining deeply invested in transforming academic environments despite its solidified state of being unwilling and unable to be reformed.

This study outlines barriers to access, success, and thriving that continue to be pervasive in academe, especially for its disparate impact on racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty. The findings from this study amplify the voices of participants, that are steeped in “imperialist white- supremacist capitalistic patriarchal” logic (hooks, 2000, p. 118) present in institutions of higher education. First, a synopsis of the experiences of racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty is provided, then theories that guide the study are outlined. This is followed by an empirical overview of some of the factors inhibiting the success of these faculty members. I conclude with suggestions for educators to reject policies, practices, and procedures that undergird exclusionary practices within institutions of higher education.

## Multiple Minoritized Faculty at the Margins of the Academy

Literature examining the experiences of racially minoritized faculty members within the academy outlines that these faculty experience isolation, hostility, racial battle fatigue (the perpetual mental, physical and emotional stress experienced by those with racially minoritized identities; Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2016), limited support as well as challenges with tenure and promotion and declining mental health and wellness, specifically in predominantly white environments (Blockett, 2017; Calafell, 2017; Griffin et al., 2014; Pitcher, 2017; Quaye et al., 2020; Turner et al., 2008). In addition to navigating hostile academic environments, racially minoritized faculty also experience devaluation of their teaching, scholarship, and service compared with their white colleagues, and often face perceptions that their scholarship is lacking rigor and/or objectivity (Gardner et al., 2017). Those faculty in the academy with other minoritized identities (i.e., various sexual orientations, gender identities, ethnicity, national origin, immigration status, ability) also share similar experiences to those outlined above. In fact, it is documented that faculty with racially minoritized LGBTQ+ identities, often struggle to navigate structural racism, queerphobia, mental health, wellbeing, and sexism in institutions of higher education (Aguilar & Johnson, 2017; Ghabrial, 2017; Lange et al., 2019; Nadal, 2019; Stewart, 2014; Wright-Mair & Marine, 2021), which is mirrored in US society.

While research has accounted for the experiences of LGBTQ+ Students of Color, (Duran, 2018) it is lacking for faculty and staff within higher education (Aguilar & Johnson, 2017; Cyrus, 2017). Higher education is a microcosm of the broader society in which we live, and as such, the reality for racially minoritized populations who are LGBTQ+ is one filled with violence such as verbal and physical assaults, discriminatory policies, and other vile forms of harassment (D'Augelli, 1992). Research on their demeaning experiences both inside and outside of the classroom note that racially minoritized and LGBTQ+ faculty often are subject to harm by their students and colleagues (Alexander, 2006; Patton & Catching, 2009). Specifically, Garvey and Rankin (2018), Harris and Nicolazzo (2020), Renn (2010), and Stewart (2015), noted that the literature on the experiences of trans faculty and staff is extremely limited, and often focuses more on the student experience of LGBTQ+ student populations. The burden placed on a faculty member with a minoritized identity is referred to as tokenization, the idea that one's identity is the reason for being selected or appointed to a role, or that one's identity is the reason they are asked to take on additional work (Baez, 2000). Tokenization operates intentionally by targeting racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty, leading them to experience compounded trauma as a result of racism, sexism, and transphobia all at once, while navigating the neoliberal logics entrenched in institutions. Neoliberalism in higher education is described as policies and logics intended to corporatize the academy (Osei-Kofi, 2012; Giroux, 2002), it became a prominent part of society in the late 20th century and transcends higher education. Ideologically, neoliberalism is the promise of fixing social ills with the intent of financial gain (McChesney, 1998). Historically, this led to a slight increase of minoritized faculty in academe, as the politics of representation is used as a means of stunting more radical politics. Neoliberal logics coincide with white supremacy and settler colonialism, which both lie at the core of institutions and precede neoliberalism.

Neoliberal ideologies are reflected across the academy from decisions about teaching, research, and service to defining what is valid and counted as rigorous, worthy, and productive (Osei-Kofi, 2012). Critiques of neoliberalism, and its place in a well-advanced corporatized academy, have gained traction over the last few years (Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017), and research is starting to uncover how the crippling forces of neoliberalism disproportionately impact the lives of faculty with minoritized identities (Osei-Kofi, 2012; Wright-Mair & Museus, 2021). Of particular interest is the way that neoliberalism influences faculty behavior (Levin & Aliyeva, 2015), meaning that faculty productivity is driven by competition and measured by the ability to meet specific outlined metrics of success that bring prestige to an institution (i.e., quantity of publications and securing prestigious grants). This constant pressure from neoliberal institutions can often lead faculty with minoritized identities to develop what Wright-Mair and Ramos (2021) term a resource deficit consciousness, further complicating their academic pursuits.

Higher education institutions were founded on racist and patriarchal philosophies (Wilder, 2013) that continue to exclude those faculty who are not white, cisgender, and heterosexual. Therefore, many policies, practices, curriculum, tenure and promotion processes are often exclusionary and do not account for, or value the work of multiple minoritized faculty members in the academy (Hamer & Lang, 2015). In fact,

the academy rewards structures often prioritizing output rather than engagement in work that is meaningful to these faculty. In short, neoliberalism governs faculty productivity and rewards faculty who are able to meet those metrics with more resources and prestige (Giroux, 2002).

## Understanding the Intersections

The critical theories engaged in this study include intersectionality (Anzaldúa, 1987; Crenshaw, 1989; Combahee River Collective, Collins & Bilge 2016) and critical race theory (CRT) (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). These theories are used as guiding frameworks for understanding the complexities of racism and heteronormativity among multiple minoritized faculty in the academy. In order to understand the intersecting identities of participants in the study, one must first understand CRT. CRT calls attention to the fact that racism and structural inequities are deeply intertwined and are part of the fabric of U.S. society, including Higher Education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998). The tenets of CRT are (a) the power of counter storytelling, (b) the permanence of racism, (c) the idea of whiteness as property, (d) interest convergence, and (e) a critique of liberalism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Together these theories explain how those with privileged identities create hierarchies across higher education and intentionally seek to marginalize and oppress.

Intersectionality is defined as “the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis [sic] of differentiation—economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective, and experiential—intersect in historically specific contexts” (Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p. 76). While the exact origins of the concept of intersectionality are contested (Nash, 2019), scholars typically attribute the concept’s emergence to the work of feminist legal theorist Crenshaw (1989), who centered intersectionality in her work on the lives of Black women experiencing employment discrimination and the differential experiences of Black women in the domestic violence service response. Challenging the notion that considering either racism or sexism as the singular, dominant structural force shaping Black women’s experiences, Crenshaw gave voice to, and theorized the complex, compounded realities of multiple marginality. Her work, and that of other scholars (Anzaldúa, 1987; Combahee River Collective, 1986; Collins, 2009; Lorde, 1984; Mobley et al., 2020; McMillam-Cottom, 2018), has further illuminated how intersecting matrices of power and privilege impact the material realities of marginalized faculty. Intersectionality reveals the compounding layers of structural inequity that are produced within higher education through the policies and practices that determine the outcomes of faculty success.

Transcending the purely theoretical, intersectionality serves as a potent analytical tool that lends itself well to applying and refining strategies to dismantle oppressive structures (Bilge, 2013). One such strategy is to use intersectional theory to deconstruct the ways that putatively progressive environments, such as the academy, have succeeded at constructing inequitable conditions for those who hold multiple marginalized identities. Scholars, for example, have leveraged the insights of intersectionality to persuasively argue that higher education has continually relegated

the experiences of minoritized faculty to the margins (Tuitt et al., 2009; Turner et al., 2008). Contributions of minoritized faculty are minimized or exploited, their research cast as suspect (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002), and their advancement forestalled by perceptions of being unfit for leadership roles. Insights from these studies thus prompted this research, in an effort to ascertain multiple marginality's role in the professional experiences of faculty who study, teach, and create policy about higher education.

## Methods for Exploring Multiple Minoritization

Critical qualitative inquiry (Denzin, 2017) was employed in order to answer the research question: How do racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty experience their academic environments? Critical qualitative inquiry allows scholars an opportunity to advocate successfully for transformation and disrupt normative discourse through their research. Critical qualitative inquiry is useful when studying systemic inequities, issues deeply embedded within society, in this case: racist cisheteropatriarchy (Buenavista et al., 2021) and settler colonialism (Wolfe, 1999). By using this approach, researchers can examine the nuances of how oppression targets minoritized populations and discuss strategies for “refusing the university” (Grande, 2018, p. 61), meaning disrupting and countering the policies, procedures, and actions that have been rendered the *norm* of the institution. This approach was important to provide an understanding of how interlocking systems of oppression (Collins, 1990) work against multiple minoritized faculty working in the field of higher education.

## Participants

Participants were recruited through purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002), through email outreach, and listserv communities for faculty teaching in higher education graduate programs. Respondents were asked to complete a brief survey to ensure that all interested participants self-identified as both being of a minoritized race, and being of a minoritized sexual and/or gender identity, prior to participating. In order to better understand the concerns of full time, tenured or tenure-track faculty, participant pool was limited to those meeting these criteria. Participants on full-time tenure-track were chosen in order to recognize the power pipeline in academe and understand more clearly what these faculty, who hold the most power and prestige in academe, experience. Eleven respondents met the criteria and were chosen to take part in the study. Ten participants identified as men and one as a woman, representing different racially and ethnically minoritized groups. Participants worked at a wide range of institutions including those classified as very high research intensive, high research intensive, and teaching focused. Participants were provided with a consent form detailing the scope of the study, the protections in place, and compensation (a \$25 gift card) for participating in the study.

## Data Collection and Analysis

Each participant engaged in a single interview ranging from 60 to 90min via Zoom. Zoom was chosen because it was the most convenient and affordable way to collect data for participants across 11 institutions nationally. A semi-structured protocol guided interview questions which were recorded and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. To ensure trustworthiness, member checking was utilized and participants were provided with their full transcript and given the option to comment or make any changes. All participants were also provided with a preliminary summary of the themes and were asked to comment on their resonance with each theme outlined. Memos were kept throughout the interview process and integrated into data analysis (Bhattacharya, 2017). Thematic categories were derived from careful line-by-line analysis of data and through interrater reliability (Belotto, 2018).

Each transcript was read multiple times in order to understand the varied perspectives of participants. Transcripts were coded manually, and a list of codes were generated and then organized into higher order themes. The themes that emerged during data analysis were analyzed through a broader lens of CRT and Intersectionality. Researcher positionality was important in this study. My positionality as a cisgender, heterosexual, Black, South Asian, immigrant first-generation woman differed, in some instances, from the participants in the study. While I am not LGBTQ+, I am a racially minoritized faculty member. For many participants in this study, one or more of my identities was resonant with their experiences. While I do recognize and understand my privilege as a heterosexual and cisgender woman, I am heartfelt and committed to doing research that amplifies the voices and experiences of those individuals who live with other multiple minoritized identities. It is important to note that while the COVID-19 pandemic certainly further complicated the lived experiences of participants, those impacts of the pandemic are not covered in this manuscript, primarily because those experiences were not captured during data collection, which was completed approximately a month shy of the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

## Findings: Navigating the Predictable Academy

The themes generated from data analysis spanned numerous areas of the racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty experience. Three themes specifically emerged from the data and are the focus of this manuscript. Across the different experiences, participants spoke about the pressures associated with the pervasive academic culture of *Quantifying Productivity*, as if all are equal on the academic market; the constant burden of *Tokenization*, as if the presence of a racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty member alone ends oppression; and the associated *Costs of Staying* in the academy, as one has to weigh the demands of their careers with their own health and well-being. This study revealed that several aspects of life for racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty are challenging due to racist and queerphobic academic environments.

## Problematizing Productivity

Participants shared stories about the pressures of academe specifically in relation to how their research, teaching, and service was prioritized and supported. The productivity pressures of their academic environments, most of which discouraged research on disenfranchised communities, meaning that their research was perceived to be inconsequential by those in positions of power, was universally a challenge for participants. Consistent with the tenets of CRT, counter storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) is useful for amplifying narratives that have long been disregarded. Faculty in this study spoke about constantly being told that their work is never enough and explain they often operate in a context where productivity is measured largely by quantity, impact factor, and prestige. Participants indicated that even at their most productive, they felt as if they had to compromise their work to attain promotion. In other words, the structures of the neoliberal academy assume that racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty face pressures no different than their white, cis/het faculty counterparts. This sentiment can be understood as the imperative for interest convergence, a tenet of CRT, as the needs of racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty must also benefit the institution in order for it to be valued. Alex thoughtfully explained these unspoken norms:

The way expectation manifests is specific to my institution, but a broader issue affecting the academy is the pressure to aspire to greater prestige as an institution and the way that is affecting metrics of the work that we're meant to be doing, and also the way that resources are being allocated or expectations of how we are expected to procure resources of our own. So [that means] grant getting, and publishing in high impact journals. All of these things negatively affect me. And when I see how people celebrate prestige or aspire for it and uphold it, that level of visible hypocrisy really wears on me.

Drew discussed his experience with the policing of metrics by his colleagues, specifically in the context of applications for large external grants and advice given by colleagues to use *appropriate* language to describe his work to increase the odds of being successful and getting a grant awarded. He noted:

What I've been told about how to apply for large grants is that I should just use very palatable language. "Diversity," "race," but not racism. And that becomes very hard because obviously that's not me and that's not how I think about the world.

These comments highlight that the academy demands that interests converge to the point where individuals are not recognizable and that research is aligned in ways that advance the institution and not the collective group of minoritized faculty members. Additionally, terminology typically implicated in justice work becomes re-purposed for neoliberal ends, and the implications of that for scholars whose driving ethos is really about equity is problematic.

Todd reiterated that achieving metrics of success is difficult when students' well-being is involved. He points out that his institution is under tremendous financial strain and requires faculty to now alleviate that burden. Consistent with whiteness as property, the institution seeks to protect itself at the expense of anyone who will keep it afloat, including faculty. Todd articulated that faculty wear several hats and choose based on what guarantees job security versus what provides fulfillment:

Being at an institution that is private, but yet not very well resourced, means that the institution is susceptible to financial pressures. It puts a lot of strain on what faculty can do. What they are expected to do. And how they are valued. With ongoing financial pressures, we're seen less as meaningful contributors and more of just - a cog within a larger system. That's been a growing sentiment on our campus... my students aren't getting the services that they need because aspects of the university are now underfunded. So now faculty are expected to then take on those additional advisory roles. For instance, we are not counseling professionals, right? And yet, now we're expected to also help facilitate mental wellness, which makes it really hard for us to then focus on other aspects of our goals as well.

Many participants also discussed the ways that the emphasis on meritocracy leads to an overwhelming sense of inadequacy. This is because in the frames they employ, success is different for everyone. This is misaligned with how academe traditionally defines success, especially factoring how interlocking systems of oppression are at play. In fact, Ambrose, who would be described as highly successful by traditional academic standards, shared that his ability to "play by the rules" of the academy has brought him to where he is currently in his career, but this is not necessarily his preferred way of operating. Ambrose shared his journey:

I don't feel successful. I've played by the rules and made my way through and achieved what I thought was the goal of promotion and tenure when I first entered a PhD program, but there have been many times where I'm like, this is not what I thought it would be. I was disenchanted by what I expected and what I would like it to be.

These comments indicate that the road to success is different for each faculty member; and while some may attain promotion, the path to promotion is often riddled with assumptions of meritocracy, colorblindness, and neutrality. While faculty felt a great sense of commitment to students and want to support them, it becomes increasingly more difficult to do so in the midst of mandates to focus on activities deemed by the institution as more important. In other words, the institution seeks to reward faculty that promote the individual over the collective, something that was resolutely at odds with the thinking of faculty interviewed in this study.



## Exposing Tokenization

Participants in the study all discussed how they experienced varying levels of tokenization because of their identities. The additional labor these faculty engage in is extremely time consuming, exhausting, and not rewarded in academic contexts, where the hierarchy of research, teaching, and service exist, with service as the least rewarded but the most expected from racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty members. Many of these academic hierarchies are a result of socio-historical contexts including a history of labor exploitation of racially minoritized populations, and a forced silencing of populations who are LGBTQ+. Silencing of LGBTQ+ people have been etched into practice, policy, and law and continue to have had several implications for faculty (Benecke, 2011). The residual precedent of law and policy continues to impact racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty experiences across higher education and has shaped the ways that intersectional forms of oppression co-exist within academic hierarchies. For instance, participants in the study reiterate that they continue to face isolation, hostile environments, as well as devaluation of their scholarship, but are still expected (and assumed) to be the ones who fix all “diversity” related issues on their campus primarily because of their race, sexual orientation, and gender identities. Highlighting the obvious discrepancies racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty face, of being used for the advancement of social justice initiatives on campus, while facing resistance and lack of support systems to advance their own research endeavors. Faculty in the study agreed that their agency within their departments, college units, and institutions was limited, meaning that they did not have the ability to make decisions that directly impact their success. Participants shared that many of their colleagues openly refer to them as “diversity experts” who “take care of the lack of diversity” on campus. This speaks to the various forms of oppression that they navigate; thus, intersectionality is a particularly useful lens for understanding why tokenization is complex and forceful. For instance, Denzel described intersectional forms of oppression:

But all these years... I think really are best described as doing a lot of mule work. Being seen as a mule, being treated as a mule. A queer magical negro mule. Anti-Blackness, and perceptions drives this. Expectations that I will come in and fix everything.

What Denzel shared is an example of the permanence of racism and queerphobia operating in an institutional setting where white heterosexual colleagues have expectations for racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty who are tied to their specific racialized and queer identities. This rings true regardless of whether or not their work is anchored in social justice. Eitenne, for example, explained the difficulty of his experiences, making particular reference to the pressure of juggling research, teaching, and service demands put on him by others. Specifically referencing that he is pushed to do diversity and inclusion work even though his research agenda does not have that focus, Eitenne relayed:

Being asked to teach a course on diversity and inclusion because I happen to be gay, I happen to be of a certain race, I happen to be first generation, I happen to come from a poor background. They don't see it. It makes you feel awful. Because you are a brown, gay body in front of these white people and they just put you where they want regardless. You got to swallow it. This happens all the time.

In addition to the expectations of driving social justice solely based on their identities, Julio outlines his inability to say no to these forced responsibilities:

Service has been challenging. Oftentimes you can't say 'no,' right? Especially for us people of color. If you say, 'no,' it's like, they will look at you. They will be like, 'He said, no.' When I see some of my colleagues, they will say, 'Well, I'm on the tenure track, I can't serve.' If I were to say that shit, it would be like, 'what?' So that's one of the things...that I can't say 'no' to.

Julio expressed how the parameters of whiteness as property (Harris, 1993) have the right to possess, use, and exclude. Callie similarly grappled with these parameters working against her, and posited:

You go from having a relatively small advising load, to all of a sudden, your personal advising load is 18 and then you're on 36 dissertation committees. How the heck did that happen? And then you struggle -- because I do want to go up for promotion. So, when my senior colleagues are the ones who are referring their students to me, can I say 'no' to that? I still struggle with that piece in terms of the agency. Who am I allowed to disappoint?

The theft of agency and time, not only impacted Callie but also John, who noted that the service work he engaged is not merely a checklist. In fact, it is closely aligned to identity, making it difficult to show up like business as usual when the tasks you are expected to perform are draining and deeply personal. John highlights:

It's emotionally exhaustive. Not only because of the work it takes to offer really good advice and feedback, but working through stuff that's very deep here. Hard for me to be like, oh, I'm going to bounce back from that, or I can read this in a few hours and be done with it. It takes me a long time to process. The big thing for our colleagues is trying to think about their positionality and how that shapes our experiences.

These comments emphasize the taxing impact of tokenization on racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty and help explain how white heterosexual faculty (to their benefit) are complicit in upholding intersectional forms of oppression. Furthermore, these comments illustrate the inability to separate the experiences of racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty from neoliberalism, and the perception that they are the fix to social ills in the institution.

An additional example of the ways that tokenization operated is that many participants in this study were expected to teach diversity classes and advise students, even though they were told that it would take away from crucial research time. This highlights the blatantly tokenizing assumption that holding multiple minoritized identities automatically means being knowledgeable about, and an expert in, diversity. At the same time, while these faculty are being encouraged not to “expend” energy on students, the expectations to advise and support students are still there; all while institutional agents expect racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty to obtain grants, publish, and be productive. The double messaging these faculty receive is conflicting and not consistent with the metrics used to measure their success.

There is a noted tension between the taxation of service work and the fulfillment that many racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty feel when engaging in it. Given that these faculty must navigate oppressive academic environments, many have a calling to support students with similar identities. For example, Leo outlined how his own retention is tied to student engagement:

Students are the reason why I’m here and need to be here. I remember when I was in my PhD program, I told my partner, ‘if I ever stop caring about students, that’s the day I want you to tell me to quit being a faculty member’. I just love seeing their excitement, their curiosity. I love getting to know them as people. I try to do that with all students, but particularly with my advisees. I try to be very giving of my time, which people have cautioned against me doing. They say, ‘Putting too much time in your students takes away from writing,’ or things like that. For me, that time invested in them, makes me a more productive scholar, because it gives me the energy I need to sustain myself.

These comments provide a snapshot of the matrix of domination (Collins, 2009) that many faculty members with multiple minoritized identities traverse. Illuminating a double bind, that is, racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty are expected to perform extra labor without consideration of traditional “success” metrics of tenure and promotion and are also still evaluated by those traditional metrics without consideration of the massive amounts of additional so-called “diversity” labor. Highlighting how faculty members who are vulnerable based on their identities are preyed upon in academe. It is important to recognize that tokenization in this case was primarily based on being a racially minoritized person, and that in many of the stories shared, LGBTQ+ identities were rendered invisible.

## **Costs of Staying in the Academy**

Racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty described themselves as surviving their respective academic careers as opposed to thriving in them, which is consistent across the scholarship on these faculty members. The hierarchies and demands within academia feel overwhelming and consuming for participants in this study. Many indicate that one major cost of staying in the academy was the decline of their physical and mental health. Research supports that the body holds on to trauma in a

variety of ways that compromises the physical and mental well-being of individuals (Van Der Kolk, 1994). Specifically, relevant, intellectual labor can further contribute to the demoralization of multiple minoritized faculty, often defined as spirit murdering (Williams, 1987) in academic environments. The cost of a murdered spirit comes at the expense of not just racially minoritized faculty, but also those in community with them (Wright-Mair & Pulido, 2021). Realizing that institutions cannot be decolonized, and that inclusion is unlikely because institutions of higher education require an antiracist disposition (Wilder, 2013), many are looking towards “academic refusal” as a coping strategy (Grande, 2018, p.58). Academic refusal (Grande, 2018) can be understood as the conscious decision to disengage and reject the “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchal” (hooks, 2000, p. 118) academic power structure. Academic refusal should not be confused with solely physically leaving academia and can also include rejecting normative policies, procedures, and practices. It is important to note that some participants indicated their decision to leave academe proactively, or to move toward leaving, as well as their constant questioning if staying is worth it, at the expense of their health and wellness.

As a result of neoliberal demands and an academy sustained by a matrix of domination (Collins, 2009) participants indicated that throughout their career they frequently questioned if being in the academy was worth it (i.e., risking losing their minds, bodies, souls, careers, families, relationships, etc.). They named negative competitive and toxic cultures within academe that focused more on outdoing colleagues, than being focused on supporting each other and producing quality work over quantity. Many acknowledged that engaging in academic refusal often came with a cost to their health, wellness, level of security, and career outlook. Participants frequently pointed out the resultant stress and mental health impact of academic expectations and productivity strain, coupled with relentless competition for scarce opportunities and resources, which are often less accessible to minoritized faculty. Participants noted that many times they have to manage this all while living in cities far away from loved ones or a supportive community. For many, where they work and live, are places not always conducive to their multiple minoritized identities. Etienne highlighted daily interactions which are toxic to his existence:

Particularly for folks who are gay and identify as a person of color, it’s not just what’s happening in a campus setting, but thinking about the surrounding communities. From my own experience my husband and I have experienced discrimination in our community, our neighbor repeatedly called us roommates even after I told him we were married. Being careful never to show affection towards each other in public. Being worried, when I’m getting my haircut and they are asking about your family. Just making chitchat. To say my spouse, instead of my husband. It’s not just campus environments, it’s also the communities in which we have to survive in and raise a family. Or just exist, right?

Intersectionality is useful in understanding how heteronormativity and racism operate, as it puts into question daily occurrences. Here it plays out as a cost of staying in academia for Etienne, as he is not only forced to deny an intimate part of his identity but also participate in his own oppression. Also, living in a city that is not support-

ive of his multiple minoritized identities, Drew noted the difficulty associated with moving to a new academic position and the beginning of a decline in his health and wellness:

Moving to a much more conservative state, and really having to think more about what it meant to be a LGBTQ+ person in a very white space. Or a person of color in a very white space. That's when my depression started to set in and physical health declined.

The strain of double marginalization comes not only with negative effects, but with the additional cost of coping with them, some of which are life-threatening. Denzel talks about his serious health issues:

It's literally not good for my health. I manage a mental illness. That has been exacerbated in the last few years. My blood pressure is through the roof. I was on medical leave for several weeks, my blood pressure had gotten down into normal range. Two weeks after being back in the office, it was back up to almost the highest it's ever been.

These comments point to the ongoing manifestations of stress and illness, caused by the forces of racism and queerphobia that are deeply embedded in academia (Pierce, 1995). Racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty are constantly negotiating their identities at the expense of their health and well-being. The question “is it worth it” arises for these faculty members as they are consistently existing in this destructive environment. Most lamented the institutional expectation is to give their all to an academy that often disregards and continuously oppresses them.

With the threats to physical and mental health, and recognizing the difference between being “*in* but not *of* the institution” (Grande, 2018, p. 49), several participants noted that leaving academia was a real possibility for them as a form of academic refusal (Grande, 2018). As echoed in Carl's comments below, the constant pressure that racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty feel to raise the ‘enough’ bar, permeates institutional culture in ways that hinder authentic relationships. Carl outlined his frustration:

I ask myself, “Am I not doing enough?” Through therapy, I realize, that has nothing to do with me—when you start comparing, it can take over. When others bring that energy, it makes me not want to be in the academy. We all want to do good work. Sometimes the people publishing many articles don't impact the field, or it's not what we need right now. That's the energy – I don't enjoy or want. My mother passing and navigating grief, put some of those things in perspective. My life is not wrapped up in this tenure track position, I can find joy in other places. Life is very short.

Similarly, Drew explained his desire to leave the academy and abandon what he was trained to do, as a form of disrupting academic hierarchies:

The thing that's really helped me was to articulate to my closest friends that I'm probably going to be leaving the field. I think I've definitely come to the point where it's like, how many more times can I be told "no?" I can't get a job at a teaching institution. I can't get a job at a research one institution. So where do I go? Why do I have to be relegated to this shit-ass job where I'm alone? Like, literally, doesn't feel good anymore. We try to tell ourselves and talk ourselves out of the sort of pain and hurt that we feel, or we feel social pressure to stick with what we've done for years and what we've been trained to do in our doc programs. But it's not healthy. Being able to just be vulnerable and own up to saying, you don't fit in here and it could be related to your identities and the way you think about the field. If they don't want you, why do you keep trying? Why can't you be who you are, do what you do in a different space, and be valued for it?

By honoring one's self, and discarding whiteness as property (Collins, 2009), as well as the interests of the institution (which are fueled by the needs of white supremacy and cisheteropatriarchy), participants are embodying a form of academic refusal (Grande, 2018) in order to thrive. Despite Denzel's significant accomplishments in the field, his disappointment is undeniable:

I'm tired, and I'm looking to leave the academy. I don't see a way to stay in the academy-and at the same time, I know first of all, that I am severely underpaid in comparison with other peers at this level...so giving the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual sacrifice to an institution that does not love me. And shows that on a regular basis day in, day out.

These comments indicate how participants' experiences in the academy have led them to feel a great sense of dissatisfaction and little incentive to stay in an academy that reinforces what they have always known, that they do not belong and can serve a better purpose elsewhere.

## Discussion

Illuminating the impacts of the academy on the experiences of racially minoritized LGBTQ+faculty, this study contributes to the literature first by examining how productivity is overly quantified and how that directly affects faculty with multiple minoritized identities. Previous literature (Gonzalez & Núñez, 2014) affirms that the academy is focused mainly on quantifying productivity, meaning that there is greater value and emphasis placed on volume and pace of production of research and publications in comparison to teaching and service requirements. Quantification is a direct by-product of the corporatization of higher education – neoliberalism (Giroux, 2002) – which leads to a culture that rewards meeting standardized metrics of success. Thus, faculty who produce more and acquire grants bring both tangibles (i.e., funding) and intangibles (i.e., prestige) to the institution. As such, given the additional burdens placed on racially minoritized LGBTQ+faculty, this is an untenable

situation for them, as they must operate under immense pressure to produce in high quantities at all times, in order to be valued.

Second, the study reaffirms existing literature (Baez, 2000; Stanley, 2006) about the ways that faculty facing interlocking systems of oppression are disadvantaged by being forced to do additional labor (e.g., teach diversity classes, advise students with multiple identities, sit on diversity committees, spearhead diversity initiatives). Congruent with the literature (Baez, 2000; Osei-Kofi, 2012; Stanley, 2006; Turner et al., 2008) tokenization of faculty impacts their ability to meet other academic expectations including research, which is highly favored as a major part of many tenure and promotion processes. Thus, placing even more pressure on faculty with multiple minoritized identities who not only have to meet specific criteria for promotion and tenure, but who also have the additional burden of diversity service work (Baez, 2000). Racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty, especially those in predominantly white institutions, are thus tasked with the responsibilities of not only living by campus equity values, but becoming a proxy for them. These faculty recognize the tensions associated with this specific form of tokenization, which demands them to be “social justice warriors” while actively being measured by institutional metrics that do not value their social justice contributions.

Third, this study contributes to the literature by highlighting the physical and emotional costs of staying in the academy, including depleted health and well-being, and continued perpetuation of a system rooted in pervasive structural oppression (Wright-Mair & Ieva, 2022). Previous literature highlights that many neophyte faculty depart their academic careers because of high stress environments, unclear expectations, and lack of feeling a sense of belonging (Eddy & Gaston-Gayles, 2008). Given the fact that institutions function as a vehicle for racism, heterosexism, and transphobia (Eagan & Garvey, 2015; Eddy & Gaston-Gayles, 2008; Pitcher, 2017; Stanley, 2006), this study further nuances the tensions racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty have about staying in their academic careers.

The resulting mental and physical conditions are important to name, as many of these faculty members are expected to operate at optimal capacity at all times, without regard for their own wellbeing. In addition, the expectations for multiple minoritized faculty to “produce” remains the same, though the research illustrates that racially minoritized faculty in particular are burdened with additional service expectations, unlike their white counterparts (Eagan & Garvey, 2015). Given the additional burdens racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty bear while trying to navigate the academy, it is not surprising that productivity looks different, and they experience higher volumes of stress, isolation, and depleting health conditions. In fact, Calafell (2017) reminded us that many faculty with multiple intersecting minoritized identities constantly feel the assaults in their everyday lives and many are “tinged with a heavy dose of depression” (p. 7) in the normative spaces they seek to transform. Given this context, this study also sheds lights on how racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty occupy their positions, not to be self-serving but to protect their communities while leveraging the resources of the university as an act of reclamation.

Finally, the study underscores that the academy perpetuates oppression, even as professional associations (an often overlooked, yet crucial part of faculty support and development) claim justice work as a priority (Quaye et al., 2018 & ASHE,

2019). Professional associations are critical to faculty development and crucial to the ways in which faculty develop their own worldviews and create their pedagogical approaches in the classroom. For example, in the field of higher education, the Association of the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) has penned strategic plans (2019) and implemented various initiatives that prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion for faculty development. In addition, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) developed a comprehensive strategic plan centering justice, equity, and decolonialization (Quaye et al., 2018) with the expectation that faculty across the country will train higher education administrators to function in and from this framework. However, many of these institutions and departments do not operate with these values and still hold their faculty (especially those who are racially minoritized and LGBTQ+) to neoliberal and normative standards. Sadly, institutions and departments across the nation continue to serve imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchal (hooks, 2010) practices and uphold problematic metrics of success at the expense of their faculty with multiple minoritized identities.

## Engaging in Refusal

The current inquiry encourages disengagement in systemic structures that dictate the kinds of experiences racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty face in higher education institutions, and calls for (re) engaging in strategies of academic refusal (Grande, 2018) to disrupt these oppressive conditions. This not only benefits racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty, but others who experience oppression in the search for possibilities for liberation. Of course, refusal will look different based on the unique experiences of various populations and should be negotiated on an individual basis. Findings from this study and previous literature (Grande, 2018; Simpson, 2014) can inform the development of engaging in other strategies of refusal. First, it is clear, as Grande (2018) aptly points out, that engaging in collective work is beneficial to racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty, as they value and benefit from collaborative experiences. While this approach is not valued by the academy (which prioritizes individuality) these faculty can (and do) engage in collectivity as a strategy for refusing the university (Grande, 2018) by working together, and taking time to engage in work that advances the community as a whole and doing work that matters to them and their communities. Institutions can prioritize initiatives such as cluster hires that account for faculty with minoritized identities including gender identity and sexual orientation.

Cluster hiring allows for the recruitment of minoritized faculty often from differing colleges or departments promoting interdisciplinary research interests specific to advancing issues of social justice. Job descriptions for cluster hires should be written in a strategic way to yield the greatest number of faculty with minoritized identities with the relevant interests in critical research. Although cluster hiring is important, the approach in this context has to maintain the core components of an intersectional framework given the intersecting systems of oppression that faculty with multiple minoritized identities navigate. One example often not considered in supporting new faculty, are faculty-in-residence programs. Creating a cohort model for a faculty-in-



residence program can allow for community building between new tenure track faculty, while also connecting them to mentoring that can be viewed as service-related activities for consideration in the tenure process. Faculty can be connected to living learning communities that reflect the identities they hold, making it easier for them to manage relationships with minoritized students that they may informally mentor in a traditional setting.

Programs such as faculty-in-residence can minimize the financial burden of faculty with multiple minoritized identities. This is a practice aligned with addressing the gap that exists within educational debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006), a concept that seeks to honor the historical, economic, socio-political, and moral debt owed to various minoritized populations. This approach is necessary as universities attempt to address dedicating resources that meet the financial needs of those who have been systemically minoritized, and, subjected to a history of enslavement and persecution. Furthermore, initiatives such as *sista* circles and faculty-in-residence programs offer a caregiving approach that refuses traditional bureaucratic practices of institutions that create barriers to success of faculty holding multiple minoritized identities (Ambo, 2018). These suggestions can facilitate the formation of collective groups of racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty members (Harris & Nicolazzo, 2020) and can also encourage the building and proliferation of connections similar to *sistas* circles where LGBTQ+ faculty can build and maintain circles of trust and solidarity (Johnson, 2015).

Second, as scholars have argued previously (Darder, 2012; Osei-Kofi, 2012), institutional metrics of success are biased and discriminate especially against racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty. Those in positions of power should refuse the traditional metrics used to measure faculty success by developing new and relevant tools that more broadly account for success. They should honor the work of faculty with multiple minoritized identities and require faculty with dominant identities to develop competence in power conscious mentoring to effectively mentor pre-tenure faculty with multiple minoritized identities. Interestingly, when participants shared stories about their intersecting identities, their LGBTQ+ identity was less prominent in academic pressures. This study thus revealed the significance of understanding neoliberal logics borne of a racist academy that chooses which identities to honor and which to erase (Nash, 2019).

Third, the study draws attention to the importance of centering the experiences of those at the margins whose health and wellness are compromised. Findings suggest that there is much to gain from strategies of refusal when we understand factors contributing to declines in racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty well-being. Findings illustrate the importance of honoring the experiences of racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty and encourage researchers to complicate how wellness can be impacted by refusal. Refusal must be a strategy, not just undertaken by untenured minoritized faculty. Tenured faculty with dominant identities should also advocate for untenured faculty who are in precarious and hostile environments and have limited agency and power. Academic affairs as a form of radical love (Ambo, 2018) can normalize wellness practices and policies. Including but not limited to providing faculty with access and resources that support their overall well-being and act as an additional benefit that is actually honored.

Finally, by reclaiming humanity and centering it fearlessly, education stakeholders must be willing to name and eradicate white supremacy and cisheteropatriarchy, in all its insidious manifestations in the academy. It is not enough to *say* we need to do better- we also must, in fact, *do* better. For example, engaging in strategies of refusal includes providing communities with reparations, giving land back, and divesting from companies that cause harm (Coates, 2014; Wilder, 2013). Refusal, however, cannot be the only strategy, stakeholders who hold power within institutions of higher education must hold themselves accountable in order to address the moral obligation of higher education for reconciliation in order to address what Ladson-Billings (2006) describes as educational debt. Anything less means the continued perpetuation of an inequitable, exclusive future for all of higher education. Our racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty communities deserve better. More research is urgently needed to understand the unique experiences of each sub-group of racially minoritized LGBTQ+ faculty, to help educators and policy makers understand how neoliberalism affects each group differently.

## Declarations

No funding was received for conducting this study.

The author has no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

This study was performed in line with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of Rowan University Date. 10/24/2020 No. Pro2019000702.

The author is fully responsible for the manuscript.

The author gives consent to the journal to publish this manuscript.

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