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How Schools Can Bolster Belonging Among Black Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Youth

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Using an intersectional framework, the current study examined how perceptions of school safety and identity valuation influenced Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ+) students' feelings of school belonging in three schools where the student bodies were predominantly Black. Research on school belonging has focused on the experiences of white LGBQ+ youth or examined disparities in belonging through a singular identity (e.g., exclusively race). Moreover, while research has considered the role of safety in predicting belonging, this work has not considered ways that school context might particularly speak to or affirm the identities of students coming from multiply marginalized groups. To address this gap in the literature, we present a model of school belonging that centers on the experiences of Black LGBQ+ youth. Moderated mediation analyses revealed significant indirect effects of sexual identity on school belonging through both school safety and identity valuation, and these effects depended on participant race. Recommendations for school programming that attends to the unique needs of Black LGBQ+ students are discussed.

What is the significance of this article for the general public?

We found that Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer students were less likely than straight Black students to feel like their identities were valued at school, and this was associated with reduced feelings of belonging. School safety predicted belonging differently for Black and non-Black students; efforts to promote belonging must consider what makes different students feel safe. As identity valuation may influence school belonging, recommendations for ways to foster this construct among Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer students are discussed.

Keywords: sexual orientation, race, school belonging, identity valuation, school safety

Research has consistently established a strong association between school belonging and positive psychosocial outcomes (Kiefer et al., 2015). Students who feel safe and accepted at school have higher grade point averages, attend school more frequently, and are more likely to have

positive health outcomes than students who do not (Gase et al., 2017). As such, it is concerning that Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ+) students report alarmingly low levels of school belonging compared to their peers. Within schools, Black LGBQ+ students uniquely experience the intersection of racist and anti-LGBQ+ discrimination among peers, teachers, and leadership (Kosciw et al., 2022), which could perhaps contribute to decreased school belonging. This is particularly pronounced in schools where Black students comprise the majority of the student body (Truong et al., 2020). Still, little to no research has examined the psychological or structural mechanisms that underlie Black

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LGBQ+ students' low sense of belonging, leaving us without an empirical base to effectively address this issue. This is particularly problematic considering this population experiences worse mental health outcomes and higher levels of victimization than their white, cisgender, and heterosexual peers (The Trevor Project, 2022).

We address this gap in the literature by using an intersectional framework to center the experiences of Black LGBQ+ youth in schools where the majority of the student population is Black. In particular, we explore how school safety and identity valuation affect how students with differing racial and sexual identities experience school belonging, a critical component of social cohesion (Schiefer & Van der Noll, 2017). This work acts as a critical first step in understanding how different students may experience school belonging, which can later inform how school leaders create programs that foster belonging, and ultimately social cohesion, among these groups.

Sense of Belonging as a Key Component in Social Cohesion

Across social science disciplines, social cohesion has been broadly defined as a process by which individuals voluntarily engage in social participation, all with a shared sense of contributing to a group collective that is tolerant of differing values and cultures (Fonseca et al., 2019; Schiefer & Van der Noll, 2017). While there is an ongoing debate on how to specifically define social cohesion, several literature reviews have identified a sense of belonging as a key component of the phenomenon and definition (Fonseca et al., 2019; Schiefer & Van der Noll, 2017). In examining the belonging component of social cohesion, rather than the entire construct, it is possible to identify "weak spots" where programs or policies may need intervention (Botterman et al., 2012; Schiefer & Van der Noll, 2017). In the United States, where racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual orientation diversity is continuously increasing, it is more important than ever to understand how students experience belonging in school, especially among groups of students who have been historically silenced or ignored by the education system.

Within the school context, belonging has been defined as the degree to which a student feels like they are accepted by peers and teachers and generally respected (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Students who feel a greater sense of belonging

in school tend to experience various positive outcomes, such as better academic and psychosocial outcomes, decreased victimization, and increased prosocial behaviors (K. A. Allen et al., 2021; Bond et al., 2007). Considering the benefits of school belonging, researchers have placed much attention on how students feel a sense of belonging in school (K. A. Allen et al., 2021). However, little to none of this work has focused on the experiences of Black LGBQ+ youth, despite the fact that this population consistently reports feeling isolated in school (Truong et al., 2020).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is critical in research that aims to address school belonging, especially among youth with multiple marginalized identities. Coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and since expanded upon by Black feminists and activists (Collins, 2015), intersectionality, as a framework, offers a way of analyzing the interconnectedness of one's privileged and unprivileged identities (Crenshaw, 1991). In viewing identity categories as overlapping rather than mutually exclusive, researchers can better understand the unique ways multiple forms of oppression interact to marginalize or disenfranchise minoritized groups (Collins & Bilge, 2016). In education research, intersectional analysis can be used to explore how oppression, power, domination, race, and sexual orientation overlap and shape Black LGBQ+ youths' experiences in schools (Tefera et al., 2018).

While there is a significant body of research on LGBQ+ youths' experiences in school, this work typically reduces youths' identities into mutually exclusive groups or centers on the experiences of White youth (Toomey et al., 2017). Observing LGBQ+ students' experiences through a singular, mostly White, identity has not only limited our understanding of queer Black youths' experiences in schools but also potentially obscures school leaders' ability to implement policies that are attuned to the unique needs of LGBQ+ youth of color (Toomey et al., 2017). For example, policies that are intended to increase LGBQ+ youths' safety in school may mainly benefit White queer youth while unintentionally marginalizing Black LGBQ+ youth in the process (Spade, 2015). Moreover, small sample sizes frequently prevent researchers from generating empirical work with youth who have multiple

minoritized identities (Borgogna et al., 2019). As such, examining the intersection of these identities and centering the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth of color is necessary for creating culturally sensitive policy solutions to structural issues in school (Hernández & Barcelos, 2023).

School Safety

Black queer youth are particularly absent from education research on school safety (Brockenbrough, 2015). School safety is conceptualized as both psychological and physical protection from intentionally harmful behaviors at school (Astor et al., 2021) and has been identified as a key predictor in school belonging (K. Allen et al., 2018). This concept can include students' perceptions of their own personal safety, incidents of violence at school, and students' experiences of victimization. Regardless of the exact manner in which students' safety is assessed, research suggests that school safety influences outcomes related to academic performance (Milam et al., 2010) and classroom engagement (Côté-Lussier & Fitzpatrick, 2016).

LGBTQ+ students experience disproportionate rates of both physical and psychological threats in schools and unsurprisingly report lower levels of safety than their straight peers (Hanson et al., 2019). In general, sexual minority youth are subject to high rates of harassment and victimization and typically describe their school environment as hostile (Kosciw et al., 2020). For example, Kosciw et al. (2020) found that 68.7% of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ+) students experienced verbal harassment and 25.7% experienced physical harassment related to their sexual orientation in schools. Moreover, 54.4% of these students were exposed to homophobic remarks on a consistent basis, and these incidents were often overlooked or ignored when reported to school administration; a lack of action from school leadership or administration in response to such harassment may be reinforced or create an environment where LGBTQ+ youth feel unsafe (Kull et al., 2016).

Racial identity also influences how safe students feel at school, with Black adolescents feeling less safe than their white and Asian peers (Lacoe, 2015). Black students are disproportionately impacted by exclusionary discipline practices and punished more frequently for typical youth misbehavior than their white

peers (Heidelberg et al., 2022). Schools are largely occupied by white, middle-class, and monolingual English-speaking staff who may be biased against them or engage in culturally insensitive behaviors (e.g., microaggressions); these experiences not only lead students to feel unsafe or unsupported but may also make Black students feel as though they do not belong (Heidelberg et al., 2022).

For LGBTQ+ youth of color, the effects of victimization or discriminatory treatment in school may only be amplified considering they experience multiple intersecting forms of oppression (e.g., race, gender, and sexual orientation; Snapp et al., 2022). Schools may be home to both homophobic bullying and race-based harassment, with 40% of Black LGBTQ students reporting both forms of victimization (Truong et al., 2020). Past research indicates that this reduced sense of safety among Black queer youth is associated with a decreased sense of belonging (Truong et al., 2020). Furthermore, Black LGBTQ+ students may feel hesitancy or tension disclosing their sexual or gender identities, as they are in contrast to the dominant culture's representations of Black masculinity and femininity (e.g., heterosexual and cisgender; Nicolazzo, 2016). Within this, one may feel limited in their ability to connect with others, as their sense of "social safety" is threatened (Diamond & Alley, 2022). Simultaneously, Black queer students have found creative ways to resist oppression or marginalization through creating affinity spaces (Blockett, 2017) or coming out to people who they trust (Lenning, 2017). Such work suggests the unique consideration of identity, over and above a broad sense of safety, may be a vital tool to promote belonging.

Identity Valuation

Social support or appreciation students receive from school may be another tool that promotes belonging and, by extension, social cohesion (Bottoni, 2018). Researchers have identified that when an institution promotes values of inclusion, then those within that institution may feel that the diverse range of their identities are valued (Fonseca et al., 2019). Given the malleable nature of identity during adolescence (Erikson, 1968) and the profoundly uncomfortable experience of identity uncertainty (Hogg, 2007), adolescents may be particularly attuned to cues that bolster or affirm

their identities. For example, developmental functional magnetic resonance imaging research on self-perception found that compared to adults, adolescents had greater activity in brain areas related to social perception, making them more likely to incorporate the views of others in the construction of their social identity (Pfeifer et al., 2009). Thus, whether others signal either disparagement or valuation of one's identity can be critical, especially among individuals from marginalized or multiply marginalized groups. Still, the exact consequences of identity valuation on belonging have been less empirically explored in the literature (Bottoni, 2018).

Research on a related construct, "identity safety," has argued that minoritized young people are more likely to flourish in contexts wherein they feel free from the threat of being negatively evaluated based on group stereotypes (Steele et al., 2002). Further work has suggested that, rather than the mere absence of threat, identity safety (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008) can reflect the more affirmative sense that one's identity is valued. This identity valuation can have meaningful consequences for students' experience of school. One study of Latine college students attending a majority non-Latine university found that the more that students felt like professors valued their ethnic identity, the better students felt about themselves and the more connected they felt to the school community (Rivas-Drake, 2012). Respectful and just treatment by school authorities signals to adolescents that they matter to the community (Granot & Tyler, 2019), and this is one way schools can actively engage with students in ways that signal the valuing of their identities.

The Current Study

Minoritized students face the greatest barriers to school belonging, and this is especially the case for Black LGBTQ+ students. With this work, we explored the experiences of students at this critical intersection of identities. Most past research on belonging in schools, when it has considered the experiences of minoritized students, has usually only considered one dimension of identity at a time. For example, work that has considered the experience of LGBTQ+ students has largely focused on white queer students; the experience of Black queer students has been greatly underexplored. Furthermore, such work has rarely been

done in the context of majority-Black schools, where racial identity is likely to be made particularly salient, perhaps over other identities like sexual orientation. Majority-Black schools also tend to be underresourced and overpoliced (Iwama et al., 2022), evincing structures where school authority is particularly likely to exclude or alienate students. Given the extant segregation of many public schools in America, it is critical to understand the experiences of Black LGBTQ+ students within this context. We asked how the intersection of Black and LGBTQ+ identities predicted both feelings of school safety and identity valuation and whether those factors operated as unique mechanisms in predicting belonging in school. Our aim was both to speak to broader psychological mechanisms that may meaningfully affect belonging among multiply marginalized youth, as well as to center the voices of Black LGBTQ+ youth in particular.

Method

The current study utilized data collected from a larger survey of students' perceptions of justice in schools ($n = 1,004$); Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from Loyola University Chicago's Institutional Review Board, and participants were recruited between 2021 and 2022. Approximately six high schools and several community organizations in the broader Chicagoland area distributed the surveys to students. To obtain parental consent, schools distributed opt-out forms to parents; if a student's parent opted out, their child was not contacted for participation in the study. Students assented before starting the survey, and they received a \$20 e-gift card.

As the current study sought to center the experiences of students who attended a school where the majority of the student body was Black, here we focused on only three of the high schools initially surveyed. Across the three schools, response rates varied from 43.33% ($n = 179$) at School 1, 34.38% ($n = 142$) from School 2, and 22.28% ($n = 92$) from School 3. Within these three schools, Black students represented 72%–97% of the student bodies. Participants were excluded from the analysis if they failed two of the survey's attention checks (e.g., completed the survey in under 10 min, responded randomly or nonsensically to open response questions; $n = 43$) or did not indicate their race ($n = 21$) or sexual orientation ($n = 24$).

Participants

The final sample consisted of 389 ninth–12th-grade students from three high schools in the Chicagoland area, where the student bodies were predominately Black. Participants' ages ranged from 14 to 19 ($M = 16.10$, $SD = 1.24$). The sample contained more women or girls (52.78%) than men or boys (39.22%) and trans or nonbinary (2.90%) participants. We collapsed racial and sexual identities into binary variables to enhance the statistical power of the analyses. Race was coded into Black ($n = 260$) and non-Black ($n = 132$) categories, and sexual orientation was coded into LGBTQ+ ($n = 131$) and straight ($n = 258$) categories. Straight Black ($n = 170$) students represented most of the sample, followed by LGBTQ+ Black ($n = 88$) and straight non-Black ($n = 88$) students. LGBTQ+ non-Black students were the smallest group ($n = 43$), reflecting the larger demographic makeup of these schools.

Procedure and Measures

Sense of Belonging in Schools

Participants completed the School Engagement scale of the Authoritative School Climate Survey (Cornell, 2015) to indicate their sense of belonging in school. The scale consists of two subscales, the affective and cognitive subscales, that contain three items each. Given that the present study aimed to capture feelings of belonging, analysis centered on students' mean scores on the affective subscale; participants were asked to rate how much they agreed with the following questions on a 4-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*): "I like this school," "I am proud to be a student at this school," and "I feel like I belong at this school." Previous studies have demonstrated the strong reliability of the subscale, with Cronbach's α s ranging from .85 to .96 (Konold & Cornell, 2015). The present study mirrored previous findings, with the three items generating a Cronbach's α score of .89. We averaged responses to these three items to obtain a single measure of school belonging.

School Safety

Participants responded to one item regarding how safe they felt entering school each day on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all safe* to

5 = *completely safe*). This item was strongly correlated with students' school belonging ratings ($r = .53$, $p < .001$).

Identity Valuation

Participants rated the degree to which they "feel like students with my identity/identities are valued" on a 4-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*). This item moderately correlated with students' sense of belonging ($r = .42$, $p < .001$).

Results

Effects of Intersecting Identities on Perceptions of School Safety and Identity Valuation

We tested how the intersection of race and sexual orientation predicted both feelings of school safety and identity valuation. While main effects are described in this section, they should be interpreted with caution (Bowleg, 2008).¹ More specifically, only examining main effects is regarded as an additive approach in quantitative intersectionality research, and researchers recommend instead examining interaction effects (Bowleg & Bauer, 2016). Through this, we are better able to analyze the intersection of one's racial and sexual identities, which is more reflective of one's lived experiences and in line with intersectionality theory, rather than treating the variables like two nonoverlapping constructs (Bowleg, 2008; Bowleg & Bauer, 2016; Hancock, 2007).

We first conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) predicting school safety from race, sexual orientation, and their interaction. We found nonsignificant main effects of race, $F(1, 347) = 1.85$, $p = .18$, and sexual orientation, $F(1, 347) = 0.08$, $p = .780$. There was, however, a significant interaction effect predicting safety, $F(1, 347) = 11.35$, $p = .001$. Among straight students, Black students felt significantly more safe than

¹ We also tested whether a four-level one-way ANOVA would yield similar results to avoid the assumption that race and sexual orientation are separate from one another (Bowleg, 2008). The results followed the same pattern as the two-way ANOVA, which was expected considering the significant interactions. We highlight the two-way ANOVA method since it further provides evidence that identity variables should not be interpreted in isolation of each other and urge other researchers to make similar considerations when studying intersectionality.

non-Black students, $t(347) = 4.23$, $p < .001$. Whereas, among LGBQ+ students, Black and non-Black students did not differ in their sense of safety, $t(347) = 1.21$, $p = .220$. Furthermore, among non-Black students, LGBQ+ students felt more safe at school than straight students, $t(347) = 2.22$, $p = .030$. However, LGBQ+ Black students felt less safe compared to straight Black students, $t(347) = 2.70$, $p = .007$.

Next, we tested the same ANOVA model predicting identity valuation from race, sexual orientation, and their interaction. We found no significant main effect of race on identity valuation, $F(1, 348) = 0.07$, $p = .790$. There was a marginal main effect of LGBQ+ identity, $F(1, 348) = 3.36$, $p = .068$, such that LGBQ+ students felt somewhat less valued in terms of their identity than straight students but not statistically significantly so. We again found a significant interaction effect, $F(1, 348) = 3.87$, $p = .050$. Among straight students, Black students felt similar identity valuation as non-Black students, $t(348) = 1.53$, $p = .130$. Among LGBQ+ students, Black and non-Black students also did not differ in their sense of identity valuation, $t(348) = 1.35$, $p = .180$. Furthermore, among non-Black students, LGBQ+ students felt similar identity valuation relative to straight students, $t(348) = 0.08$, $p = .940$. Still, LGBQ+ Black students felt significantly less identity valuation compared to straight Black students, $t(347) = 3.31$, $p = .001$.

Moderated Mediation

We tested a broader model expanding beyond these interactions to consider how school safety and identity valuation may act as unique mechanisms in predicting school belonging. Specifically, we explored whether the relationship between sexual identity and sense of school belonging was mediated, simultaneously, by school safety and identity valuation and whether these effects were moderated by participants' racial identity. Moderated mediation analysis was conducted using Model 58 of Hayes' PROCESS (Hayes, 2013) macro. Model 58 was chosen because it allowed us to further examine race's unique influence on the relationships between the mediating variables and sense of belonging. Overall, the direct effect of sexual identity on the sense of school belonging became nonsignificant, $b = -0.05$, $t(346) = -1.28$, $p = .202$, 95% confidence interval (CI) $[-0.11$,

$0.03]$, while its indirect effects through school safety and identity valuation were significant and dependent upon participants' race, suggesting full moderated mediations (Figure 1).

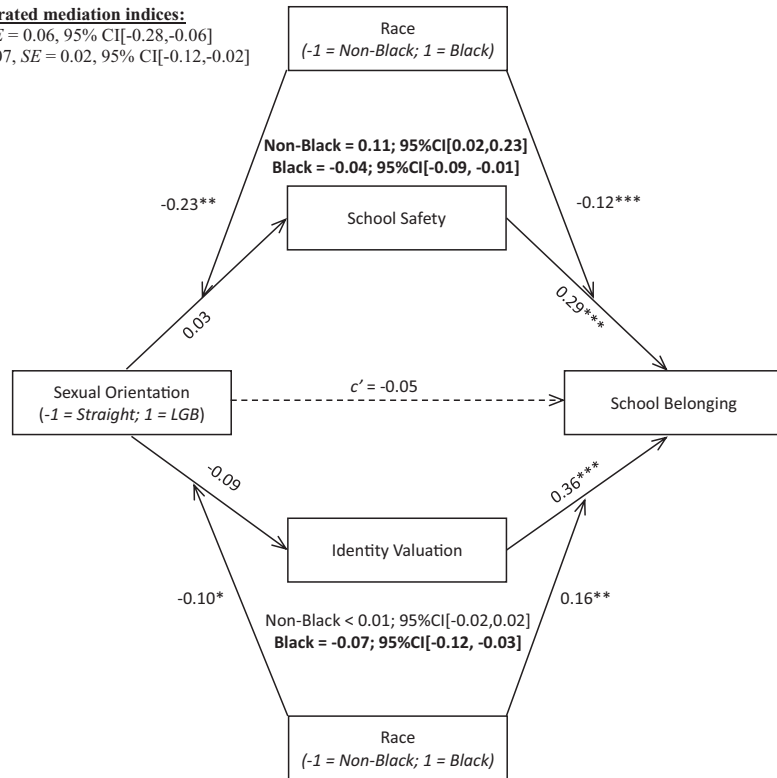
School Safety

There was a significant indirect effect of sexual identity on school belonging through school safety, and while this mediation existed for both racial groups, the direction of this effect depended on participants' race (index of moderated mediation $= -0.16$, $SE = .06$, 95% CI $[-0.28, -0.06]$). For LGBQ+ non-Black participants, the intersection of their identities predicted more feelings of safety than their non-Black straight peers and subsequently increased school belonging ($b = 0.11$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI $[0.02, 0.23]$). However, for LGBQ+ Black participants, the intersection of their identities predicted less safety than their Black straight peers and, subsequently, less belonging ($b = -0.04$, $SE = .02$, 95% CI $[-0.09, -0.01]$).

The model also suggested that race significantly moderated the relationship between school safety and sense of belonging in school ($b = -0.12$, $SE = .03$, $p = .001$). For all participants, feeling safer in school significantly predicted a higher sense of belonging ($b = 0.20$, $SE = .33$, $p < .001$). A simple effects t test demonstrated, however, that the effect of school safety on belonging may be stronger for non-Black students, $b = 0.45$, $SE = .06$, $t(346) = 7.74$, $p < .001$, than for Black students, $b = 0.22$, $SE = .04$, $t(346) = 5.80$, $p < .001$.

Identity Valuation

There was a significant indirect effect of sexual identity on the sense of belonging through identity valuation, but only among Black participants (index of moderated mediation $= -0.07$, $SE = .02$, 95% CI $[-0.12, -0.02]$). Among non-Black students, perceptions of identity valuation did not differ based on sexual orientation, $b = 0.01$, $SE = .08$, $t(348) = 0.08$, $p = .934$, 95% CI $[-0.15, 0.16]$, nor did they significantly predict school belonging, $b = 0.16$, $SE = .07$, $t(348) = 0.70$, $p = .484$, 95% CI $[-0.10, 0.20]$. Conversely, the intersection of Black identity and sexual orientation significantly predicted students' sense of identity valuation, $b = -0.18$, $SE = .06$, $t(346) = -3.36$, $p = .001$, 95% CI $[-0.29, -0.08]$, which influenced their feelings

Figure 1*Moderated Mediation Analysis***Participant race moderated mediation indices:**School safety: -0.16 , $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI $[-0.28, -0.06]$ Identity valuation: -0.07 , $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI $[-0.12, -0.02]$ 

Note. Statistically significant indirect effects are bolded. LGB = lesbian, gay, and bisexual.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .10$. *** $p < .001$.

of school belonging, $b = 0.36$, $SE = .06$, $t(348) = 6.33$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.25, 0.48]. For Black students, identifying as straight was associated with feeling more valued, which was associated with a greater sense of belonging. Black LGBTQ+ students, however, were less likely to feel valued by their school and, as a consequence, reported lower levels of school belonging.

Discussion

We explored the influence of safety and identity valuation in promoting school belonging as a function of Black and LGBTQ+ identities, with a particular goal to understand the experiences of Black LGBTQ+ youth. Black LGBTQ+ high school students within majority Black schools felt less safe and felt their identities were less valued relative to their straight Black peers, and this was associated with lower levels of school belonging.

Furthermore, while our findings replicated past work suggesting the importance of safety in predicting belonging, we noted that this connection was less strong among Black students, suggesting that efforts to promote safety may not be one size fits all and schools should consider the needs of different groups of students. Finally, we found that only among Black students, identity valuation served as an additional unique mechanism explaining deficits in belonging among LGBTQ+ students.

These findings raise questions about how school context uniquely impacts students' feelings of belonging, especially at schools where the majority of students are Black. Contrary to prior research on feelings of school safety, the present study found that non-Black LGBTQ+ students felt safer in school than their non-Black straight peers and that Black students felt safer in school than non-Black students. One explanation for this could be that institutions where the majority

of students are Black may inherently foster positive racial development, but not for all students. For example, research on historically Black colleges and universities has found that attending historically Black colleges and universities increases Black students' cultural awareness or self-confidence (Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002) but finds their sexual identities othered (e.g., Patton & Simmons, 2008). Black LGBTQ+ people live within what theorists describe as a "troubling intersection," wherein social constructions of Blackness have been associated with heterosexuality, while queerness has been considered exclusively white (Kumashiro, 2001). As such, Black LGBTQ+ students may conceal their sexual identities or avoid spaces where they feel that they may encounter discrimination based on the intersection of their racial and sexual identity (Cech & Waidzun, 2011). On the contrary, non-Black LGBTQ+ students might engage more with affinity spaces for LGBTQ+ students where they can foster feelings of community and resiliency. Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of not only considering the social categories that students' identities exist within but also the social context they occupy (Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016).

Belonging is a valuable construct highly relevant to understanding social cohesion (Schiefer & Van der Noll, 2017), and data from the present study highlight how youth with differing identities experience school belonging. However, social relations (in addition to belonging), identifying with institutions, and acting for the common good have each been identified as additional key components to fostering socially cohesive collectives (Schiefer & Van der Noll, 2017). Though outside the scope of the present study, future research should consider how Black LGBTQ+ students, or other youth with multiply marginalized identities, may differ in their experiences of these other dimensions and subdimensions of social cohesion. Extending this work to better understand how social cohesion, in its myriad forms, is experienced across different social groups, and especially incorporating youth perspectives outside of what is considered normative by dominant groups, has the potential to inform equitable policies related to school inclusion.

Limitations and Future Directions

Our model expands upon a great deal of past work that has considered safety as a predictor

of belonging (K. A. Allen & Kern, 2017); however, these data are cross-sectional and correlational, precluding causal interpretations. It is possible that belonging and safety may reciprocally impact one another. Additionally, we provided evidence for identity valuation as a unique and meaningful predictor of belonging, over and above feelings of safety, particularly for Black LGBTQ+ youth. Our measure of identity valuation did not distinguish, however, which identities students intended with their responses. Students may have answered this question with only one identity in mind or with a more holistic integration of their identities. Further work is needed to unpack what students intended when they referred to the experience of identity valuation, especially in the hopes of articulating what specific efforts made by schools convey that feeling.

As we focused on the experience of predominantly Black participants in majority Black schools, these data may not generalize to individuals identifying with other racial identities or who attend schools with other demographic compositions. However, we sacrificed potential generalizability, in this case, to highlight the voices of Black LGBTQ+ students, who are underrepresented in the research literature. By narrowing our focus, we were able to highlight how schools may have to tailor their outreach and inclusion efforts in ways that speak to the needs of Black LGBTQ+ students, especially in majority Black schools. Not all efforts at inclusion work in the same way for all people, and for some students, a sense of belonging in the broader community may require direct affirmation of individual group identities. One approach is to hire and retain staff that share identities with these students, with the promotion of these staff into leadership positions as an even stronger message of identity valuation.

Recommendations for Research, Policy, and Practice

Our findings suggested that the intersection of students' dominant and nondominant identities predicted different feelings of safety, identity valuation, and belonging in school, with Black LGBTQ+ students scoring lowest on these metrics. Black LGBTQ+ students have been historically silenced within schools, research, and policy action (Brockenbrough, 2015). While these data cannot directly answer what has caused Black LGBTQ+ students to experience school in this

way or how to best solve this issue, we can make recommendations to address these disparities. One way that practitioners, school leaders, and scientific scholars could foster identity valuation among Black LGBTQ+ students is to center their voices. At the community level, there are a number of organizations across the country that center and empower Black LGBTQ+ identities in this way, including the Brave Space Alliance in Chicago, Black and Latino LGBTQ Coalition in Harlem, New York, and Kentucky Black Pride Inc. Within social science research, utilizing a critical or participatory approach, which engages youth in research, could work to provide Black LGBTQ+ youth the opportunity to create solutions to the problems they actively face, by placing them in an empowering leadership position (McIntyre, 2000). While more research is needed on how to best enhance identity valuation among Black LGBTQ+ students in school, this recommendation could be a worthwhile application or future research avenue.

Finally, the present study highlighted that school safety and identity valuation could be meaningful mechanisms in fostering a sense of belonging among Black LGBTQ+ students. As such, efforts should be made to create school environments where Black LGBTQ+ students feel safe and that all aspects of their identity are valued. Affinity groups are one potential avenue for increasing Black LGBTQ+ students' safety, as research has demonstrated that ethnic or cultural clubs increase feelings of belonging and safety among Black students (Truong et al., 2020). Implementing programs within affinity spaces that focus on sexual identity could further support Black LGBTQ+ students in majority-Black schools, especially since these schools are less likely to have gender and sexuality alliances (Truong et al., 2020). Program elements that integrate both students' racial and sexual identity can increase awareness of one's own biases as well as a mutual understanding of others (Otis & Loeffler, 2005; Schuitema & Veugelers, 2011). These elements might include components particularly related to youth activism, as past research has shown that Black LGBTQ+ youths' engagement in activism might reduce the harmful consequences of experiencing discrimination in school (Frost et al., 2019). By helping youth shift from a "problem-focused" to a "possibility-focused" view of social issues, school leaders can develop spaces where Black LGBTQ+ youth can develop critical consciousness (Watts et al., 2011) and

engage in radical healing (Frost et al., 2019). A better understanding of Black queer students' experiences, with additional considerations of school context, could serve as an important way to determine what support they need to feel like they belong in school.

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