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SPILLING THE TEA, MEMOIR OF A FUTURE'S PAST: A SCHOLARLY
PERSONAL NARRATIVE

by

DOMINIQUE JEROME HECTOR

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the graduate faculty of The University of Alabama at Birmingham,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

2023

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SPILLING THE TEA, MEMOIR OF A FUTURE'S PAST:
A SCHOLARLY PERSONAL NARRATIVE

DOMINIQUE JEROME HECTOR

HEALTH EDUCATION/PROMOTION

ABSTRACT

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) individuals and topics have been at the precipice of media coverage and policy decisions for decades. With the passage of same sex marriage by the Supreme Court in 2015, this ushered in a new era of unearthing narratives that are unique to LGBTQ+ identities. Although this is a huge advancement for this population here within the United States, scholars have posited how these identities intersecting with other social constructs such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and social justice have reimaged how LGBTQ+ identities are viewed and treated in the country. Although there is still much work to be done in liberating and protecting this population, there is still a need for narratives that are uniquely intersectional and spills the tea (expounds) upon the day to day lives of these identities and how we may utilize these experiences to circumvent areas of oppression in the future.

The objective of this dissertation is to employ a Scholarly Personal Narrative to expound upon the lived experiences of a Queer, Black, Haitian, man as he navigated the K-12 educational sphere in Alabama. This work uses interdisciplinary qualitative methods and theoretical approaches ranging from introspective analysis, narrative inquires, thematic coding and storytelling. Additionally, a myriad of concepts was

reviewed in order to speak to the social, political, health, and educational factors associated with navigating, teaching, and mentoring the K-12 experience. Moreover, I conducted a ZOOM interview with a member of my dissertation committee to ascertain rich personal and academic experiences which are expounded through my findings. Nevertheless, this dissertation examines and challenges the status quo of K-12 experiences for a specific Black, Queer, Haitian man in the Deep South in America.

Keywords: LGBTQ+, Scholarly Personal Narrative, Borderland Theoretical Approach, All Tea, All Shade, Education, K-12, Higher Education Experience, Public Health

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to every individual who identifies as Black or Queer. To the young men, women, and non-binary individuals who will one day inherit the keys to the kingdom. Thank you for leading transformational and resilient lives.

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Family: I would like to first take this time to acknowledge my mom who was my very first teacher, friend, bully, and confidant. Your unique outlook on life has shaped me in ways I could never repay you for. To my father who was my first role model, challenger, and competitor. Your dual outlook on life has taught me to lean into chaos and balance. To my great grandparents and grandparents. Immigrating to this country from Haiti and not completing high school gave me the determination to carry out your wildest dreams. To my Aunts Dianne and Tiffany who gave me the space to be vulnerable in safety. In a world where Black bodies are constantly confronted with violence, we need souls like you two to foster healing. To my sister Ashleigh, who was the first friend that I had who loved and accepted me unconditionally. Your laughter is infectious, and your attitude is uncanny. To my niece Sakari, who reawakened my cold heart. You continue to teach me what my heart can truly do. To my love, Bobby, thank you for seeing me as the man I am. Thank you for coming into my life in a season of winter and forcing me to spring. To my family, I cannot thank you enough. I love you all!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

High school students (grades 9-12) are experiencing adverse events that vary in emotional and physical intensity. The presence of many social phenomena speaks to the need to develop models for effectively observing these phenomena and designing strategic programs that provide appropriate support. Social factors such as social-emotional learning (SEL), conflict resolution, HIV/STI prevention and treatment, emotional intelligence, sexual decision-making, healthy relationships, gender identity and expression, mental health awareness, and unstable housing/homelessness are phenomena that affect the success of LGBTQ+ youth. The introduction of teacher mentors in school systems and districts may serve as the catalyst needed to address these disparities in marginalized communities. Although there are interventions present to address mentorship, only one has been adopted by the Center of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to introduce this framework nationwide. Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) is the CDC's academic and health framework that emphasizes connections between health and academic achievement, the importance of evidence-based school policies and the community in the aiding the school (Lever et al., 2023). In laymen terms, the WSCC model invites practitioners to consider the psychosocial and physical environments in conjunction with the institution of family and community agencies with a goal of improving childhood health behaviors and development. Additionally, an added benefit to the WSCC model is that this framework is commonly

utilized by districts and schools across the U.S. for its probability in addressing mental health while allowing for the evolution of existing work and the design and implementation of future works (Lewallen et al., 2015). Subsequently, WSCC invites practitioners to utilize a multitiered team approach that consists of the following identities: teachers, administrators, nurses, and parents/students (Lever et al., 2023). Moreover, The CDC offers additional resources for LGBTQ+ youth through professional development for teachers, administrators, and healthcare workers, creating safe and inclusive classrooms, and evaluation resources of implemented programs. The CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) results revealed a myriad of behaviors such as bullying, sexual health risks, unintentional violence and alcohol and drug use that were equal to or higher than the national average here within the state of Alabama (CDC, 2022). Additionally, these behaviors are key areas of concern for practitioners and researchers who service the LGBTQ+ population.

Mentorship

Mentorship is defined as an evolved partnership between the mentor and mentee that emphasizes taking turns to lead around conceptualizing, writing, and presenting (Diamond & Mullen, 1996). However, scholars have posited that mentorship is the process of one individual providing specialized support while inviting another individual to participate in the behavior change process (Bush, 2009). This form of mentorship is often observed on the higher education level and is commonly thought of as a finished product. For this dissertation and this population, mentorship encompasses these topics: social emotional learning (the process of developing the self-awareness, self-control, and

interpersonal skills that are vital for schoolwork and life success), , emotional intelligence (which is the ability to manage the emotions of oneself and understand those of others) and emphasizes these skills 1. self-awareness, 2. self-regulation, 3. motivation, 4. empathy and 5. social skills , mental health awareness, and healthy relationships which involve honesty, trust, respect, and open communication. It is paramount that mentorship services be offered to Black Queer youth. In a world where there are constant inflictions plaguing society from health disparities, diminishment of rights, and stigma, we must be knowledgeable of the physical, emotional, and intellectual threats that impact our youth. Additionally, we must educate our youth on the expanding social issues from domestic violence, mass incarceration, and mass shootings. According to Healthy People 2030, mitigating disparities for LGBTQ+ individuals of are of top priority. Specifically, the goal is to improve the health, safety, and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people (ODPHP, 2021). Mentors need to be equipped with knowledge about LGBTQ+ youth because it allows them to explore the full personhood of queer and trans children and offer specific and particularized resources for a vulnerable population.

Knowledge of Available Resources

Sexuality Education Resource Center, STI/HIV Prevention and Treatment which consist of targeted strategies are implored to reduce the risk of sexually transmitted infections and human immunodeficiency virus. These measures include: 1. getting regularly screened for STI's and HIV, 2. choosing less risky sexual behaviors, 3. using condoms every time you have sex, 4. limiting your number of sexual partners, 5. getting tested and treated for STIs, 6. talking to your health care provider about pre-exposure

prophylaxis (PrEP), and 7. not injecting drugs. These things plus awareness of mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression as well as the unstable housing of queer and trans youth are some of the things that all mentors hoping to work with this population should understand. Studies have shown that a lack of teacher mentorship can disrupt a seamless transition in students' lives from middle school (6-8) to high school (9-12) arena (Stolz & Pill, 2013). Indeed, Stolz and Pill (2013) recommends developing classroom practices that enable students to see their potential, support their needs, build their agency, and encourage mentorship in students. When viewing outcomes for mentorship for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ+) students it is imperative to address that many opportunities are nonexistent in their respective communities. Since same sex marriage was legalized in 2015, there has been continued support for the expansion of LGBTQ+ rights by people who recognize the humanity of queer and trans individuals. This has even increased the amount of funding and support for services within the LGBTQ+ community. Although there is widespread support for LGBTQ+ rights in the United States, there are still many entities such as politicians, at the national, state, and local levels that oppose expanding services for the LGBTQ+ population.

Barriers for LGBTQ+ Populations

There has been a national increase in discriminatory policies such as Florida's HB 1557, commonly referred to as the "Don't Say Gay" bill, Alabama's HB 322, which prohibits transgender youth from utilizing sport and locker room facilities that correspond with their preferred gender (Public Health, 2022) in addition to barring classroom

discussion in public schools around LGBTQ+ identities and SB 184, which states that it is a felony for a medical professional to provide gender affirming care such as hormone blockers or hormone replacement therapy to anyone in the state ages 18 and below (Public School, 2022).

Religiosity and spirituality also serve as barriers to the social and political protection of queer and trans people. Religiosity and spirituality play an integral role in the daily lives of many people in the south, particularly in Alabama. When discussing religion and spirituality, it is vitally important to remember that both are layered and nuanced in nature. Scholars have posited that religion encompasses formal sets of beliefs/practices that are affiliated with an acknowledged religious authority and includes professed visible acts such as praying before meals, attending worship services, and reading sacred texts (Watkins et al., 2016; Davis et al., 2003; Coyle, 2002). If you grew up in the yellowhammer state, then you know that there is nothing more salient in Alabama than God and football. However, as mentors, we must be mindful of the religious and spiritual walks that Alabamians are navigating. This may seem self-explanatory but to truly understand why religion and spirituality are salient we must discuss the unique experience that individuals in the state of Alabama are experiencing. Many Alabamians are born into their religions. Traditionally, before Alabamians can speak, they are conditioned into religious practices. This may look like having a christening ceremony when the child is still an infant. During this ceremony, immediate members of the individuals' families present the child to the church so that the preacher/reverend may prophesize over the child and ask God to watch over the child and the adults in the life of the child as they mentor and usher the child into the religion. It is

expected that this will facilitate the process of leading a life that is Christ-like once the child transitions from an infant/child to an adolescent. During the adolescent stage of the child's life is when they may decide to be baptized into the religion that they have been christened into.

This might seem like a seamless process for anyone who identifies as cisgender and heterosexual. However, if an individual deviates from the established norm, they will be met with discrimination and mistreatment that will ultimately cause them to experience intersecting oppression. Those youth living at the intersections of oppressive systems are also often denied access to the resource that they need. These resources are structured to support their emotional, social, and physical well-being. Without resource providers who understand the unique experiences of queer and trans people's lives, they will undoubtedly be subjected to systems that do not recognize their full humanity.

Gaps in Resources

There are resources that are present within the greater Birmingham community. Services such as LGBTQ+ youth drop-in centers and Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) provide physical and mental health services in urban communities such as Birmingham (Budhwani, et al., 2022). Although there are specialized services that address these disparities, there is still a need for coordinated and collective efforts to address the unique needs of LGBTQ+ students in grades 9 - 12. Wrap around services are defined as a comprehensive, holistic, youth and family driven way of responding when children or youth experience serious mental health or behavioral challenges. Specifically for the LGBTQ+ community, wrap around services are a lifesaving tool that

are beneficial to mentoring and supporting the LGBTQ+ student population. Moreover, wrap around services encompass ten central components: 1) family voice and choice, 2) team based, 3) natural supports, 4) collaboration, 5) community based, 6) culturally competent, 7) individualized, 8) strengths based, 9) unconditional, and 10) outcomes based (Bruns et al, 2004 pp.4-10). Additionally, religious, and spiritual guidance is another area of mentoring that teachers should be knowledgeable in.

Religion encompasses a formal belief of practices that are associated with a monotheistic or polytheistic authority and includes professed acts of worship, praying before meals, or the reading of sacred texts. (Watkins et al. 2016; Davis et al. 2003; Coyle, 2002). Spirituality on the other hand posits that there is a personal connectedness with a higher power utilizing intrinsic properties in their relationship with God (Watkins, 2016). It is imperative that mentors of this community be conscious of the religious and spiritual struggles of students. In my own personal experience, being shunned from the church due to my sexuality and gender expression have impacted my religious relationship with the church. Those tough experiences shaped my spiritual connectedness to a higher power which governs my morality and how I interpret and express my opinions daily. Mental health services on high school campuses are limited especially depending on their positionality within urban and rural settings. Moreover, it is imperative that communities that service the LGBTQ+ student population have access to drop-in centers, strategic programming, and social media outlets that allow ease of communication between mentors, facilities, and students.

Dimensions of Health

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity (WHO, 2020). Although this concept was essential in the early 20th century, health has evolved into a holistic framework in the 21st century. The dimensions of health also known as the dimensions of wellness encompass eight levels of wellness that intersect to speak to the holistic wellness of individuals. These eight dimensions are: physical, emotional, environmental, social, spiritual, intellectual, occupational, and financial health. Coined by Dr. Bill Hettler, the dimensions of wellness have been cited by an array of scholars and practitioners have contributed to the expansion of the model by adding the financial and occupational dimensions (Montoya & Summers, 2021). In the realm of education, specifically within grades 9 - 12, holistic approaches are essential to surviving and thriving in the south as an LGBTQ+ youth. Moreover, integrated programs and strategies are needed as resources that address the intersecting oppression that LGBTQ+ students in grades 9-12 are experiencing. Health disparities such as rising anxiety and depression rates, increases in suicide attempts, increases in prescription opioid overdoses, and post-traumatic stress disorder diagnoses are all areas of concern for this population. Additionally, social constructs such as gender, race, socioeconomic status (SES) and sexuality are intersecting with the health disparities to manifest forms of intersecting oppression. When three or more social constructs intersect to oppress an individual's access to resources or identity, that individual is experiencing intersecting oppression (Collins, 2006).

Exemplars of Dimensions of Health/Wellness

There are many charter schools answering the call to service students from marginalized communities and identities. The Magic City Acceptance Academy or (MCAA) is the first charter school in the state of Alabama that has a specific focus on LGBTQ+ inclusivity as well as marginalized identities being in a safe and brave space for students to learn and grow as well as develop into leaders of their respective communities. When it comes to MCAA specifically, its purpose, existence, and significance of it being in Alabama for the South speaks to many individuals within the area. In Alabama, it is understood that across the south the state is known as one of the Bible Belt states specifically from South Carolina all the way down to Mississippi. Additionally, because of that designation there have been a great deal of hardships that are specifically unique towards the LGBTQ + community. Moreover, in that same space it is also understood that the representation of the LGBTQ+ community is very limited especially in spaces of education. Due to this limitation, many of these states in the South are at will states. Therefore, administration can fire a teacher for any reason. All administrators must do is say the word and vice versa for teachers. At will means an individual can leave at the drop of a dime if they choose to end. So, with that aspect, many limitations exist around protections legally being in place in the South and specifically in Alabama. MCAA's existence is game-changing and innovative in its own space because it boldly provides a platform for true LGBTQ+ plus advancement and advocacy within Alabama. Moreover, MCAA also serves as a launch pad for the Bible Belt to start mimicking the same practices and acquiring progression among our work in our community. Furthermore, we must discuss research and politics around the

limitations that these laws create for LGBTQ+ student Alabamians, discuss how many anti-LGBTQ+ laws exist in Alabama and how these laws have overarching ramifications for marginalized communities if left unaddressed. Therefore, MCAA in essence is also showing a flaw in the education system that education does not always align with law. Moreover, at the end of the day, by law the school must provide education to every single student. Additionally, by law it does not matter the social markers of the child, institutions should care for or acknowledge the existence of these students and provide services for them. Additionally, MCAA is the first public charter school in the country and specifically in the south that encompasses LGBTQ+ students in grades 6 - 12. Contrary to their southern counterparts, The Harvey Milk High School in New York City (NYC), New York is a small transfer school servicing students in grades 9 - 12. The mission of Harvey Milk High School is to “establish and promote a community of successful and independent learners by creating a safe educational environment for all young people”. Adding to the mission, HMHS expresses that the school is designed for students grades 9 - 12 who have struggled in a previous educational setting in need of an additional opportunity in an alternative setting (HMHS, 2021). Furthermore, for the purposes of this dissertation, we will focus on the Magic City Acceptance academy due to its unique positioning as a public charter school located within the bible belt of Alabama. The Magic City Acceptance Academy’s intersecting identities such as: being a public charter school, servicing students within grades 6-12 in the state of Alabama, and its commitment to LGBTQ+ affirmation positions the institution at the intersections of intersecting oppression from the greater Alabama communities.

Intersecting Oppression

There is a plethora of examples that support the notion that charter schools are a suitable approach when servicing marginalized populations. However, where these institutions are lacking are the intersections of oppression that face these students. When students of color are in the building, it is likely for them to experience microaggressions, micro assaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations because of implicit bias (Franklin, 2016). Sex, sexuality, and gender are often three concepts that are conflated and confused with one another in the everyday conversations within American culture. In a society that is conditioned to believe the traditional heteronormative binary, these concepts are portrayed as quite simple. Sex is what an individual is assigned at birth. Male or female. It checks the box of the binary. Sexuality is what an individual identifies with sexually. Traditionally an individual's sexuality can be heterosexual (attracted to the opposite sex) or homosexual (attracted to the same sex). In the 21st century, sexuality scholars posit that there are endless possibilities for sexualities because sexuality evolves along a spectrum. Gender is defined as choices an individual makes that expresses themselves. Traditionally, gender would be expressed based upon the sex that is assigned at birth which is a reinforcing factor. Knowing that the individual constructs have oppressive characteristics, it is within this moment the constructs have the opportunity to "intersect". The concept of intersectionality derives from early women's and queer studies. Scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa, a Chicana queer and feminist scholar whose work augmented discussions around intersections of race, gender, immigration status, and sexuality through the *borderland/La Frontera* approach (Chun et al., 2013). However, Kimberle Williams Crenshaw was the first to coin the term intersectionality in 1989 in her work related to race and womanhood in the workforce. Carastathis (2016) notes that

intersectionality is the study of overlapping or intersecting identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination (Carastathis, 2016). Collins (2006) extends this notion of intersectionality to speak to the overlapping structures of oppression that impact intersectional identities.

Similarly, my own intersectional identities Black, Queer, Assigned Male at Birth (AMAB), Young Adult (age of 30 and below), and Haitian cast a cloud of oppression, discrimination and turmoil that is deleterious to opportunities around career advancement, education, mentorship, housing, and healthcare access for marginalized identities. This in mind, this dissertation looks at the lived experience of a Black gay male educator, me – Dominique Hector, working at an LGBTQ+ charter school to unearth innovative frameworks for teachers supporting and mentoring LGBTQ+ youth.

Problem Statement

Specifically, the problem I seek to address is a lack of teacher mentorship for LGBTQ+ youth ages 14 - 18 in the state of Alabama. Recently in the state of Alabama, the passage of SB 184 (banning of gender affirming medical care for any LGBTQ+ individual under 19) and HB 322 (banning of LGBTQ+ students using preferred gender restrooms and locker rooms) have signaled to conservative republicans within the state that LGBTQ+ youth health outcomes are of minimal concerns. The Alabama State Legislature allowed and passed bills that limit the rights of LGBTQ+ youth within the state. Alabama's Governor Kay Ivey finalized and signed these Anti-LGBTQ+ bills into law. For those unfamiliar with this process, bills are voted out of committees into debate and passage in the House & Senate, and then "forwarded" to Governor's desk for a signature. Therefore, this collective government body have sentenced thousands of

LGBTQ+ youth to restrooms, classrooms, and medical waiting rooms that are unwelcoming and unsafe for them. This sentenced thousands of LGBTQ+ youth in Alabama to utilizing restrooms and locker rooms that align with their sex assigned at birth but not the one that corresponds with who they truly are. Additionally, this sentenced minors to years of emotional, social, and spiritual oppression, as their rights to lifesaving and affirming care were denied. Having teacher mentors who are aware of the political sphere within this state can speak against the many atrocities that are perpetuated by local and state politicians. Allowing teacher mentors and certified health education specialists (CHES) to guide and plant knowledge around identity development, socioeconomic status, politics, healthcare outcomes, risk mitigation, and advocating and organizing are key elements to ensure thriving for LGBTQ+ youth rather than simply surviving.

Significance of the Study

This work is significant and matters because when LGBTQ+ students do not receive needed mentoring they experience intersecting oppression. This form of mentorship where teachers work alongside students is beneficial in nature. When creating safe and cultivated spaces, teacher mentors must be aware of the struggles that LGBTQ+ youth are experiencing. As mentioned above, there is a plethora of legislation that is aimed at these identities that imply feelings of abandonment, disdain, rejection, and anger. For example, within the United States there has been an increase of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation proposed. Bills such as Florida's Don't Say Bill and Alabama's SB 184 have signaled to other states such as Texas, Arkansas, and Arizona to draft bills that target this population. Moreover, there has been an influx of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation in as many as

15 states throughout the country. This study aims to speak to the many atrocities that are happening within this population and how teacher mentors can be catalysts in supporting LGBTQ+ youth as they thrive.

Purpose Statement

This scholarly personal narrative was written to share my own personal experience as a Black gay Haitian male educator navigating my way through the 9-12 educational experience. I hope to provide readers some very personal insight to who I am, what it is to have an intersectional identity on the margins and desperately need a mentor to guide you while attending high school in the United States. The purpose of this work is to be transparent, brutally honest, and open about this specific experience in my life and to also provide insight as to what I really needed during this academic time, and what I believe others like me may still need. Ultimately, the purpose of this work is to write a love letter to the LGBTQ+ community and mentors of the community to say thank you. You were needed. You were appreciated, but the work is not yet done. We need more. We need a formalized system. We need advocacy. We need you, the reader, to respond.

Research Question

This qualitative study is guided by one overarching research question and two sub-questions. These are as follows:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of a Black gay Haitian male educator who has navigated the K-12 experience needing a mentor?

SQ1: What supportive strategies and resources were available?

SQ2: What interventions were used to navigate the K-12 space?

Borderland Theoretical Framework

Culture, identity, and early theoretical frameworks have been instrumental in the design process of qualitative research. An example of this is from Hudson's work around Chicana Feminism. Hudson (2012), referencing the work of Anzaldua (1987), Hurtado (2003), and Moraga & Anzaldua (1981), argues that a borderland approach is a liminal space that generates and resolves conflict; it is situated both physically and symbolically between domination and resistance, but also a *home* with the power to restore and transform.

However, Anzaldua's (1987) borderland framework posits that a borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary (Perales, 2013). It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants...Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot. The only 'legitimate' inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites. Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest reside there, and death is no stranger (pp. 3-4).

Moreover, there are spaces that emphasize healing and liberation on a myriad of levels: communal, familial, national, and political. Moreover, Thurlow-Brenner argues that "in each case, the primary purpose of the approach is the comparison or the borders themselves, rather than a subsidiary element or afterthought" (p. 4). For this research, a borderland theoretical framework has been created utilizing Anzaldua (1987) approach. It is critical that when utilizing the borderland approach that all borders are being turned to view phenomena from a specific lens. Within this study the connecting borders of Critical

Race Theory, Queer Theory and Symbolic Interactionism have been utilized to create the lens of a borderland theoretical framework. The specific borderland framework for this study, *All Tea, All Shade*, will be discussed in depth in chapter 3.

Overview of the Methodology

The selected methodology for this research study is a Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) which aims to tell the stories of vulnerable populations within qualitative research (Nash & Viray, 2013). First defended at the University of Vermont, SPN has since spread throughout the country to speak to the many social injustices experienced by marginalized communities. These marginalized communities encompass individuals of varying social constructs of identity based on social class, race, religion, gender, sexual orientations, nationalities, disabilities, and the like. These constructs are at the center of how individuals see and *understand* the world. As mentioned in Nash and Vicay's (2013) article, SPN centers around personal interpretation, perspective, and translation. Additionally, SPN is grounded in the belief that our lives carry meaning and that we all have stories to share that have the potential to inspire others to learn about themselves and their relation to the world. Lastly, SPN challenges and calls qualitative scholars to connect themes from their personal narratives to larger worldviews and implications (Nash, 2004).

Understanding Narratives

For this study, I am approaching this work from a unique and nuanced experience. Growing up in the southern part of the United States specifically in Alabama, it is easy to garner a certain perception of what LGBTQ+ looks like. Narratives are based upon experiences, and they are a product of memory. These narratives can be centered around a central subject or ideology. Therefore, the major assumption of this work is that I accurately remembered my experiences and interactions during my K-12 high school experience.

Limitations

There are some limitations within this work. This work is limited to a single story. There is always concern for one's own emotions. SPN may create a space for extreme reflective emotions that may allow the author a bit of self-indulgence. With indulgence comes the concern for bias noting that the reliability of the narrator may be in question for distorting whether intentional or not the truth of the narrative from their perspective. And there is also the concern that the reader's experience with the subject matter is narrowed by the one-sided perspective provided by the scholar telling the story, and his/her/their in-/ability to introduce themselves and who they truly are from an outside perspective while having wholly an insider perspective. The question then becomes, how does the scholar narrate their own identity without some form of bias or skewed lens? The answer to this question is that bias is not rejected but is embraced. It is the dissonance one lives in.

Terms & Definitions

In the following section, a list of terms and definitions have been provided to assist readers who may not be familiar with some language and concepts shared within the work.

- *Ally*: An ally is an individual who speaks out and stands up for a person or group that is targeted and discriminated against. An ally works to end oppression by supporting and advocating for people who are stigmatized, discriminated against, or treated unfairly. For the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ+) communities, an ally is any person who supports and stands up for the rights of LGBTQ+ people.
- *Assigned at Birth*: Commonly utilized by trans individuals, the term illustrates that the individual's sex (and subsequently gender in early life) was assigned without involving the person whose sex was being assigned. Commonly seen as "Female Assigned at Birth" (FAAB or AFAB) and "Male Assigned at Birth" (MAAB or AMAB).
- *Bisexual*: A person who is attracted to members of more than one gender; does not have to be a preference for one gender over another.
- *Black Activist Mothering*: this is defined as a position of strength, courage, and brilliance that encourages Black women to be in conversation and community with elder Black women to make sense of the present.
- *Black Queer Theory*: the deployment of various black studies works or specific contexts lesser known in queer studies to discuss "LGBTQ topics" or to launch a

queer argument. Mapping local and trans-local genealogies, trajectories, and commitments of black [and] queer politics and expressive culture,

- *Borderland Theoretical Approach*: the concept of borders, geographical and otherwise, as instruments that are socially produced. It utilizes Gloria Anzaldua's theoretical framework of Borderlands theory as a set of processes that seek to attain the decolonization of the inner self.
- *Cisgender*: Someone who identifies with the gender identity/expression expectations assigned to them based on their physical sex at birth.
- *Critical Race Theory*: is an academic and legal framework that denotes that systemic racism is part of American society — from education and housing to employment and healthcare. Critical Race Theory recognizes that racism is more than the result of individual bias and prejudice.
- *Determination*: In the realm of Health Education and Promotion, self-determination theory focuses on autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and motivation when predicting the health and wellness outcomes of individuals.
- *Discipline*: Discipline means not giving up when things go south and refusing to succumb to your current circumstances.
- *Folx*: a way of writing "folks" (= people) that emphasizes the fact that you intend the word to include all groups of people.
- *Freedom*: This freedom is unknown to many of the African American diaspora due to the constant political, social, and psychic attacks of white supremacy and capitalism through the media which mimic many of the sociological effects of slavery on the African American self-identity and cultural orientation.

- *Gay*: A common term for men who are attracted to other men; also, an umbrella term used to refer to the LGBTQ community as a whole.
- *Gender Binary*: The division of gender into two distinct and opposite categories (man and woman). The gender binary is recognized as a social construct, as there are many identities in-between and outside of these categories.
- *Gender Expression*: The external display of one's gender, through a combination of dress, demeanor, social behavior, and other factors, generally measured on scales of masculinity and femininity. Also referred to as "gender presentation."
- *Gender Identity*: The internal perception of one's gender, and how they label themselves, based on how much they align or don't align with what they understand their options for gender to be.
- *Heterosexism*: The societal/cultural, institutional, and individual beliefs and practices that privilege heterosexuals and disparage LGBTQ people. The critical element that differentiates heterosexism (or any other "ism") from prejudice and discrimination is the use of institutional power and authority to support prejudices and enforce discriminatory behaviors in systematic ways with far-reaching outcomes and effects.
- *Intersex*: A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male.
- *Lesbian*: A common term for women who are attracted to other women.
- *LGBTQ+*: For this study, the acronym LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, plus) will be utilized instead of LGBTQIA2S+.

To give credit to researchers who have utilized different acronyms, they will be cited as it appears within the work. In the population highlighted within this study, there were no students or teacher faculty that identified as intersex (I), asexual (A), and two spirited (2S) identities.

- *Opportunities*: when I refer to opportunities, I am specifically speaking to these three concepts around, prior knowledge, the allocation of attention, and social sources of opportunity related information.
- *Pansexual*: Attraction toward people of all genders, including those who identify as transgender, transsexual, androgynous, genderqueer, agender, and all other gender identifications, as well as those who do not feel they have a gender; pansexuality is often confused or intermeshed in definition with bisexuality.
- *Polyamory*: The state of having multiple sexually or romantically committed relationships at the same time, with the consent of all partners involved. Polyamorous relationships can be open or closed.
- *Queer*: An umbrella term which embraces a matrix of sexual preferences, orientations, and habits of the not-exclusively- heterosexual-and-monogamous majority; also, a sexual orientation or gender identity label denoting a non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender orientation. Also, a historically derogatory word that has been reclaimed by many in the LGBTQ community. It is important to note that many LGBTQ people continue to view this as a derogatory term.
- *Questioning*: The process of exploring one's own sexual orientation or gender identity, investigating influences that may come from their family, religious upbringing, and internal motivations.

- *Romantic Orientation*: Describes an individual's pattern of romantic attraction based on a person's gender(s) regardless of one's sexual orientation.
- *Same Gender Loving (SGL)*: 1. A term used by members of the Black community to express same sex/gender attractions. 2. An alternative to Eurocentric LGBTQ identities that do not culturally affirm the history of all queer communities.
- *Sex*: A medical term designating a certain combination of gonads, chromosomes, external gender organs, secondary sex characteristics and hormonal balances. Usually subdivided into "male" and "female", this category does not recognize the existence of intersex bodies.
- *Sexual Orientation*: The type of sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction one feels for others, often labeled based on the gender relationship between the person and the people they are attracted to; often mistakenly referred to as "sexual preference".
- *Symbolic Interactionism*: assumes that people respond to elements of their environments according to the subjective meanings they attach to those elements, such as meanings being created and modified through social interaction involving symbolic communication with other people.
- *Tough Love*: is the concept of creating distance between oneself and blackness and a second approach which focused more so on social determinants in determining relationships between mothers and children.
- *Transgender*: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression does not conform to that typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. (Wake Forest University LGBTQ+ Center).

Organization of the Dissertation & Summary

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. Chapter One has presented the introduction of the research study, significance of the study, purpose of the study, including research questions, theoretical framework, overview of the methodology, assumptions, limitations & delimitations, pertinent terms & definitions, and the organization of the dissertation. Chapter Two elicits a detailed and powerful review of literature as it relates to the intersections of education, sociology, public health, and African studies in reference to LGBTQ+ Ally mentorship. Additionally, Chapter two specifically reviews how these intersections create intersecting oppression for LGBTQ+ students in grades 9-12 that limits their educational trajectory, mentorship opportunities, and visible representation. In chapter three, the theoretical framework that evolved from the borderland approach, *All Tea, All Shade*, framework encompasses Critical Race Theory (CRT), Black Queer Theory (BQT), and Symbolic Interactionism (SI) to create a unique lens to examine intersecting oppression for the LGBTQ+ community. Chapter Four introduces Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) as the methodology that will be utilized for this study. Additionally, chapter four will discuss the researcher's positionality, data collection methods, data storage strategies, analysis of the data, triangulation of the data, validity methods, and ethical considerations. Chapter Five presents the findings and Chapter Six provides a thorough discussion of research findings, the implications that ensue, lessons learned, implications for future practice and a love letter to current and future scholars.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Health is an interdisciplinary concept that consists of science, philosophy, and sociology as foundations. The unique combination of these disciplines historically creates a lens that allows us to examine health phenomena within our society. Early scholars and philanthropists such as Wifflicke Rose established the first commissioned public health program with the help of Abraham Flexner (Maeshiro et al., 2010). This led to the establishment of public health programs at multiple universities across the United States. The 19th and 20th centuries gave birth to frameworks such as sanitation studies, the introduction of public health studies, theoretical frameworks in healthcare, health education/promotion practices, and strategies to strategically augment population health within the United States (Maeshiro et al., 2010). Combining these frameworks allows researchers to continue to examine the intersections of health phenomena. Specifically, the Dimensions of Wellness, commonly known as the Dimensions of Health, has served as a guiding principle when viewing health outcomes or status holistically (Perera & Moe, 2020). The six Dimensions of Health encompass physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, environmental, and financial health. In addition, Hales (2015) has added two additional dimensions – social and occupational health.

Although these concepts and frameworks were designed to view phenomena holistically, certain populations were omitted during their early inception. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ+) identities have been studied throughout the

19th and 20th centuries (Mayer et al., 2008). However, many of the practices recommended during this period called for cruel and unusual treatment of LGBTQ+ identities. Practices such as conversion therapy and criminal sentencing were highly recommended for individuals who identify as LGBTQ+. Gender identity, sexuality, and expression create a myriad of health disparities that are unique to LGBTQ+-identifying individuals. Disparities such as depression, anxiety, erasure, invisibility, HIV awareness, and suicide are critical topics that must be addressed for this population (Dentato, 2017; Hayes et al., 2015). Moreover, these disparities mirror what is being reported in heteronormative societies. The passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Clean Air Act allowed public health efforts to be expanded to provide protections to marginalized identities (Long, 2003).

Dimensions and History of Public Health Education

Many disciplines produce what some classify as helping professions. Occupations ranging from doctors, nurses, lawyers, and social workers to counselors can all be understood as helping work. A helping profession is any occupation that provides health and education services to individuals and groups. Additional fields that encompass helping are psychiatry, physical and occupational therapy, teaching, education, and public health. Although these fields have historically focused on the Westernized medical models the issue that arises with these models is that practitioners often promote medical treatment rather than prevention which results in limiting the practitioners' ability to provide wellness (Blount et al, 2020). Holistic methods suggest that practitioners encompass the entire individual when providing treatment. This approach is not foreign

to the field of public health. According to Simeonsson (1991), the levels of prevention concept state that primary prevention aims to prevent disease or injury before occurring, secondary prevention aims to reduce the impact of a disease or injury that has already occurred through screening, and tertiary prevention aims to treat the impact of a condition or injury that has lasting effects (Simeonsson, 1991). More specifically, these specific frameworks are vital in the prevention of disparities that impact Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning individuals, also referred to as LGBTQ+. Researchers state that to better understand the importance of helping professions, we must augment our strategies and approaches with inclusive methodologies. Health is at the precipice of the helping professions in addition to the need to apply knowledge gained to current situations (Fisher et al., 2008). Without the concept of health, it would be impossible to make sense of behavioral observations and the impacts they have on our health outcomes. Smith (2015) speaks to LGBTQ+ teacher allies' acknowledgment of taboos. To combat heteronormativity in K-12 schools, teachers responded to the call of care which is at the forefront of health to solidify a community of support in their respective schools. This is an example of how a helping profession can shift the culture around concepts that the public has deemed taboo for the progressive advancement of a population's health outcomes.

In recent years, we have been reminded that health is not the result of bureaucratic and legislative decisions. Yet, it is a culmination of multiple experiences and intersections that are working together simultaneously. The World Health Organization (2014) defines health as a state of complete mental, social, and physical well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. This marriage of different dimensions of

health is paramount to the success of overall perception and behavior change. A common quote from philosopher Rene Descartes elaborates on this by offering, “Divide each difficulty into as many parts as is feasible and necessary to resolve it and watch the whole transform” (Descartes, 2008). The dimensions of health focus on physical, emotional, spiritual, social, occupational, environmental, intellectual, and community realms (Bernel et al., 2016). This research benefits from the parameters of the dimensions of health by studying how each dimension is interwoven into the lives we lead. Bernel et al (2016) also suggested that financial health, also known as “occupational health,” has a direct correlation with all remaining dimensions of health. Because of occupational health on the other dimensions, it is worth examining how the history of health education was impacted through these endeavors.

The discipline of public health education is rooted in physicians, nurses, and public health professionals working to prevent disease in times of epidemic. It is speculated that health education was founded in the late 19th century (Gebbie et al, 2003). However, there are records that public health education has earlier origins that are indicated. (Hind, 2016) suggests that the most plausible indication of health education derived from 1787 – 1850. Researchers suggest that Wifflicke Rose was the first public health commissioner to enlist a group of philanthropists and practitioners (Hind, 2016). In 1914, Rose invited Abraham Flexner to establish specialized education for a public health career through an inaugural committee Gebbie et al, (2003). This committee emphasized the development of a scientific-educational model rather than a medical one. Through the development of this practice, the John Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health was erected in 1918. In the subsequent years after the founding of the first state-funded school

of public health, legislation was passed to solidify health education in American society. In subsequent years, the Rockefeller Foundation raised money to endow schools of public health at Harvard University and The University of Toronto (Hind, 2016).

In the coming years, many advances in public health education advanced its stature and prevalence in federal, state, and local communities. In 1935, the United States passed the Social Security Act that allowed the federal government to strategically aim funding for the advance of public health. Additionally, this led to the establishment of schools of public health at 10 other universities. According to the Institute of Medicine (IOM), Committee of Professional Education (1988), these 10 schools were: John Hopkins, Harvard, Columbia, Michigan, California at Berkeley, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Wayne State, and Yale (Gebbie et al., 2003). In the 1930s, the emphasis was inverse of what we see in public health practice today. Research suggests that health departments and public health corps at this time we're more focused on individuals who completed Master of Public Health (MPH) programs. Resulting in enormous emphasis on public health administration, health education, public health nursing, biostatistics, viral disease control, and community health services (Gebbie et al., 2003).

The Civil Rights era ushered in a new reign of progressive advancements in the field of public health. Under President Lyndon B. Johnson, many public health services were expanded through the Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) (Berkowitz, 2005). Unique endeavors like the OEO allowed for the establishment of more than 100 neighborhood health centers while the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare was responsible for another 50 sites throughout the nation (DHEW, 1958). Additionally,

Under President Johnson, the Medicare Act of 1965 was signed into law allowing healthcare access to many marginalized populations. The 1970s saw a wave of newly established federal agencies that advanced public health initiatives both domestically and internationally. The Clean Air Act of 1970 allowed for the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) (Long, 2003).

Following the passing of the Clean Air Act of 1970, many financial challenges faced the discipline of public health in subsequent years to come (Long, 2003). During the 1980s, under President Ronald Regan, public health funding was continuously slashed to fund the administration's other endeavors and most notably, the *war on drugs* (Long, 2003). According to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) from 1980 – 1987 funding continued to decline annually with public health grants being diminished by up to fifty percent (Gebbie et al., 2003). Researchers suggest that the issue of funding was not alleviated in the 1980s and many of these issues bled over into the next decade. The 1990s saw a host of issues with budgeting resulting in administrations working to keep the budget consistent to support public health services. Although this consistent support allowed services to advance, there was not enough allocated in the budget to address the *incredibly weak* barriers to graduate public health education training (Long, 2003; Gebbie, 1999). Additionally, some barriers are continuously unearthed that contrast with the binary notions that have traditionally plagued individuals who exist within the margins. Heteronormative concepts such as gendered ways of thinking, performing tasks, and ideas around the physical and social presentation and sexual identity have muddied access for individuals who identify as LGBTQ+.

History of Health for LGBTQ+ Community

Lesbian Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ+) individuals face increased health disparities compared to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts (Aleshire et al, 2019). Communicable disparities ranging from sexually transmitted infections (STI) like gonorrhea, syphilis, chlamydia, and HIV are often hyper-augmented within LGBTQ+ communities as a result of stigma and heterosexism in research and practice (Aguinaldo, 2008). However, when it comes to non-communicable health disparities, there is little to no research on the progression of these conditions and how they impact the specific identities of LGBTQ+ individuals (MacDonnell & Grigorovich, 2012). In addition to the many barriers LGBTQ+ individuals face, compounding factors such as inequalities in healthcare access, quality of life, and overall health outcomes diminish (Aleshire et al, 2019). Research on queer and trans communities has long been marred by the dissonance associated with gender identity and sexual orientation. To further examine these concepts, we must operationally define the terms that are unique to the LGBTQ+ community.

When discussing the acronym LGBTQ+ it is important to remember that the acronym encompasses gender identity, expression, and sexual orientation. Gender identity refers to the surface-level sense of being a man or boy, woman or girl, or another gender (transgender, bigender, or genderqueer which is a reimagination and progression from the traditional societal expression of gender). Historically, gender was a defined construct that operated in the binary expression of male and female. However, over the past several decades, gender identity has evolved to encompass the congruent and

incongruent identities that may complement or differ from the sex assigned at birth and the appearance of reproductive genitalia. Gender expression posits that personality traits that are exhibited by the individual are unique in behavior, appearance, and mannerisms that are culturally associated with masculinity and femininity. This idea introduces the concept of gender identity and expression. However, the concept that is often overlooked is gender dysphoria. When unpacking the concept of gender dysphoria, it is paramount to understand that dysphoria speaks to the discomfort individuals experience with the sex assigned at birth (Fisk, 1974).

Before the 1970s, if a person was identified as being a member of the LGBTQ+ community, they could be lawfully committed to an asylum where an array of testing was conducted to reverse same-sex attraction and thoughts around gender dysphoria and identity. Conversion Therapy is defined as treatments addressing sexuality through individual talk therapy, behavioral, group therapy, or milieu to change an individual's sexuality from homosexual to heterosexual (Shipiro & Powell, 2017). These scholars point out that in the 19th century, psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing and writer Karl Maria Kertbeny coined the terms "homosexual" and "homosexuality" (Shipiro & Powell, 2017). Although the terms were utilized in publications, the pair fundamentally disagreed with the moral implications of the terms' usage. The two differential fields of psychiatry and sexology research argued that from a psychological viewpoint, an individual who experiences homosexuality deviates from the established norm of heterosexuality. However, from a sexology research viewpoint, some individuals experience an innate and authentic attraction to the same sex. These differences in opinions and attractions stemmed into the 20th century as scholars unpacked the inner layers of these concepts.

Drescher et al., (2017) refer to Sigmund Freud as the Father of Psychoanalysis. Freud posited that homosexuality was a form of developmental arrest noted as “immaturity” in which the normed sexual instincts of childhood emerge into adulthood. However, opposing viewpoints of Freud were prominent among 20th-century scholars such as Sandor Rado. Rado hypothesized that there was no such thing as normal childhood sexuality; rather a phobic mitigation of heterosexuality caused by inadequate, early parenting (Isay, 2010) . Views such as Freud’s and Rado’s heavily shaped the practice of psychoanalysis during the 20th Century. However, Sexology researchers such as Evelyn Hooker and Alfred Kinsey ushered in a new wave of research through sexual expression (Weston, 1998). The growing field of social sciences allowed scholars to conduct studies where participants were enlisted from the public rather than clinical and prison institutions.

Moreover, Drescher et al. (2017) suggest that through these progressive endeavors, scholars of the 20th century such as Kinsey and Hooker contributed to the scientific view that homosexuality is normal in much the same way that its heterosexual counterpart is viewed and read. During the latter part of the 20th century, there was an increase in diagnoses of mental health conditions around LGBTQ+ identities. The American Psychological Association (APA) heavily utilized the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM) while treating neurotic and psychological conditions of patients and clients. Although this manual provided a wealth of information about mental health disorders, there was little to no advocacy occurring around LGBTQ+ identities. In 1971, a brave group of activists that consisted of lesbians and gay men garnered the attention of the American Psychological Association. Through their

endeavors, the group pointed out the stigma associated with how the association viewed mental illnesses. These allegations disrupted the procedural meetings of the American Psychological Association and forced them to re-examine the grounds of homosexuality as a mental disorder (Drescher et al., 2017). Moreover, homosexuality was removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders in 1973. This paved the way for societal shifts around the idea of sexual orientation.

For the first time in the United States, individuals who experienced an innate attraction to the same sex would not be subjected to harsh treatments and punishments. Additionally, this allowed for international examinations of homosexual lifestyles. Due to a change in attitudes within the United States, this endeavor was subsequently adopted by international communities. The World Health Organization (WHO) followed the sentiments of the American Psychological Association (APA) and overturned their stance on homosexual lifestyles from the International Classification of Disease (ICD-10). Although these decisions were made to advance the quality of life for LGBTQ+ individuals, there are still religious conservative opponents who combat this advancement to seek regression and oppression in the lives of those who openly identify. As (Drescher, 2017) mentions, converting sexuality is hugely dependent on the successful shifting of individuals from homosexual behaviors to heterosexual behaviors. There is a possibility that a conversion may work based on law, religion, and culture. If the conversion did succeed, then conventional and ordained methods would not be in vain. People in the United States place a great deal of significance on religion and law, which makes them important areas of analysis. When discussing religion and law, it is vitally important to remember that both are layered and nuanced. A number of scholars have established that

religion typically signifies that there are formal sets of beliefs and practices that are affiliated with recognized religious authority and that include professed visible acts such as praying before meals, attending worship services, and reading sacred texts (Watkins et al., 2016; Davis et al., 2003; Coyle, 2002). Moreover, spirituality posits a personal experience or feeling of connectedness with a higher being and typifies intrinsic unseen qualities appropriated to one's relationship to an otherness, higher power, or God (Watkins et al., 2016). It is important that we read queer and trans experiences outside of the boundaries of religion and law, because historically anti-LGBT attitudes have permeated those boundaries so deeply that humanizing LGBTQ+ people within them appears unlikely.

Evolving Education in the United States

Education within the United States has evolved over the past three centuries to encompass more than just traditional forms of instruction between the educator and the student. In today's educational system, there is a greater emphasis on educating the "whole child." This entails students benefiting from a wide range of services that are designed to foster a safer school environment, reinforce core content through tutoring methods, provide free or reduced lunches through nutrition services, and establish comprehensive models that include the community as a whole. Although these advancements have been at the precipice of progress in school health, there is still a didactic need for the implementation of federal school health programs across the United States. Currently, there is one federal model that has been proposed that encompasses the social and ecological contexts that permeate and plague school health leaders. According

to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Whole School, Whole Child, Whole Community (WSCC), is the CDC's framework for addressing the health of children in schools (CDC, 2022). Moreover, the model is positioned around the community as a pillar of support in reinforcing connections between health, academic achievement, and the relevance of evidence-based school policies.

The educational system has not endured a programmatic evaluation of effectiveness since the 1800s. Education is more than school buildings, teachers, and students. Education is a process of knowledge-making and world understanding that pushes us to grapple with our place in the world. Many scholars and practitioners are also thinking about the safety and protection of children on the margins. As it relates to LGBTQ+ youth in general, educational institutions have thought about how to protect and support those students for decades. With the creation of gay-straight alliances, safe spaces, and LGBTQ+ awareness events and activities educational institutions have attempted to support this population for many years. When we think about what is possible for educating LGBTQ+ youth we must not only consider the youth that has access to schools, colleges and universities, but also LGBTQ youth who are homeless and most often ignored and denied what it means to protect, support, and educate those LGBTQ youth. Additionally, strategies can be implored around how we can be better for those youth, and what they need to feel supported as we grapple with questions like that, we understand the necessity and the urgency of schools centered around not just queer and trans youth but black and brown youth, Asian and Pacific Islander youth, disabled and formerly incarcerated youth. All youth deserve high-quality, rigorous, and exciting educational experiences. According to the Center of Disease Control and Prevention

(CDC), the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) framework is designed to address and assess health in schools. The framework utilizes a 10-construct approach that is divided into two categories: social and emotional climate and counseling, psychological, and social services Lever et al., (2023).

LGBTQ+ Community within Education Systems and Beyond

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning students in the United States have endured a wide variety of experiences throughout their short, but often vibrant lives. There are many stories within the United States that speak to their adverse experiences in the American educational system. One example of this is Nigel Shelby, a 14-year-old gay Black boy who experienced bullying at his Northern Alabama high school. As a result of the continuous harassment, Nigel took his own life in the Spring of 2019. A transgender teen, Taylor Alesena, who candidly documented her struggles with loneliness and bullying at a San Diego area high school on YouTube, died in an apparent suicide on April 2, 2015. The Fallbrook High School student, who was 16 years old, took her own life during spring break. It has recently been reported that the mother of a transgender student who committed suicide has filed a lawsuit against Manville's Board of Education alleging the school district did not properly address the repeated acts of bullying and harassment faced by 17-year-old Myles Fitzpatrick. These experiences expound upon the horrors that LGBTQ+ students have experienced at the hand of peers, parents, and school systems. There was a total of 334 LGBTQ+ deaths of students aged 13-19 between the years 2003 – 2017. In comparison to their heterosexual counterparts that were assessed, data revealed that LGBTQ+ students evidenced a 4.92 odd of being

bullied which is an antecedent for suicide risk (Clark et al., 2020). It is important to contextualize stories such as Nigel Shelby's, and those of so many other queer and trans youth, since their deaths, while seemingly self-inflicted, were most likely preventable. We live in a society that ostracizes queer and trans youth and makes them feel invalidated and inferior. Research suggests that LGBTQ+ youth experience significantly higher levels of bullying compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Hillard et al., 2013). This social norming is the byproduct of a myriad of systems of oppression such as white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy. One framework that has been proven successful in many schools and districts are Gay Straight Alliances (GSA). Research suggests that GSA can foster feelings of inclusivity, support-belonging, and leadership (Porta et al., 2017). Additionally, GSA's can be augmented with CDC interventions such as the Department of Adolescent Sexual Health (DASH) provides a wealth of resources that address sexual health in school systems (Szucs et al., 2021). However, if we hope to combat these systems of oppression, we must explore health disparities and the ramifications that ensue with the K-12 experience. There are now 48 states within the United States of America where sexual health education policies have been mandated (Garg & Volerman, 2021). Research suggests that LGBTQ+ school related victimization is strongly related to young adult health outcomes in reference to mental health and STI risk (Russell et al., 2011). Although there is plethora of research that speaks to the normed majority within the LGBTQ+ community, there is an absence in representation in reference to Black queer individuals. Resulting in the expedited and immediate need tailored interventions and frameworks that mitigate the educational and health disparities experienced by Black queer identities. For example, in Garg &

Volerman, 2021 policy assessment for LGBTQ+ policies, it does not center Black queer identities and the intersections of their lived experiences in reference to recommended policies. Moreover, in Szucs et al., 2022 work there are recommendations for school systems implementation of LGBTQ+ programs. However, these approaches do not follow the ethic and practice of Black and queer liberation work.

Health Disparities

For this dissertation, quality of life is defined as how good or bad a person's life is. However, according to Green and Kreuter (1999), it is the perception of individuals or groups that their needs are being satisfied and that they are not being denied opportunities to pursue happiness and fulfillment. There is a myriad of ways in which quality of life can be measured. However, social indicators are often used to explain the quality of life. The quality-of-life indicators are absenteeism, achievement, aesthetics, alienation, comfort, crime, crowding, discrimination, happiness, hostility, illegitimacy, performance, riots, self-esteem, unemployment, votes, and welfare (Green & Kreuter, 2005). The social indicators that affect African American men who have sex with men and transgender women the most are discrimination, welfare, self-esteem, and unemployment.

Discrimination

African Americans who identify as LGBTQ experience higher rates of discrimination and other social stressors that increase their susceptibility to HIV transmission. Healthy People 2020 proposes to “improve the health, safety, and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals.” African American men and

transgender women continue to experience high rates of discrimination. In a study conducted by Dale et al., (2016), HIV positive African American men were sampled to gain insight into their experiences with discrimination. Researchers uncovered three intersecting stigmatized factors: race, HIV status, and sexual orientation. (Dale et al., 2016) also found a correlation between higher neighborhood poverty and an increased occurrence of hate crimes. The study suggests the need for tailored programming with an emphasis on promoting “individual and neighborhood level socioeconomic empowerment and stigma reduction” (p. abs.). The comprehensive well-being of African Americans who identify as LGBTQ+ plays an integral role in their increased risk of HIV transmission. In my study, welfare is defined as the state of doing well, especially in respect to good fortune, happiness, well-being, and prosperity.” Healthy People 2030 hopes to address this through “achieving health equity, eliminating disparities, and improving the health of all age groups. Individuals who identify as LGBTQ experience numerous disparities that restrict their welfare compared to other racial groups. The social indicators and disparities include depression, poverty, and social isolation.

Self-esteem is an integral factor concerning HIV prevention and self-efficacy. In this dissertation, self-esteem is defined as confidence and satisfaction in oneself. Factors such as high poverty, discrimination and isolation, low education levels, religion, and family acceptance often impact many African Americans who identify as LGBTQ. A study conducted by (Quinn et al., 2010) examined the correlation of internalized homonegativity among African American men who have sex with men. Factors identified in correlation with internalized homonegativity were religiosity, resilience, and gay community acculturation. Researchers concluded that “the pathways and mechanisms

linking internalized homonegativity and health disparities indicate that homonegativity and heterosexism adversely influence self-esteem and depression among MSM.

Erasure of Identities

In a study aimed to identify the impacts of erasure among trans women and how that affects transgender women's access to healthcare, Bauer et al. (2009) coordinated seven community soundings to garner responses regarding transgender women's erasure. Eighty-five trans community members and four allies participated within the community. Discussions were semi-structured and addressed concepts such as individual health concerns, health care experiences, efforts to maintain personal health, health education, and resources, the role of the communities, and HIV-related risks and services. Bauer et al., (2009). A grounded theory approach was utilized to allow for the natural emergence of patterns and theory (Glasper, 1992). An important finding was the desire to ensure that the trans community team members felt ownership of the research processes and outcomes and that attention was paid to capacity building and demystifying research processes (Minkler, 2005). The study resulted in identifying two barriers that impact access to healthcare for transgender individuals. These two barriers are informational and institutional erasure. Informational erasure is described as not including trans women in literature on disparities that affect women. An example of institutional erasure is not being allowed to identify with a preferred gender legally Bauer et al., (2009).

Invisibility/Transparency

In a study of 23 Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer, and Transgender (LGBTQ) women living with HIV, researchers found that structural factors such as social exclusion and violence elevated the risk of infection. Logie et al., (2012). Purposeful sampling was the method that was utilized. Participants were recruited via word of mouth, and flyers in community agencies, including AIDS service organizations, HIV support programs, LGBTQ centers, and community health centers. Researchers composed several research questions that provided the framework for the focus groups. The research questions composed were: “What challenges do LBTQ women living with HIV in Ontario face?”, “What HIV research are you aware of that addresses these challenges?”, “What issues do you feel people in your community are silent about?” “What would motivate you to participate in any HIV research?” (Logie et al., 2012 p.3). From these research questions, a focus group interview guide was developed. The focus group interview guide examined personal, social, and healthcare challenges and experiences, issues silenced in one’s community, and engagement in, and knowledge of HIV research Logie, C. H., James, L., Tharao, W., & Loutfy, M. R. (2012).

HIV Awareness/Risk

According to the CDC (2021), 471,500 African Americans were living with HIV. However, 16 percent of individuals were unaware of their HIV infection. According to HIV.gov in 2019, 44% of new HIV infections were African Americans, although this population only represents 13% of the United States population. There have been many advances and publications on the expansion and evolution of HIV. However, little

information has been published addressing the seriousness of this disparity among African American Men who have sex with men and transgender women. Thoman et al., (2018) conducted a study to determine the level of knowledge among African Americans who identified as men who have sex with men or transgender women. Researchers examined the uptake of Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), antiretroviral therapy (ART) to prevent HIV-negative individuals from seroconverting if exposed to HIV was exceptionally low among this population. The study consisted of two focus groups to assess the perception of an online advertisement for pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) in New York City. Researchers sought to address knowledge of PrEP, its physical and psychological side effects, and psychosocial barriers related to PrEP adherence and sex shaming. The study found that participants were knowledgeable about PrEP. However, study findings show that stigma, infidelity, representation, distrust of the medical community, and commodification from pharmaceutical companies are issues of concern.

According to Cahill et al., (2017) “Examining ways to understand, address and reduce medical mistrust is essential to improving health outcomes of Black men” (p. 1355) The purpose of this study was to assess attitudes and perceptions regarding PrEP usage among men who have sex with men and transgender women. Researchers utilized two focus groups to assess the opinions of participants of an online PrEP advertisement. Findings from the studies show that African American participants were more reluctant to utilize PrEP. The themes identified from the study were: side effects, the commodification of HIV prevention, misconceptions about PrEP, and marketing and stigma. The sample population of the first group consisted of 11 black men who have sex with men and one black transgender woman. The sample population of the second group

consisted of five black, three white, and three Latino men who have sex with men and one Latina transgender woman. Researchers concluded that “to understand and confront the challenges of reaching those most impacted by HIV, research and implementation efforts must embrace the messiness and complexity of social dynamics, rather than hoping biomedical interventions can bypass them.”

Depression & Suicide

In a study to examine the social support and exposure to violence that transgender women faced, Nemoto et al (2011) researchers observed how depression correlates with transgender women who engaged in sex work. 573 transgender women were enlisted for this study. Recruitment of participants was completed through street outreach and referrals. More than half of the Latina and White participants reported experiencing depression. Of the 573 participants interviewed, three-quarters of white participants reported suicide ideation, and sixty-four percent reported attempting suicide within their lifetime. Lastly, white and African American participants reported occurrences of experiencing transphobia as a transwoman Nemoto et al., (2011).

Stigma

For many women who identify as transgender women, needs assessments are commonly administered to further garner information from this vulnerable population. These needs assessments are utilized to unearth unique barriers and experiences that trans women face within their communities. According to the World Health Organization, “Health is a holistic state of mental, physical, emotional and social health that is integral

toward the total experience of health” (WHO, 2008, p. 9). In a study designed by Poteat et al. (2013), researchers examined the intersections of stigma and discrimination and how those experiences influenced healthcare access and utilization regarding transgender women. Stigma is defined as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting and that reduces the bearer from a whole and usual person to a tainted discounted one” (Goffman, 1963, p. 3). In recent studies geared towards collecting data from those who are experiencing stigma and how that affects their volitional control, researchers have stated how impactful stigma can be in accessing primary healthcare (Meyer, 1995). Participants in this study were asked to expound upon their family and social life, gender identity, sexual orientation and practices, healthcare experiences, and experience of stigma and discrimination (Poteat, et al., 2013). A community-based participatory approach was utilized and coupled with a grounded theory approach to ground the study within the community. Two community advisory boards (CABs) met before the data collection could begin. The study enlisted 55 transgender participants. There were twenty-five transmen and thirty trans women surveyed. Each participant was interviewed 1 on 1, and the length of the interview lasted between 45 – 180 minutes. Researchers performed a coding process and established five categories from the research analysis: feelings about transgender identities, feelings about hormone therapy, learning about trans health, clinical interactions with transgender patients, and interactions with colleagues (Poteat et al., 2013). Along with gathering responses to transgender women’s needs, a new theory was developed from this research. The theory of managing uncertainty and establishing authority. To manage uncertainty and establish authority, one must be aware of the

interpersonal stigma/discrimination and structural and institutional stigma/discrimination that is present to manage uncertainty and establish authority (Poteat et al., 2013).

Gaps within the Research

Some gaps exist within the literature that encompasses Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ+) identities. Most of the research that does exist utilizes quantitative methods and focuses on lesbian, bisexual, and questioning identities (Sang et al, 2023; Bayrakdar & King, 2023; Antonelli & Sembiente, 2022; Shaheed, 2021; Landi et al., 2020). However, there is a lack of research available related to LGBTQ+ youth and their intersecting social constructs of identity (i.e., Black, Haitian, queer, and male) in the 9-12 secondary education system. If we wish to lift the veil of disparities for these populations to thrive, their stories and the stories of other marginalized and minoritized individuals' experiences must be shared (Files, 2021). Therefore, the purpose of this work is to be transparently honest and open about my life experience as a Black, Haitian, queer, male during my K-12 experience in hopes of providing insight into not only my youthful academic journey and the needs that I had but what others similar to me might still need.

Summary

There is a scarcity of research encompassing the LGBTQ+ student population, and this study is a gateway to forge new paths in bridging the gap between this population and the deficits among mentorship, education, and wrap-around resources. Studies have shown that a lack of resources can lead to the manifestation of disparities

such as depression, anxiety, and suicide and may result in adverse engagement around factors such as education, full-time employment, and insurance benefits (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2019). Moreover, this serves as an opportunity also to bridge gaps specifically for transgender identities who experience these disparities (Files, 2021). Utilizing this research, we can traverse the educational and health disparities among the LGBTQ+ student population through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Black Queer Theory (BTQ), and Symbolic Interactionism (SI). This research will serve as a foundation for future implications around community health research, health education announcements, and systematic changes for schools, teachers, administrators, and members of community-based organizations (CBOs) wanting to serve as mentors for the LGBTQ+ student population.

CHAPTER 3

BORDERLAND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Have you ever tried to view a social phenomenon but were not sure if you were viewing from the correct lens? In order to transparently share my K-12 experience as a Black, Haitian, queer, male I realized that a monolithic approach would not be sufficient. Monolithic approaches such as utilizing one theoretical approach will yield limited views in reference to social phenomenon. Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) posits that a borderlands approach is a unique lens where “a vague and undetermined place is created through the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition” (p. 3). Additionally, it is imperative to highlight that the borderland theoretical approach aims to unearth areas that lie at the intersections of the associated borders. Traditionally, borders are mentioned in reference to geographical boundaries that exist. Moreover, borders also exist at the intersections to represent the unintentional, multicultural spaces where cultures intersect and those inhabiting the boundaries uncover shared beliefs, rituals, and newfound customs (Ernst-Slavit, 2000). Furthermore, the borderland theoretical approach has been utilized in research to speak to marginalized identities that show up within the margins but are left out of the normalcy around societal narratives. For instance, as a queer Black man in the Deep South region of the United States, it is imperative that I am conscious of my identity around Blackness, Americanism, queerness, and cultural identity. These intersections of identity are like oil and water. Existing simultaneously, but never quite mixing to forge a new mixture or identity.

Why a Borderland Approach?

The purpose of utilizing the Borderland Theoretical Framework is to elicit unique findings at the intersections of race, sexuality, gender, education, class, and culture/heritage. Authentically and intentionally, I selected a combination of theories from legal studies, queer studies, and educational epistemology studies; this framework serves as a beacon of light. Together these disciplines intersect to give birth to a framework to explore intersecting oppression within the LGBTQ+ student population. Coupled with Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) as the methodology, this framework aims to unearth innovative frameworks that educators have utilized to support LGBTQ+ students and an exploration of the experience of the researchers 9-12 experience. Specifically for this study, the borderland theoretical framework was constructed utilizing critical race theory, Black queer theory, and symbolic interactionism.

Critical Race Theory

There are many theories that have been utilized to examine injustices and inconsistencies within the legal system. However, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a legal framework that was designed more than 40 years ago to speak to the social construct of race and its intersections within the American legal system (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). Credited by legal scholars Kimberle Williams-Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, and Derrick Bell in the 1980s, CRT centers racism as a construct and posits that racism is not merely the product of individual prejudice or bias and is subsequently ingrained within the American judicial system (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). An example of where this theory could be applied is the 1992 class action lawsuit against a privately owned apartment

complex in Mobile, AL who would not screen the applications of potential Black residents. These residents would pay their application fees to be considered for an apartment unit. When the applications were returned to the managers, they were marked with a red pen and put into a separate pile that would later be discarded. There would be no further screening occurring for these applicants and they were denied approval based on their race.

Therefore, CRT is the correct choice for this work because, when CRT shows up in this work is when race is mentioned, I am speaking to the nuanced experiences of black folks and black queer folks within the United States. Additionally, CRT in this work will also encompass the unique experiences around race, patriarchy, and movement through space as an individual of Black diaspora. CRT is the right choice for this work because as a person who has lived my entire life as a black American, I understand that the tenets of CRT are essential to unearthing factors that are rooted in microaggressions, microinvalidations macro-invalidations, direct violence, and vicarious racism. CRT also gives me a frame and language to engage in counter storytelling which benefits the students I work with daily. CRT serves me when discussing vicarious traumas or forms of racism that permeate communities of color and are rarely discussed in real time.

Black Queer Theory

Before we focus deeply on black queer theory we must talk about its origins within queer theory. It is an amalgamation of many disciplines that have influenced and shaped the ways in which we interact in society in the socio-cultural sphere. There are many social phenomena that have lent space to QT to evolve to the most utilized theories

to approach sexual orientation, gender expression and identity (Amin, 2016). Movements such as the civil rights movement, gay and lesbian movements, and AIDS activism are a few of the movements that have advanced QT since its 1991 introduction. Scholar Teresa de Lauretis' coined the term "Queer Theory" in her text "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities". de Lauretis argues that there are essentially three constructs of the theory that work in tandem to speak to the nuance around sexuality, gender identity and expression (Amin, 2016). These three constructs are: 1) refusing heterosexuality as the benchmark for sexual formations, 2) a challenge to the belief that lesbian and gay studies is one single entity, and 3) a strong focus on the multiple ways that race shapes sexual bias (Amin, 2016). When Queer Theory shows up in this work, it encompasses the unique intersections of sexual orientation, gender expression and identity and the colloquialism associated with them in American society. Moreover, in order to assess the unique yet nuanced intersections that exist between the two theoretical frameworks, queer theory must be expanded to speak to the dimensions of race, ethnicity, and gender which was omitted by previous scholars such as de Lauretis (Amin, 2016). For example, de Lauretis states the three aforementioned constructs work in tandem to speak to lived experiences around queerness. Additionally, scholars such as Butler, Halberstam and Munoz have argued the term queer must be reobtained from prior use resulting in expansion of the term that has yet to settle and has guided many social and political movements (Amin, 2016). However, queer theory misses the critical intersection of race and gender identity. Black queer theory posits that LGBTQ+ African Americans experience a type of racism that their white LGBTQ+ counterparts do not experience (Johnson, 2021). Moreover, transgender individuals are experiencing adverse physical

and mental health disparities (Dowling et al, 2022). However, Black transgender individuals are at the intersections of intersecting oppression.

Black queer theory is the correct choice for this work because BQT is grounded in a politics based in black freedom, black knowledge, black struggle/resistance, black feminism, and black revolutionary movements so that black folks can see their full humanity and resist white frameworks of queerness as the norm. The reason Queer Theory was shelved, and Black Queer Theory was utilized for this dissertation was because I am a Black Queer man who has a unique experience with blackness and queerness in America. White queerness does not have the capacity to speak to the many social dimensions and phenomena that black queer folk experience. For example, as a Black Queer Person who has worked in both Black and White queer spaces, I have had the opportunity to bear witness to nuanced power structures that were meant to provide institutional support yet yield cultural forms of oppression. While working at a prominent infectious disease clinic in the South, I witnessed doctors provide care through a medical lens but missed the public health and cultural lens needed to affirm patients in their diagnoses. This misconception speaks to the ideas African American individuals have around medical treatments and are not being retained within care. Additionally, experiences such as these may provide clarity as to how individuals interact with unique experiences that are had.

Symbolic Interactionism

Society is composed of many complex and nuanced challenges that individuals face daily. These challenges may be categorized in intrapersonal, interpersonal, communal, and organizational modes. However, symbolic interactionism (SI) speaks to the ways in which individuals decipher meaning with society. Additionally, SI can be defined as a “micro-level theoretical approach in sociology that addresses the process in which individuals create and maintain society through face-to-face, repeated, meaningful interactions” (Carter & Fuller, 2016, abs.). Initially introduced by American Philosopher George Herbert Mead in 1934, he theorized that there was a relationship that exists between self and society. Recent scholars posit that there are four central components of symbolic interactionism. Carter & Fuller (2016) citing Blumer suggest 1) Individuals act based on the meanings objects have for them; 2) Interaction occurs within a particular social and cultural context in which physical and social objects (persons), as well as situations must be defined or categorized based on individual meanings; 3) meanings emerge from interactions with other individuals and with society; and 4) meanings are continuously created and recreated through interpreting processes during interaction with others (Carter & Fuller, 2016).

Symbolic interactionism is the correct choice for this work because I possess a varying experience that is shaped by the many interactions that have occurred throughout my lifetime. Specifically, my experiences during my adolescent years shape how I react to different forms of social stimuli today. For example, when I was 19 years old, I came out to my parents as a queer Black man. During that conversation, feelings were high, and my parents yelled at me while stating that I would contract HIV, die, and go to hell.

Although these statements were uttered amid conflict, I acted based upon the meaning of their chosen words, socially and culturally I categorized this experience as negative, I arrived at new realizations through interacting with others, and these meanings are constantly contorted to unearth new meanings through interactions with others.

Creating a Borderland Theoretical Framework

In the following sections I will explain the steps that were taken to create the borderland approach as it encompasses my many intersecting identities. With the introduction of these three theories: Critical Race Theory (CRT), Black Queer Theory (BQT), & Symbolic Interactionism (SI) it allows me to create a theoretical framework that best defines the intersections of my identity and the work presented in this scholarly personal narrative. Through the lens of this borderland theoretical approach, I will conduct my analysis of the findings. The emphasis of this approach is to create a new theoretical framework by overlapping theories to create a unique kaleidoscopic lens to view social phenomena.

Phase 1: Core Identity – Fluidity

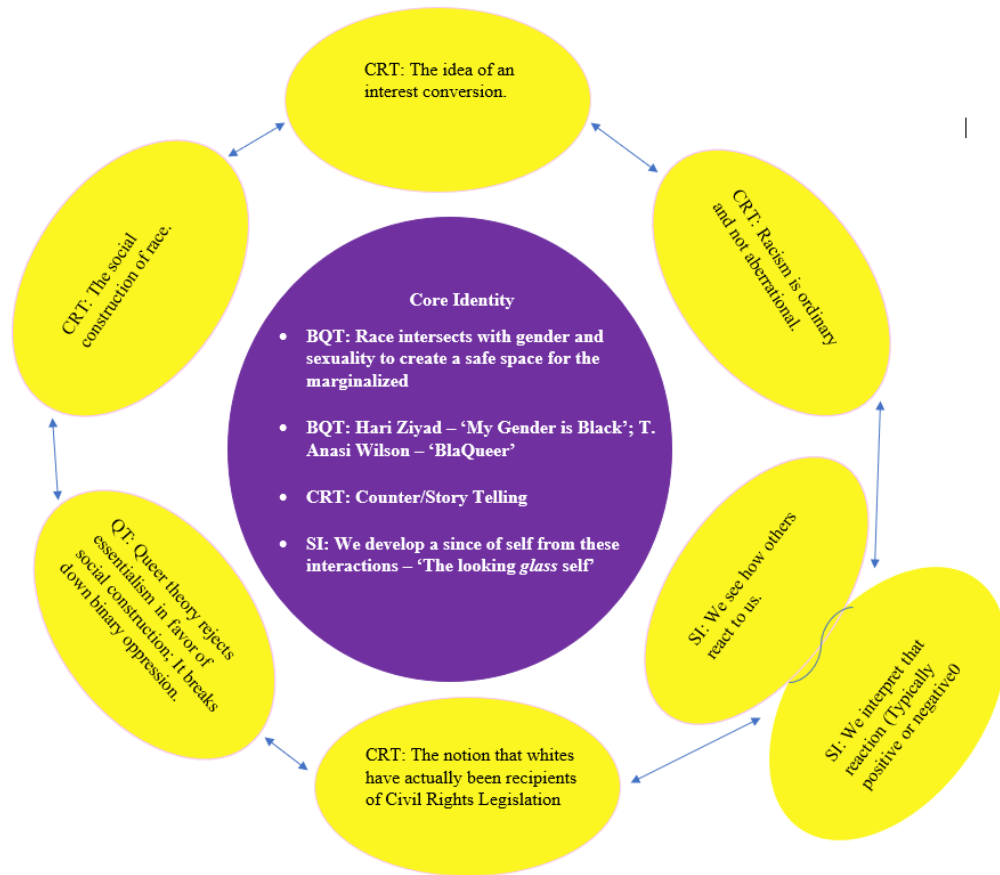
In the beginning of this process, I began constructing my ideas around my core identity by exploring the tenants of the three theories that were chosen for this study. The theories that were selected were Critical Race Theory, Black Queer Theory and Symbolic Interactionism. Utilizing the concept of journaling, I began documenting which constructs were central to my identity from these three theories. The first theory used was Critical Race Theory which posits that there are 5 core components to the theory. 1)

Racism is ordinary and not aberrational, 2) The idea of an interest convergence, 3) The social construction of race, 4) The idea of storytelling and counter storytelling, and 5) the idea that whites have been recipients of civil rights legislation (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). The second theory is Black Queer Theory. Before I was able to view this theory with an authentic lens, I first had to make a connection as to why Black Queer Theory is important for this study and how it differs from Queer Theory. Judith Butler states in her 1991 work “Trouble the Notion of Gender” that QT rejects essentialism in favor of social construction; it breaks down binary oppression such as man or woman or gay or straight. However, Black scholars who have intersecting identities noted that race does intersect with gender and sexuality (Johnson, 2000). Following the notions of E. Patrick Johnson’s work, it is integral that for this specific study that Black Queer Theory is utilized to speak to the dynamisms and nuances of my identity. Additionally, modern Black Queer Theory scholars have posited that identity is ever evolving and even has a racial component (Hari Ziyad, 2017). Building on the concept of blackness as a gender Ziyad states “Blackness ruptures the laws of gender just like the laws of the state seem intent on interrupting black lives” (Line 43, Paragraph 7). Building on this idea, Black Queer Theory allows scholars to look past the binary expressions of identity to look at the intersections of identity in innovative and plausible ways. Additionally, we must be mindful of BlaQueer identities as these identities are hyper-surveillanced and marginalized. Barsigian et al. (2020) state although the concepts of race, gender, and sexuality are often isolated, there is no separation between the three even if and when gender is fleetingly (un)attainable. Additionally, Wilson (2021) argues that “those who share structural and societal positions particularly around race, gender, and sexuality share a unique angle of vision with regard

to knowledge production and analysis of the dominant as well as the shared society” (p.170). Within this study, it is paramount to my identity to remember that Black Queer Theory can hold the authenticity of my being and identity as this narrative is explained.

Figure 1.1

Phase 1: Core Identity – Fluidity



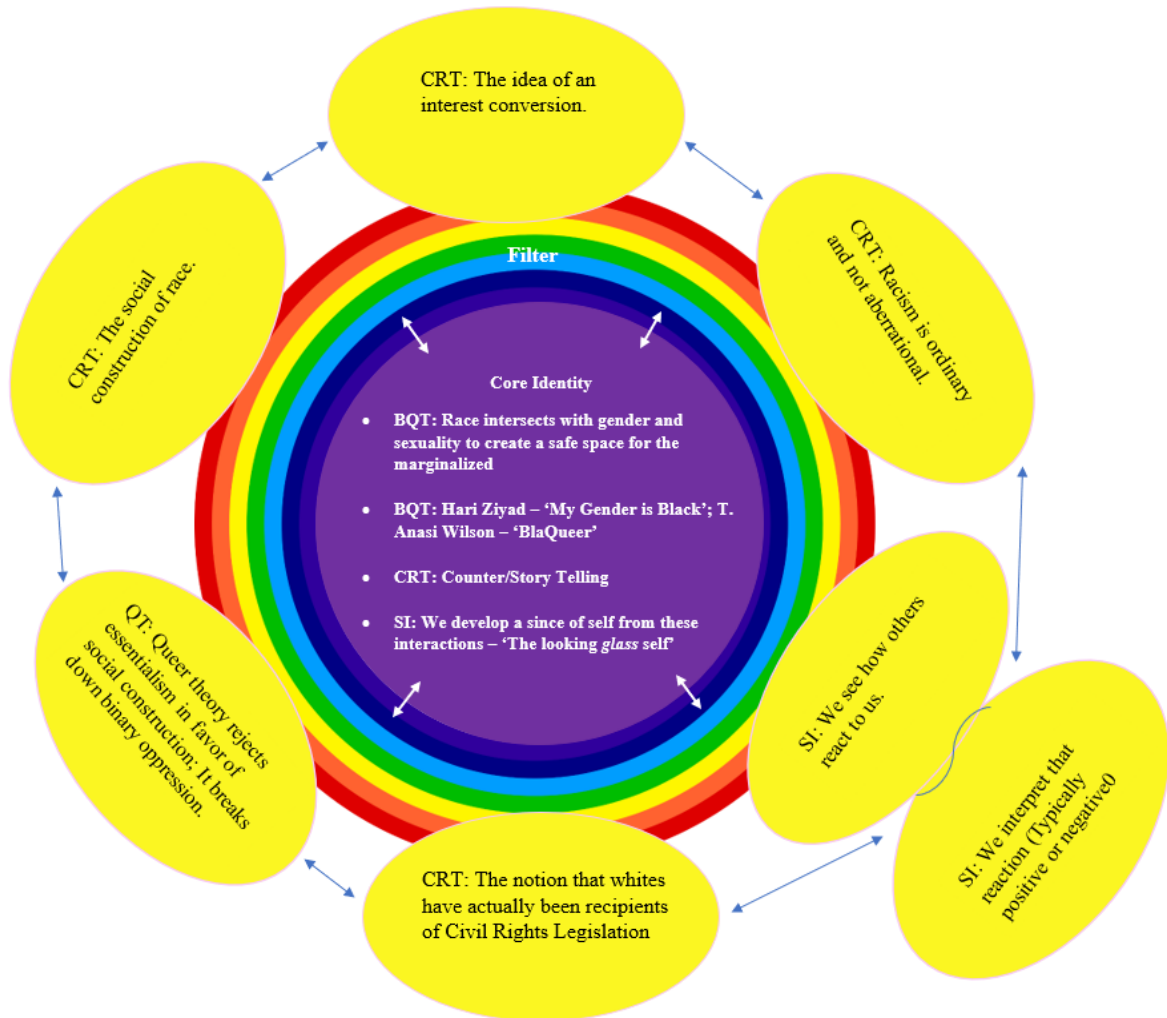
Note: Please see Appendix B for a picture of the original process that created this phase of the All Tea, All Shade Model

Phase 2: Filter Lens

Secondly, within this framework it is imperative to examine how the world is viewed through the eyes of the individual. The filter lens acts as the looking glass self. This allows the individual to view protective and risk factors that are at play in environments that they are immersed in. Continuing the process of journaling, I documented my day-to-day experiences and reflected over the events of the day. When documenting these characteristics, I emphasize on 1) emotions and how I am currently feeling, 2) what feelings I am having in introspection, 3) specific isolated events and 4) environmental changes. These characteristics act as a filter for how I respond to situations in real time. The filter also allows me to observe interactions through the process of magnification. Jones-Ahmed (2022) quoting Cooley states that the filter is similar to the concept of the looking glass self which states that a person viewing him or herself in the mirror, begins to imagine how he or she compares to others, anticipates their judgment, which evokes an emotional response (Jones-Ahmed, 2022). Additionally, Jones-Ahmed posited that there are three versions of the empirical self: 1) the material me, 2) social me, and 3) spiritual me (Jones-Ahmed, 2022). When documenting educational experiences and how I have matriculated through life as a mentor and educator, it is imperative to remember the looking glass self-framework as findings are being unearthed.

Figure 1.2

Phase 2: Adding a Filter Lens



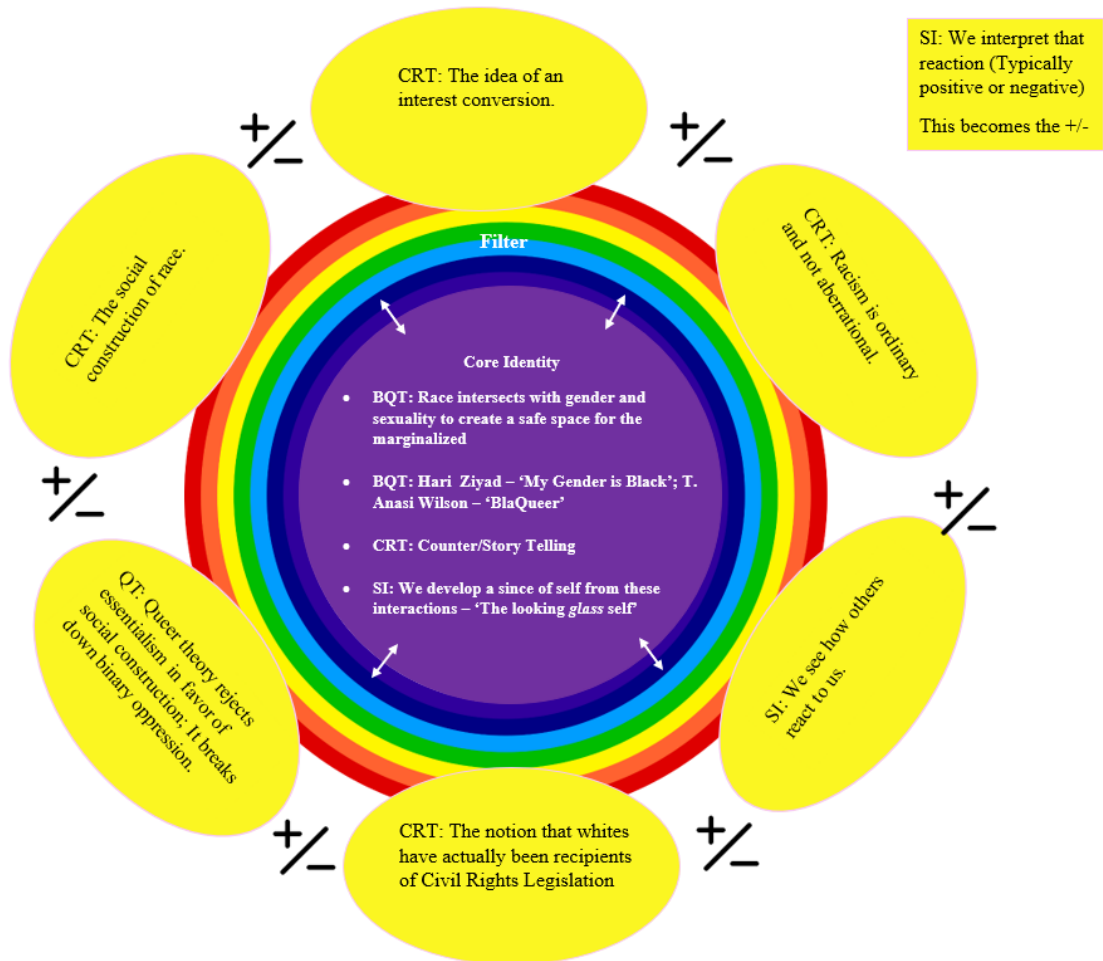
Note: Please see Appendix B for a picture of the original process that created this phase of the All Tea, All Shade Model

Phase 3: Protective and Risk Factors

Thirdly, it is imperative in this framework to be conscious of both protective and risk factors. It is easy to view these factors as external and internal or black and white. However, these factors are nuanced and have areas of gray that stem from the intersections of these factors. For the purposes of this study, protective factors will be utilized to speak to the behaviors and choices that are made to keep oneself safe. Risk factors for the purpose of this study will be utilized to elicit the characteristics of fear and how those fears translate to stagnation and intersecting oppression. Moreover, risk factors can be thought of as negative external influences such as: bullying, sexual harassment, erasure, mis-gendering, homophobia, transphobia, rejection, absence of self-esteem, shutting down due to social pressures, unprotected sexual intercourse, substance abuse, and ultimately suicide.

Figure 1.3

Phase 3: Adding Protective and Risk Factors



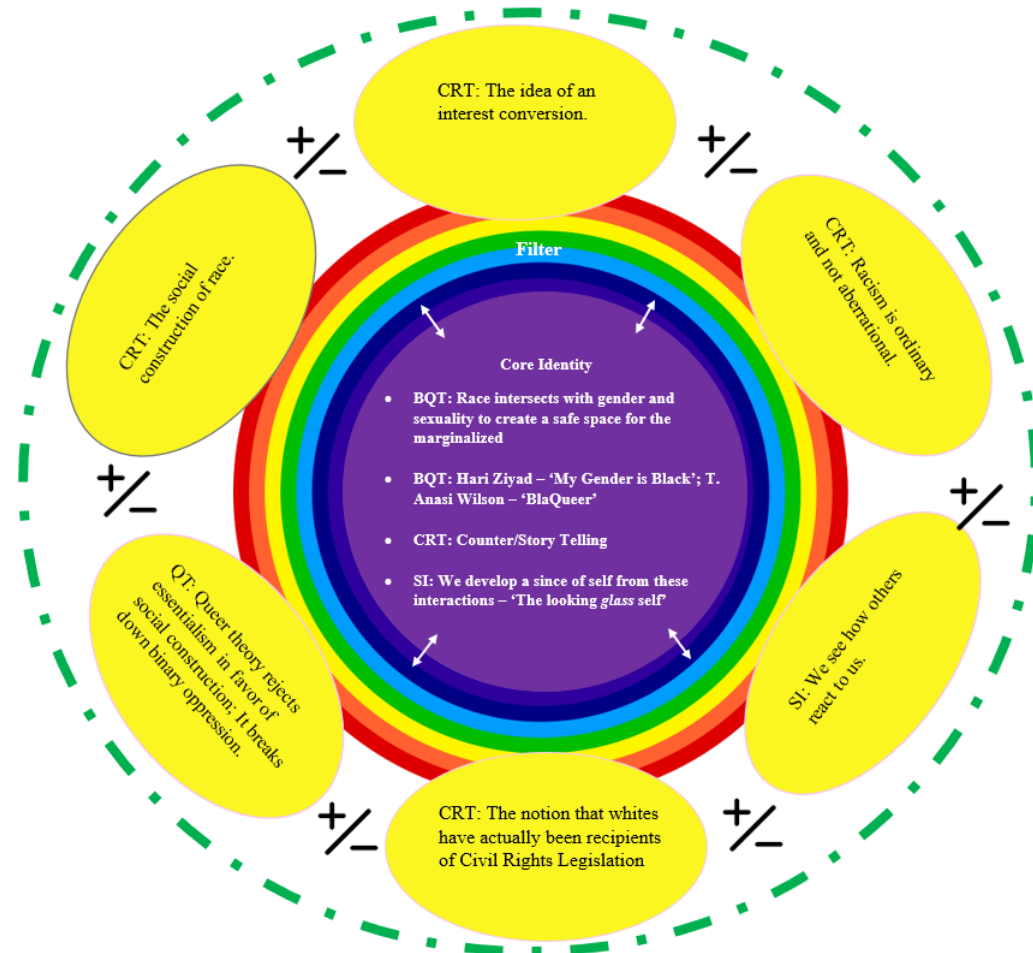
Note: Please see Appendix B for a picture of the original process that created this phase of the All Tea, All Shade Model

Phase 4: Communal Context – Bi-directional

Fourth and lastly, communal context is an external factor that speaks to the perceptions of members of society. The perceptions are bi-directional in nature because they encompass the internal perceptions of the individual and the external perceptions of others. Due to the constant berating of these perceptions in respective environments, individuals may mask (utilize their filter) their fluidity and identity in an attempt to avoid the risk factors and protective factors that may be deemed detrimental due to an individual's respective experience. The communal context is essential in casting light on mentorship and wrap around services for LGBTQ+ students. Nevertheless, communal context is vital in the preservation of mentors and preservation, surviving, and thriving of the LGBTQ+ community.

Figure 1.4

Phase 4: Communal Context – Bi-directional



Note: Please see Appendix B for a picture of the original process that created this phase of the All Tea, No Shade Model (please fix this title Dom)

All Tea, All Shade Model: The Introspective Framework for Black Queer Identities

Hurled in the LGBTQ+ community as a phrase of endearment, “No Tea, No Shade” is a slang phrase meaning “No disrespect, but...” and is common vernacular among many members of the LGBTQ+ community. Similarly, other slang terms such as “All Tea, All Shade...” means the following information is true and I am unconcerned whether it offends you. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, “All Tea, No Shade” will mean the aforementioned information is factual and there is no intention to offend you. As stated in the community, once the lens has revealed the unique intersections of oppression, individuals must “do with that information as they will”. Meaning that once the information, lessons, and wisdom have been imparted, it is up to the individual to promote those concepts in their respective communities. Exuding the essence of transparency, support and nurturement, these phrases emanate the spirit of tough love, which is vital for thriving and surviving for LGBTQ+ youth. Additionally, for this dissertation, the culmination of experiences and information garnered through this lens will help mentors build community and unearth new understandings of America’s talented yet overlooked students.

Summary

Borderlands Theoretical Frameworks have been utilized for over 90 years. Since its inception, borderlands theory has been utilized to examine the concepts of borders that are socially produced (Orozco-Mendoza, 2008). The “All Tea, All Shade” Model is an introspective theoretical framework for Black Queer Men. This model examines the

unique intersections of race, gender, sexuality, education, health status, and culture/heritage. These unique intersections can be observed in the theoretical framework following the five phases of the model. 1. Core Identity – Fluidity, 2. The Filtered Lens, 3. Protective and Risk Factors, 4. Communal Context – Bi-directional, and 5. The All Tea, No Shade lens allows me to examine these intersections as they cast unique clouds of oppression for LGBTQ+ students. In Chapter Four, I will elaborate on how I will implore the All Tea, All Shade in tandem with methodology and methods of a Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) in preparation for data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

The reasoning around this vulnerable qualitative method is to explore the educational and health disparities in the LGBTQ+ community and the impacts on teacher mentorship within the education system in grades 9-12 within the bible belt state of Alabama by looking through the lens of one individual, Dominique Hector. A scholarly personal narrative (SPN) was chosen because it aims to uplift the experiences and voices of marginalized individuals, such as myself, within research. Moreover, this methodology also allows me to examine innovative frameworks that a Black Gay Teacher Mentor utilized to support students of the LGBTQ+ population in grades 9-12. This chapter discusses the qualitative research design SPN, the researcher's positionality, data collection, data storage, data analysis, and ethical considerations. This research project was approved by the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the dissertation committee before any data was collected.

Scholarly Personal Narrative

The selected methodology for this research study is a Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) which aims to tell the stories of vulnerable populations within qualitative research (Nash & Viray, 2013). First defended at the University of Vermont, SPN has since spread throughout the country to speak to the many social injustices experienced by marginalized communities. Among the differences of social class are racial diversity,

religious diversity, LGBTQ+ community, international differences, disability, gender expression, and gender identity. As mentioned in Nash's and Viray's (2013) article, Scholarly Personal Narrative centers personal interpretation, perspective, and translation. These constructs are at the center of how the researcher *sees* and *understands* the world. Additionally, Travers et al. (2011) suggest SPN is grounded in the belief that our lives carry meaning and that we all have stories to share that have the potential to inspire others to learn about themselves and their relation to the world. Lastly, SPN challenges and calls qualitative scholars to connect themes from their personal narratives to larger worldviews and implications (Nash, 2004).

Moreover, it is imperative to consider that SPN is a rigorous qualitative approach that is designed to center the author's personal experiences in relation to social phenomena within communities. Additionally, this framework provides space for education and social justice to be augmented in the realms of program implementation and curriculum. Scholars propose that SPN is a relatively new methodology, it encompasses many of the traditional elements celebrated in qualitative research. Nevertheless, there are two elements of emphasis around SPN: 1) the frequent use and merger of research and theoretical literature to unearth the particularities of the narrative, to amplify and critique, and to offer interpretation and 2) The continuous attempt to theorize generalizable elements of events, contradictions, and actions (Nash & Viray, 2013). SPN is the correct choice in methodology for this work because it gives voice to identities that have been left within the margins such as mine.

Let Me Introduce Myself....

I open with these words from Black woman writer Toni Cade Bambara, “Are you sure, sweetheart, that you want to be well? ... Just so you’re sure, sweetheart, and ready to be healed, cause wholeness is no trifling matter. A lot of weight when you’re well” (Bambara, 1980). I am sure that I am ready to be well. I am an enigma of many things. There is no one way to concretely describe my identity. Identity is ever evolving. Like many species who have graced this planet before me, I strive to make sense of my reality through my unique experiences. Many have asked who are you? However, that is an ever-evolving question. At the intersections of my identity, I am an amalgamation of many things. Some may call me brother, friend, mentor, professor, teacher, son, grandson, Liberator, and leader. My name is Dominique J. Hector. The man who speaks to you today is a result of the intersections of his many identities and experiences. To answer the question, who are you? I must first give you context into my past as it shapes my future.

The acronym LGBTQ+ was something that would work towards my liberation long before I knew what the acronym stood for. I remember a time when I was three years old, and I was having a conversation with my aunt who had to paint a blank canvas portrait of me. I cannot recount the exact conversation I had with my aunt that day, however I knew that I was expected to sit still for more than two hours. This two-hour time frame may seem minute for an experienced babysitter. However, my aunt always challenged me to be better than my expectations. This story is important because it is the first time that I contended with the idea of discipline and living by other people’s expectations. Many people may ask what this story has to do with his matriculation into

adulthood. However, this was the first time I learned about discipline and realized it was OK to be different from other three-year-old boys. At the age of seven, I experienced my first attraction to the same sex. The feeling was very foreign yet familiar. I felt as though what people and society were telling me a young man should be done did not align with what I felt wholeheartedly in my heart. It was at the age of 7 that I realized what a gut feeling was and to always trust that feeling and lean into my authenticity. 7 years later as a freshman in high school, I navigated the halls as a naive 14-year-old who was learning about his lifestyle through everyday experiences.

As a freshman in high school, I knew what the terms homosexual and gay meant. I was not fond of labels, but this was the first time that I resonated with a label that defined my unique experiences and what I felt in my heart. All these experiences may seem trivial in the development of an LGBTQ plus youth. However, this was the first time in my 14-year experience that the magnitude of these experiences explicitly cemented the man that I was becoming. There is one final experience that I think readers will need to know to make sense of who Dominique J Hector is. Although in my high school experience I was openly out to friends and family members or friends, I was not out to my immediate and extended family. It wasn't until an eerie spring day in March of 2011 that I would contend with the concept of accountability, transparency, and honesty. I remember this day as if it was a day of mourning or natural disaster. I remember sitting calmly in my bedroom of my parents' home reading the article from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. This article detailed how UAB was the only public institution in the state of Alabama that offered insurance and employment benefits to LGBTQIA

employees of the university. Although this was ecstatic news to witness in my home state, this would be deleterious news to my immediate home.

Before I proceed with this portion of the story, I want you all to focus on the grief that parents experience when learning the truth of their children's identities. I give this content warning to inform you that there is no hero or villain on this side of the story. Only people who have human experiences may be moved by many words of passion while expressing their views and opinions. As I move forward to share this story, I will refer to both of my parents singularly as one entity. As we have seen in the LGBTQ community, language and identity are ever evolving and can be utilized to give birth to unique situations and experiences that are happening around us and our existence. On that eerie day in the spring of 2011, I sat in my parents' room in fear of not knowing what would come next once I parted these words from my lips. A parent asked me what is it that you are reading this morning? I have never seen you glued to a laptop in this fashion, I would like to know the content of what you are reading. I look up from my laptop and I tell my parents that I am reading an article around innovative frameworks for the LGBTQ community in the state of Alabama. Dismayed by my comment, my parents asked me, "Dominique, are you gay?" In my mind my response is racing 1000 mph, my stomach has turned in every direction that I can fathom, and my anxiety takes me to a paralyzing depth. I muster the courage to utter the word "Yes." To which I am greeted with the rebuttal, "Are you telling me you are gay?"

Ever shrinking and as the seconds pass, I find myself in the headspace of a 7-year-old Dominique. In my mind, I stand there thinking, "What have you done this is your truth, do you think they will handle it with as much care as you do?" The question rings

for a third and final time as my parents' voice slips further and further into despair "So, you're telling me that you are gay"? in which I respond, "for the third time, yes, and I do not know any other way to tell you." The remaining humanity I had left in me because of being transparent and vulnerable was obliterated by these next words. My parents stated, "Why my child, Lord?!" with the look of utter despair my parents in the blink of an eye spoke death over my life in three different ways. "You are going to get HIV, you are going to die, and you will go to hell"! At that moment a sense of determination to thrive rather than survive was ignited. My goal moving forward was to ensure that no other LGBTQ plus individual would have to endure the words that I endured for speaking my truth. I knew that if I was going to thrive and touch lives, I had to educate those who were committed to misunderstanding me and to be a mentor and everything to LGBTQ plus youth that I did not have growing up. From that moment on, I was committed to making sure my community was not killed physically, mentally, and spiritually. And here is where my positionality lies within this work.

Data Collection

To recount the details of my day-to-day experiences, I employed a myriad of methods to ensure that I am collecting the most authentic moments. In the past I have used journaling, voice recording, social media comment sections, and peers to speak to these experiences. I kept a detailed journal of my daily experiences as a teacher in a public LGBTQ+ inclusive charter school. I voice recorded conversations around culture when I am speaking with students, clients, and mentees. I performed deep self-reflection where I sat with my inner thoughts and beliefs around certain issues. Finally, working

with my committee members, I created an interview protocol (See Appendix C) and requested that a committee member conduct this interview on Zoom. This combination of methods allowed me to tell the most didactic story informed by theoretical literature and sound qualitative methodology.

Data Storage

Data storage consisted of ensuring that all video and audio materials are stored properly. To ensure this process is conducted to fidelity, the recordings were recorded and housed on one computer. Access to the Zoom platform was protected by email and password login. Additionally, the MacBook Pro used for this study can only be unlocked through a fingerprint scanner. Moreover, there is a two-factor authentication in place to restrict access to sensitive documents such as research protocols, interview protocols, and other associated study materials. Lastly, this laptop was kept in the possession of the principal investigator.

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Data Analysis

After the research was conducted, the researcher transcribed the data utilizing NVivo to review and transcribe my data. Peer Review/Peer Debrief was an additional tool utilized to insure validity of study findings. As data was collected, analyzed, interpreted, and disseminated for this study's findings, I consistently consulted with select committee members and other researchers familiar with qualitative research methods and methodology through peer reviews and debriefs. Additionally, the process of coding was conducted with a member of my dissertation committee to organize data pulled from the

interview transcript. Thematic codes were organized in the following categories: attraction, Black love, access to LGBTQ+ education about identities, who holds the power, situational support, forever educator (taxation), and co-curricular education in religious indoctrination. These will be further explained in chapter five.

Triangulation

In order to ensure that my work stayed focused on the phenomenon of my K-12 experiences as a Black, Haitian, queer, male I utilized members within my committee to assist in establishing the questions for the reflective interview questions. I also asked a member of my committee to interview me so that I would stay on tasks and not become sidetracked from this specific phenomenon. Triangulation can be defined as utilizing more than one theory and utilizing more than one investigator to study a single phenomenon (Heale & Forbes, 2013). I have used these approaches to triangulation within this study by incorporating three theories (CRT, BQT, and SI) within a borderland approach to create a unique theoretical framework as a lens to view my data, and by inviting my committee members to assist in the interview protocol creation and interview process.

Ethical Considerations

Qualitative research employs rigorous methods to collect, analyze, and disseminate rich textual and narrative data. The unerring interpretation of this data is the researchers' responsibility. In this way, the researcher, themselves, is a research instrument central to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While qualitative research makes no claims toward

objectivity, the researchers' biases and subjectivities must be attended to establish research credibility (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Although advancements exist regarding ethical considerations, there still remains research bias when it comes to marginalized communities. Bettinger et al. (2013) posits that researchers should always be mindful of the consequences of their work. However, Martin and Meezan (2003) assert that the study of marginalized sexualities augments the potential for issues and ethical questions within research. To circumvent these issues, this research employed two primary validation approaches 1) reflexivity and 2) peer review/peer debrief with the dissertation committee. It is important to note that this research protocol was reviewed by the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Institutional Review Board office and it was determined to be not human subjects research and I was given permission to move forward with this work (See Appendix A).

Summary

In this chapter, I have shared my research protocol including my methodological approach, data collection, data storage, and data analysis. I have discussed how the work will be triangulated and the ethical considerations put in place. In the following chapters, I present my SPN and unpack my lived experiences from K-12 as a Black, Haitian, queer, male in hopes of providing a unique insight to my world and advocating for others like me.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

In this chapter, I open with setting the stage for my audience of the narrative journey that will take place. There are mentions of how I as an individual navigated the K-12 system in order to obtain a healthy version of self-imagery. Additionally, I address how I developed into the teacher and mentor that I am today through sharing authentic truths about lived experience and being. I open with a literary text that addresses healing as a concept that is needed in order to gain clarity through trauma and taboo social phenomenon. Unorthodox in nature, I wanted the opportunity to invite my audience into my world as a researcher completing a Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN). As mentioned in the previous chapter, SPN aims to give voice to those who reside within societal margins. It is indeed a framework rooted in social justice, authenticity, freedom, and liberation.

Building Context

I open with these words from Black woman writer Toni Cade Bambara, “Are you sure, sweetheart, that you want to be well?... Just so you're sure, sweetheart, and ready to be healed, cause wholeness is no trifling matter. A lot of weight when you're well” (Bambara, 1980, n.p.). I am sure that I am ready to be well. I am an enigma of many things. There is no one way to concretely describe my identity. Identity is ever-evolving. Like many species who have graced this planet before me, I strive to make sense of my

reality through my unique experiences. Many have asked who are you? However, that is an ever-evolving question. At the intersections of my identity, I am an amalgamation of many things.

Some may call me brother, friend, mentor, professor, teacher, son, grandson, Liberator, and leader. My name is Dominique J. Hector. The man who speaks to you today is a result of the intersections of his many identities and experiences. To answer the question, who are you? I must first give you context into my past as it shapes my future. As a child, I was gifted the nickname “scholar” by my uncle because I was the baby, toddler, and child that never ceased to speak. Nicknaming is an important and unique part of being African American/Black within the United States of American. It is sign of community belonging that is familial in nature. Historically white slave owners stripped enslaved Africans of their cultural and given names to be replaced European Christian names. Renaming or nicknames were in direct opposition to established white patriarchal systems of oppression (Lambert, 2022). I remember around the age of six, my grandfather and uncle were having a conversation about me and told me that I would one day be a professor or doctor. I never understood why they made those assertions about me. Thinking back on that moment, this is significant because in the African American community we belief and practice the method of manifestation. This is the idea of speaking positive things over one’s life to affirm. Many of my students and colleagues have called me Professor or Doctor Hector. It is a sign of deep honor and respect for one’s intelligence. I do not take this honor lightly and this is the first time in my life where I wanted to use my education for the greater good of humanity. However, I am reminded that I always had a defense or rationale for some event occurring and the most

significant event at the time was being black and queer. The acronym LGBTQ+ was something that would work towards my liberation long before I knew what the acronym stood for. I remember a time when I was three years old, and I was having a conversation with my aunt who had to paint a blank canvas portrait of me.

I cannot recount the exact conversation I had with my aunt that day. However, I knew that I was expected to sit still for more than two hours. This two-hour time frame may seem minute for an experienced babysitter. However, my aunt always challenged me to be better than my expectations. This story is important because it is the first time that I contended with the idea of discipline and living by other people's expectations. Many people may ask what this story has to do with his matriculation into adulthood. However, this was the first time I learned about discipline and realized it was OK to be different from other three-year-old boys.

At the age of seven, I experienced my first attraction to the same sex. The feeling was very foreign yet familiar. I felt as though what people and society were telling me a young man should be done did not align with what I felt wholeheartedly in my heart. It was at the age of 7 that I realized what a gut feeling was and to always trust that feeling and lean into my authenticity. 7 years later as a freshman in high school, I navigated the halls as a naive 14-year-old who was learning about his lifestyle through everyday experiences. As a freshman in high school, I knew what the terms homosexual and gay meant. I was not fond of labels, but this was the first time that I resonated with a label that defined my unique experiences and what I felt in my heart.

All these experiences may seem trivial in the development of an LGBTQ plus youth. However, this was the first time in my 14-year experience that the magnitude of

these experiences explicitly cemented the man that I was becoming. There is one final experience that I think readers will need to know to make sense of who Dominique J Hector is. Although in my high school experience I was openly out to friends and family members or friends, I was not out to my immediate and extended family. It wasn't until an eerie spring day in March of 2011 that I would contend with the concept of accountability, transparency, and honesty. I remember this day as if it was a day of mourning or natural disaster. I remember sitting calmly in my bedroom of my parents' home reading the article from the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

This article detailed how UAB was the only public institution in the state of Alabama that offered insurance and employment benefits to LGBTQ2+ employees of the university. Although this was ecstatic news to witness in my home state, this would be deleterious news to my immediate home. Before I proceed with this portion of the story, I want you all to focus on the grief that parents experience when learning the truth of their children's identities. I give this content warning to inform you that there is no hero or villain on this side of the story. Only people who are having human experiences may be moved by many words of passion while expressing their views and opinions. As I move forward to share this story, I will refer to both of my parents singularly as one entity. As we have seen in the LGBTQ community language and identity are ever-evolving and can be utilized to give birth to unique situations and experiences that are happening around us and our existence.

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in this fashion, I would like to know the content of what you're reading. I look up from my laptop and I tell my parents that I am reading an article around innovative frameworks for the LGBTQ community in the state of Alabama. Dismayed by my comment, my parents asked me Dominique, are you gay? In my mind my response is racing 1000 mph, my stomach has turned in every direction that I can fathom, and my anxiety takes me to a paralyzing depth. I muster the courage to utter the word "Yes". To which I am greeted with the rebuttal "are you telling me you're gay"?

Ever shrinking and as the seconds pass, I find myself in the headspace of a 7-year-old Dominique. In my mind, I stand there thinking "what have you done this is your truth do you think they will handle it with as much care as you do"? the question rings for a third and final time as my parents' voice slips further and further into despair "so you're telling me that you are gay"? In which I respond, "for the third time, yes, and I do not know any other way to tell you." The remaining humanity I had left in me as a result of being transparent and vulnerable was obliterated by these next words. My parents stated, "why my child Lord"?! with the look of utter despair my parents in the blink of an eye spoke death over my life in three different ways. "You are going to get HIV, you are going to die, and you will go to hell"!

At that moment a sense of determination to thrive rather than survive was ignited. My goal moving forward was to ensure that no other LGBTQ plus individual would have to endure the words that I endured for speaking my truth. I knew that if I was going to thrive and touch lives, I had to educate those who were committed to misunderstanding me and to be a mentor and everything to LGBTQ plus youth that I did not have growing

up. From that moment on I was committed to making sure my community was not killed physically, mentally, and spiritually.

As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I am hyper-aware of how my intersecting identities present in spaces I exist in and the impacts that affect my interpersonal relationships. Although many may see this as beneficial personally, I must look at the privilege that is associated with my positionality around my identity in the community. Being a black cisgender gay man has impacted my life in ways that many may not be able to conceptualize for the common public. Living the life of a black cisgender gay man has afforded me opportunities that have not been afforded to my heterosexual black cisgender male counterparts. When I think of the acronym LGBTQ+, I think of freedom and liberation. The freedom to express, emote, exist, and elope. A freedom that carries authentic feelings is often misinterpreted and muddied due to the expectations, beliefs, and opinions of society.

This freedom is unknown to many of the African diaspora due to the constant political, social, and psychic attacks of white supremacy and capitalism through the media which mimic many of the sociological effects of slavery on the African American self-identity and cultural orientation (Mitchell, 2008). A freedom so foreign due to the chains and bondage of white supremacy and capitalism that many within our race have resulted in loving each other conditionally rather than unconditionally. Whether it be political, religious, academic, societal, fraternal, or occupational, we as African Americans are expected to navigate space as if we are immune to the conditions around us. As a member of this community, I am oftentimes reminded of the privilege of perspective and temperance. The radical act of existing through space authentically and

freely is in direct opposition to what is expected of the black experience in America. If it weren't for my positionality in the LGBTQ+ community I would not be able to exist, create, and lead in innovative ways.

Additionally, as a member of this community, is where I first learned the lesson and had mentors who guided me on this central principle of authenticity. What is authenticity? To me, it means to evolve and transgress without bounds. However, research has shown that in adolescence, the concern of why self-behavior is paramount during this time is due to the yearning for self-identification which is central to their development (Mitchell, 2008). Meaning that certain behaviors and experiences must take place for a magnificent metamorphosis to take place. African American Author and Poet James Baldwin stated "Freedom is not something that anybody can be given. Freedom is something people take, and people are as free as they want to be" These words burn deeply within my soul. It is why authenticity has been the water to cool and soothe my soul after all these years. Many LGBTQ+ individuals before me did not have the opportunity to tell their stories, the stories of those who mentored us, raised us, molded us, and most importantly loved us unconditionally. Whether we sacrifice for what we believe in or for others to believe in, the choice begins with the individual.

Moreover, James Baldwin left us with this quote, "People pay for what they do, and still more for what they have allowed themselves to become. And they pay for it very simply by the lives they lead." It is vitally important to live your life in the ways that serve you. Many ask how I have achieved the success that I have at the age of 30. I am reminded of the fact that you have given family and chosen family. Your given family is the family you are assigned to at birth. You share DNA, surnames, and genetic traits with

these individuals. However, your chosen family is the family who loves you wholly, they have been vetted personally by you and they support you without bounds. When I think of my successes and accolades, I am grateful to both my given and chosen family. If it had not been for the defining experiences from my given family and uncanny support of my chosen family, I would not be the intersectional being that I am today. I would not be able to claim the titles of mentor, teacher, professor, advocate, coordinator, consultant, and social scientist. These individuals have birthed and molded my intersectionality and individuality until this point. Therefore, I take a pause within this work to introduce each to my readers.

Mother: Tough Love

When I think of influential moments in my life or those who have molded me into the being that I am, I am reminded first of my mother. My mother was my first teacher and was the first teacher I had the pleasure of observing. I remember my mother saying to me as a child “People are always going to have a perception about you. Whether the perception is good or bad, folks are going to talk and you are going to have to let them talk. People are unpredictable. They killed Jesus and he came to save everybody!” It was at that moment that I learned the foundations of what tough love meant.

Many studies have explored how tough love has affected relationships with mothers and their children. Two strategies implored in the early 2000s by Black mothers were racelessness which is the concept of creating distance between oneself and Blackness and a second approach which focused more so on social determinants in determining relationships between mothers and children (Harris & Amutah-Onukagha,

2019). There would be many more examples of tough love throughout my adolescent upbringing. My mother often spoke to me in metaphors to relay the central point of her lessons. This was central in my development of how I love, develop passions, and established my sense of determination. It was in those metaphors and stories that I learned to see the many perspectives of love. There was determination, fear, hope, courage, pride, resiliency, opportunity, and strife in those stories. Even though the passion of my mother's tone resonates with me as I make decisions today, there were times when those words molded me and determined how I maneuvered through space. Thankfully for the intentions of my mother's tough love, I no longer need that tone to navigate spaces that I show up in today.

Father: Military Discipline

In the instance of my father, there is only one way to describe him and that would be discipline. Growing up with a Haitian American father who was in the military was an extension of my mother's tough love. I did not know at the time that my mother was the general and my dad was the sergeant. There would be many days that my dad would be deployed throughout my adolescent upbringing. The first time that I can recollect, is when he was sent to Kuwait when I was in 5th grade. Before he departed from the unit base in Mobile, AL he stated "You know you are going to have to be the man of the house in my absence. Anything that your mother needs assistance with you help her and the same goes for your grandmother as well. You are the man until I get back and I need you to remember all the lessons that I imparted to you until I get back. If you need me,

think of me and a phone call will come right after. That is me responding to your thought”.

At that moment, the term discipline took on a new meaning for me. Discipline no longer means to do exactly as you are told. It was taking the lessons that you have been given and making the best use of them in your reality and experience. Discipline means not giving up when things go south and refusing to succumb to your current circumstances. I am thankful for my father’s discipline but ultimately his ability to teach through showing love. It is when love is shown and embraced that we may move forward in life to the opportunities that are in store for us.

Aunt: Opportunity

Opportunity has been a concept that has been discussed in multiple ways. This concept has also been defined in numerous ways depending on cultural and geographic positionality. In this study, when I refer to opportunities, I am specifically speaking to these three concepts around, prior knowledge, the allocation of attention, and social sources of opportunity related information (Haynie et al., 2009). However, the person that embodies these concepts and personified them for me is my aunt. When I think of the accolades surrounding my aunt, terms like an entrepreneur, real estate and property management agent, insurance adjuster, information technology, baker, and broker. Whether it was a well-thought-out idea or a rush of spontaneity, I always saw my aunt land on her feet. One of the lessons that she imparted with me was the lesson of the phoenix.

She stated, “Let me tell you about a bird named phoenix. She is fierce, resilient, calculated, resourceful, and expressive. The flames of the phoenix burn brightly with the experiences that she has endured. Those same flames, ignite the path in which every opportunity is visible so that she may traverse without pause.” That story always resonated with me as a teenager. I used to sit in awe as my aunt would elegantly and carefully piece together her life without the ominous feeling and fear of the unknown. It may be considered unorthodox for a Black Queer man to find inspiration in a Black woman. However, the very essence of my being came from the attributes of strong Black women. The need to care, support, love, and nurture all come from the maternal figures in my life.

Grandpa: Determination

Here, determination will be explored through the voice of my grandfather. Recently I went home and talked with him, and he told me the story of where his sense of determination came from. And the conversation went like this: “I am 1 of 10 children. I am the second oldest boy of my parents who were sharecroppers in Marengo County Alabama. We didn't have much growing up. There were times where we had to make ends meet what we had rather than what was available. I used to be a farmhand to my father and many times I saw him break his back to provide for his family. At the time, I had no idea that we were poor, I just thought we didn't have enough. It wasn't until I was around 13 years old that I learned the truth of our living situation. as the head sharecropper on the land, my father would do extensive labor and not be paid appropriately for what his work produced.

Noticing that my father was being taken advantage of financially, this angered me and drove me to a point where I hated him for a moment in time. I thought, “how could you let these white people swindle you out of your money when you do all of the work, and your family has nothing to show for it?” “I will never let a man take advantage of me and my money like I said to my father. Not knowing where that courage came from, I quickly realized that I was a boy trying to be in a man’s shoes. My father said to me “you giving me lip boy”? in which I responded, “no sir”. Having stepped outside of my place I noticed that my father was angry with me, and he went to grab his belt. “I told you about sassin’ me boy!” my father yelled. He reached out and grabbed me, shook me violently and threw me over his knee.

My father raised his hand with that belt and swung down with all his might striking me three times on my butt. I yelled in pain, but my father’s grip was tight. There was nowhere for me to go and only one thing for me to do. I thought to myself now or never I opened my mouth, and I bit my father’s inner thigh. He screamed in pain and threw me to the ground. He ran towards the house and told me to wait right there. Frightened at what my father would do next, I ran toward the house and into the room, grabbed the bag that I had already packed, and I dashed for the door.

As I ran across the front yard, I heard my father say don’t you ever disrespect me or come back to this house no more. I look back and I see my father loading his shotgun and then taking aim. I ran in a zigzag line hoping that the bullets would not graze my flesh. Boom! boom! Two loud shots rang out from his shotgun, one of them grazing my pants and clipping my inner thigh. As do you have that mark on me today and that was the first time that I was determined to live and do better. I asked my grandfather where

did you go and how did you survive? He responded and said “I ran to the bus station, and I purchased a one-way ticket to mobile AL. I was 13 years old, and I was leaving everything that I knew at the time. In the suitcase, I only had two shirts, one pair of pants and the shoes on my feet.

When the bus pulled up in Mobile, AL, I called my sister and told her that I was in the city. She came and picked me up from the bus station and she told me I could stay with her for a while until I got on my feet. As a 13-year-old, there weren't a lot of places that were hiring because I was supposed to be in school. However, I had dropped out of school to go back home to help around the farm. When I saw my father was being taken advantage of, I figured there was more money that could be made if I could make my own decisions. So, I was determined not to let anyone do what was done to my father. I had a 7th-grade education but there wasn't much that I could do with that at the time. so, I got a job at the RC cola plant in mobile. I was making \$8 a week which was a lot of money back then.

I would save some of my money, but I would also use money to pay my sisters' rent, put some money aside to buy things like clothes, and also spend a little money on groceries as well. I worked this job for about two years until I got into other forms of work. I eventually ended up learning roofing and construction skills. These were the things that would be able to help me build and sustain a future. I went back home to Marengo County, to visit some of my family and that is when I met your grandmother. I happened to be strolling by her house as she was outside tending to some of her siblings. I talked to her for a little bit, I got her address, and we started to write each other letters.

We wrote each other letters for some time and then I went back to visit your grandmother and that is when I asked her to move to mobile with me and we got married. From that moment on I have been determined to give myself, my family and my community a better opportunity than I had growing-up up in the country.” The spirit of determination can be defined in many ways. Stone et al. (2009) note that self-determination theory focuses on autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and motivation when predicting health and wellness outcomes of individuals. In reference to my grandfather, I believe that he is a product of autonomous motivation. The yearning to dig deep and persevere against whatever odds life may throw at you is the true testament of the concept of determination. When a man chooses to live as only he sees fit, that is when he has the power to change his trajectory and destiny.

Grandma: Wit & Wisdom

Black Activist Mothering is defined as a position of strength, courage, and brilliance that encourages Black women to be in conversation and community with elder Black women to make sense of the present (Sakho, 2017). Here, wisdom is explained by the voice of my grandmother. Recently I went home, and she explained to me what wisdom means in her words. The conversation went as follows. To me, wisdom is an equation. It took me many years to figure out the equation but through experience and talking with my folks, I think I cracked the code. Wisdom is experience plus education which equals good judgment.

My mother used to say a hard head totes a sore ass. What she meant by that is when you do not listen to lessons that are being imparted upon you, you will have a hard

time due to poor judgment. I did not realize this until I was much older. However, she was right in my opinion. My mother and other women in the community taught me along with all the kids in the community to treat people the way that you would like to be treated, love unconditionally, sit in conversation with those whom you care about deeply, and always listen to your elders so that you won't make foolish decisions. I learned many of these lessons from my mother and my grandparents. These lessons were important to my upbringing, and I wanted to instill the same values in my children. Having a family was always something that I dreamt about, but I got firsthand experience rearing my younger siblings. When my mother went to work, she would say "you are the oldest and that your siblings should listen to you in my absence".

During this time, I learned the basics of homemaking such as cooking, cleaning and caring after children. During this time, I learned that cleaning is therapeutic to me, and I always found joy in having my hands busy while I figured out life's challenges. This was also the time where I would have heart-to-heart conversations with my siblings. I always found it pleasurable to impart lessons that have been shared with me from elders to my younger siblings. As I grew older, more lessons were shared with me from my elders and others who inhabited the community. Nonetheless, I started to see how my community from Marengo County, AL was a singular unit for nurturing and protection for all the kids in the community.

In the 1970s it resonated with me that in Mobile, AL, we as Black women were creating the community in which we grew up in. bell hooks (2000) states, "alienated masses of women from the movement, especially poor and or non-white women, who find parenting one of the few interpersonal relationships where they are affirmed and

appreciated (pp. 134-135). My grandmother stated, “During the 1960s and 1970s, Black women who were mothers during this time utilized communal mothering to reaffirm and empower each other in an environment where many of us were being looked down upon because of our education and upbringing.” It is pivotal as researchers that we explore and unpack how these maternal archetypes resisted oppression and continued to impart lessons of wisdom throughout their respective communities.

My non-familial mentors are a fusion of many different people and disciplines. All of these individuals have helped mold and shape the person that I am today. Individuals who hold the titles of professors, fraternity brothers, sorority sisters, and friends. All of their unique presences and experiences have left an embellishment on my heart that I will never forget. I remember a time in my undergraduate experience when I took a course titled the gender and sexuality of sociology. The professor was Dr. Adrienne Millner. She was statuesque, athletic, alluring, enlightened, and emboldened. On the first day of class, she stated to us “this course will force you to question everything you have been taught around gender and sexuality”. This frightened me due to the historical things that I have been taught around white women’s tears and passion. Historically, the passion and tears of women such as Carolyn Bryant Donham have brought immense amounts of suffering and death for Black male bodies.

As a Haitian American male student attending a public university in the heart of the city centered around civil rights, what Dr. Millner was asking me to do was to abandon all that I have known and done to survive in order to imagine a world without social bounds. It was not until finals week of that spring 2013 semester that we had to submit our final papers. Throughout the course, we discussed concepts around feminism,

hegemonic masculinity, toxic masculinity, the intersections of sociology in other disciplines, Black Feminist Theory and Queer Theory. During this week I submitted my final paper, and this was the first time that I was affirmed by a white woman. Upon reading my paper, Dr. Milner stated, “This was a very thought-provoking paper and I believe you may have a future in academia one day”. Filled with elation, I clung to those words and rode those affirmations that were spoken over my life. The following semester brought many interesting revelations. I enrolled in the health education minor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

There I had the pleasure of meeting an additional two white women professors in the School of Education. Drs. Evans and Forbes would be instrumental in my health education theory and praxis training. I learned health education theory, program planning, implementation, and evaluation skills from these women who were passionate around alleviating health disparities in marginalized populations. These were the very people Dr. Milner encouraged me to work with to learn the routines of the academy. If it were not for these pedagogues passing their torch of wisdom to me, I would not be able to innovate and disseminate in authentic ways. Coupled with my cultural, academic, and multifaceted intersections, I have been allowed to create frameworks that speak to the very ideals that heteronormativity speaks against.

Ally mentorship is a concept that is gaining traction within the United States due to the legalization of Same-Sex Marriage and the rise of Anti-LGBTQ+ legislation that is being proposed throughout the United States. The 2015 Supreme Court decision that solidified same-sex marriage as the law of the land, also ushered in new frameworks for mentorship in K -12 education, higher education, health and wellness, and politics.

Utilizing interdisciplinary disciplines such as women and gender studies, sociology, and health education we can explore strategic and expansive programming that will increase health literacy, representation, diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Social justice education posits that an interdisciplinary conceptual framework should be utilized to explore multiple forms of oppression in their complex intersections as well as setting interactive, experiential, pedagogical, tactics, approaches, and strategies for grappling with social oppression and how it interplays with education (Bell et al., 2007).

Themes

Sticking with the concepts of a scholarly personal narrative, in this section you will notice that I as the author speak in first person and reveal the themes of my student experience by sharing excerpts of my narrative while both connecting and intertwining the literature into the work. This allows me the opportunity to unpack my experiences within the context of the macro-level power structures (health care and education) that have impacted my life.

Hollywood Education (Media, MTV, VH1, CMT, BET)

I learned through the media and cable music stations about LGBTQ+ culture. Stations such as Music Television (MTV), Video Hits One (VH1), Black Entertainment Television (BET) and Country Music Television (CMT) all displayed an array of socially progressive artists and tv shows. Through programs such as Noah's Arc and Queer as Folk, I was able to see queer men in multifaceted and nuanced ways. At the time when I was in middle school, this would be 2002 until 2005. I didn't really have a

lot of imagery of black, queer identities on television or throughout the media. I think some of the black, queer identities that we saw were in interracial relationships. So, I think that was a big push in the beginning. I didn't really see any other examples of that. However, I was the one that was sneaking and watching the Logo channel, which was MTV's LGBTQ+ network, and on there they had a show that was called Noah's Ark. I began to watch Noah's ark, and that was the first time that I saw four black, queer men who were of the same sex attracted having different life experiences, and, like one of them was a professor. One of them ran like a clinic. The other one was a designer, and the last one was just, you know the fun, guy. So, from that example I saw relationships in that show. I think that's when I first identified that there could be black love between two same sex, attractive men or queer identities. This was the first time that I saw men deviate from heteronormativity. It was freeing, ethereal, transcending as layer after layer of self-hate was shed as I viewed episodes. Viewing these shows also introduced to me the different lingo that was being utilized between the two shows. This is when I noticed that there was a different dialect that was being used in the mainstream versus people of color POC communities. Additionally, during this time, I was able to see the dynamics between white mainstream culture and Black queer culture. As E. Patrick Johnson noted in his 2000 work on Black Queer Theory, many early LGBTQ+ media outlets and texts were highlighting and representing gender and sexuality as constructs. However, the missing concept in these discussions and forms of representation was the construct of race (Johnson & Henderson, 2020).

The power of media and television has had a grip on American culture since its inception in the early 20th century (Otto, 2005). Through endeavors such as movies,

radio broadcast and television programs, Americans have been influenced by the media in every facet of life. Over the last 40 years, media and television programming has continued to evolve. Much success can be credited to talent agents from some of the largest metropolitan areas in the country. Areas such as Los Angeles, CA, Las Vegas, NV, New York City, NY, Atlanta, GA, and Miami, FL have pushed the media industry into new dimensions within the 21st century. Although the push for media expansion has been beneficial, there are still looming detriments. Television networks such as BET, MTV, VH1, and CMT are constantly scrutinized for airing content that is deemed socially taboo.

Some of the earliest examples of taboo airing could be credited to MTV when they pushed the concept of inclusion in reference to race and music video representation. Throughout the 1980s many Black artists such as Michael Jackson, Prince, and Whitney Houston were aired extensively on the network. Although this is a credit to the African American community, this achievement pushed the boundaries of inclusion in the early 1980's. Similarly, the same can be said in the airing of LGBTQ+ content on major broadcasting stations. Ru' Paul's Drag Race, Queer as Folk and Noah's Arc were some of the early LGBTQ+ shows that pushed the boundary of queerness in the early 2000's. I think that's also around the time we started to get things like Ru' Paul's Drag Race and other high entertainment mainstream, LGBTQ (+) shows. But I knew that, being a black, queer child in the South, that these weren't going to be things that were readily accessible to me just yet. So, I utilized those things for encouragement and empowerment. But I wasn't able to act on those things at middle school during that time. I think I was still

developing, but I probably didn't develop into my most powerful child self until high school.

Weaponized Education as a System of Control

When people think of formalized education, it is often perceived as teacher, students, quizzes, and assessments. However, what is overlooked is that people use certain vernacular and we as individuals derive meaning from the language that is utilized. Language like black twink, sissy, and fag were intended to be derogatory in my formative years, it helped push my thinking on the importance of the intentionality behind the terms utilized. This newfound criticality allowed me to focus on how terms are intended, rather than what is simply being stated. This is a unique skill that is needed in order to navigate spaces where I serve as the educator and mentor. As the All Tea, All Shade model suggests, there is a filtered lens that occurs in conjunction with the positive and negative experiences that are happening simultaneously in shared spaces.

As I reflect on my formative experiences, I was learning queer jargon and slang from the Internet and probably some of the other kids. What was intended to harm me as a child empowered me once I stood firm within my queerness. I remember terms that were kind of derogatory like twink, black twink, of course, the Faggot word. I learned that those terms were derogatory, and I was like, oh, okay meaning I heard what was said but it will be paid dust. However, I also learned other forms of sexual jargon. I learned what a blow job was, what a rim job was. You know people were having conversations during that time about different types of sexual positions and relationships. What a top is, what a bottom is, what versatile was, and what the insertive and receptive partner is.

Additionally, this speaks to the types of conversations that are invited into these cultivated spaces. When spaces are deemed safe, there is a depth of conversation that is invited and allowed to permeate the area. The difference in levels is also vital in the dialogue that is expressed. For example, conversations in the middle school time period of my life were much more reserved than the conversations and taunts that occurred in my high school era. In middle school and high school, we were not allowed to talk about same sex reproductive or sexual health.

So, we didn't get an opportunity to really talk about the importance of using condoms in same sex relationships. Things you might need to do before having sex like testing for HIV and other STI's, or also things around negotiating safer sex. Those are some differences that I saw. However, some of the similarities that I was seeing were that we were all in the same class, and we were all expected to partake in abstinence, and do the abstinence pledge we learned about. The differences were very stark, and I feel like because LGBTQ+ sexual health wasn't taught, that contributed to some of the risky behaviors that I engaged in within middle and high school. As I reflect back on these experiences during my formative years, I am reminded that we are still fighting these issues today masked as Anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. Florida and Alabama have been vital in the educational overhaul of diversity, equity, and inclusion policies in schools. With the introduction of bills signed into law by Alabama Governor Kay Ivey, in addition to passing two state houses of the Alabama Legislature such as the S.B. 184 and H.B. 322, these bills prohibit the discussion of LGBTQ+ topics in K-12 classrooms and prohibits medical and gender affirming treatment for LGBTQ+ youth.

Religious Indoctrination Versus Spiritual Liberation (Arriving at Authenticity)

Religious doctrine has been utilized to control the masses from the earliest recollections of human history. Stories of how individuals were turned into pillars of salt for disobeying a jealous God and unspeakable famines that occurred due to disaster or personal sin. Religion has also had monumental benefits within society. When utilized with pure intentions, it has the power to foster community, transcend boundaries and borders, and give a sense of purpose. However, in the 21st century, religion has been weaponized to oppress identities that exist within the margins of the normalized majority here within the United States. As I think back to my own experiences with religion I am reminded of the sermons and stories that were used as fear tactics. Specifically in the African American community, religion has been utilized as a way to keep order and prevent individuals from questioning the unknown.

Rooted in white supremacy tactics, American forms of Christianity are still perpetuating oppression among marginalized groups. For example, there are socio-political phenomena at play where religion and education conflate and display moments of dissonance. Currently within the United States, there are news articles that highlight how education and religion clash in K-12 spheres. In a viral video that depicts a Baptist Pastor at a school board meeting, the pastor expresses his discontent with the children's book "It's Completely Normal". In his public discourse, the pastor expresses how pictures of sexual intercourse, discussions of sexuality, gender identity, and family units are inappropriate in an elementary school population. The pastor then states "You see, I don't get my talking points from the RNC or DNC but the BIBLE." At that point I had to stop the video.

As I sat and reflected on his sentiments, three words continued to permeate my thinking. “Conservatism”, “Censoring” and “Data”. I thought the Bible was rewritten during a time of conservatism and morality. It speaks on death, abuse, destruction, adultery, betrayal, lying, sodomy, depression, pride, greed, and deceit. Yet, instead of censoring these topics, we invite them to happen in public discourse, worship spaces, and classrooms. Yet, we cannot talk about sex in elementary school. This brought me to my next endeavor which was data. Here in the Deep South, youth between the ages of 10-24 are 3 times as likely to contract an STI by the age of 25. In the great state of Alabama alone, according to the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) in the years 2020-2023, 68.2% of our Chlamydia cases have been attributed to the 10-24 population. Additionally, 53.1 percent of our Gonorrhea cases have been attributed to this population respectively. Mind you there were 206 kids between the ages of 10-14 who were diagnosed with Chlamydia and 89 who were diagnosed with Gonorrhea. 10 year olds (who are in elementary school) are included in this group. The data doesn’t lie. The babies are active. This forced me to think of my own experiences with religion and the K-12 sphere.

Building context, this would be the late nineteen nineties, early two thousands, and I saw a lot of stigma when it came to queer identities, especially Black Queer identities. For Black Queer men, major emphasis was placed on the HIV epidemic. Augmented projections and portrayals of hyper masculinity and the emasculation of the Black male body were rampant. Widespread public discourse about toxic masculinity and bullying were hot and socially accepted topics. Resulting in soft boys being excluded from other groups of men/boys who socially conformed and performed toxic

masculinities. Men would be teased for liking the opposite sex and being attracted to the same sex. From a religious perspective I was also hearing messages that you will go to hell for having these feelings. You may not have even had sex yet; however, damnation is the sentence if you are attracted to the same sex attracted, and ultimately you are demonized. You are broken, and you have to go into the fiery pits of hell... So those were things that I was learning in religious spaces. Also seeing in schools that we weren't allowed to have conversations about queer identities and whatnot, but we could talk about damnation and morality. It really felt as though my identity was diminished and didn't matter. As long as we were talking about the status quo and the societal norm, it was okay. But don't go over there and talk about those taboo no-no topics. This was the first time where I, as a Black Queer child, had to contend with the concept that my authentic identity is not in alignment with the societal status quo. Black religious spaces, especially in the Deep South do not have safe or cultivated spaces for these identities to exist within the precipice of religion. Many have asked throughout my K-12 experience who introduced me to religion and why would you subscribe to a doctrine that will yield nothing but eternal suffering?

As I grappled with this question, I was reminded of experiences and conversations with multiple family members about religious indoctrination. Now I do want to say this first, that this is my truth and so, I learned religion from the matriarchs of my family. When I was taught about religion, I was always told the Bible says that man is not supposed to lie with another man, as they do with a woman as referenced in Leviticus 18:22 (Olyan, 1994). So, I learned that scripture, and I internalized it for a long time, because I didn't want to go to hell due to my feelings and what I had been taught.

Additionally, if you're gay, if you engage in this, if you think about this, this is what's going to happen to you when you die. This was an equation for death. So, with religion, It scared me because I was a part of the church for a long time. Possibly until about age 15, like in high school, and I was very fearful of that particular scripture. What folks had to say about homosexuality, especially when there were sermons preaching about how things like HIV was God's punishment for people who are attracted to the same sex. Or loneliness, depression, and anxiety are the only things that will come out of same sex attraction. Hearing messages like these really left a sour taste in my mouth for religion because I started to think, why would God create me this way? Especially, if all I'm going to experience is oppression and hurt? So, I started to do research for myself, and I started to learn that a lot of the Scriptures and things had been manipulated and transcribed to have different meanings throughout kingdoms, borders, and eras. Armed with that knowledge, around age 15, I ceased going to church, and I told my mom that I no longer felt comfortable going to church because it didn't speak to the individual that I was and would continue to develop into. It spoke to a set of rules that an individual needed to follow in order to be viewed in a certain light. I realized that religion was helping people live for other people, and I wanted to be able to have a personal relationship with God so that I may live for that purpose and will. That's when I became more spiritual, more so than religious. Black queer youth and people may be able to utilize this approach to foster their own narratives that are not centered in binary teachings of religious indoctrination. Additionally, a way to arrive at spiritual authenticity can be a divorcing and reteaching of the perceptions that we have around religion and spirituality. Furthermore, fostering a

pathway that empowers and liberates Black queer youth from binary systems of tyranny and oppressive religious indoctrination.

MANifesting Progressive Masculinity

I believe during this time, matriculating from fifth grade into sixth grade, there were many misconceptions and portrayals of different forms of masculinity. In Mobile County, sixth grade would be the beginning of my middle school years. At the time I was being exposed to different versions of male role models. For the record, there was not an absence of male role models in my life. I grew up with a disciplined, spontaneous, and nurturing father in my home. I also had both of my grandfathers, who were in my life. Additionally, I had uncles, cousins, and family friends who were distinguished and amazing role models. I am not saying that I come from a family of perfect men.

However, I come from a family of men who have great intentions with sometimes misplaced effect. Although these are the prototypes, I did not feel as though these men resonated with the type of man that I was becoming. Resulting in me finding inspiration and adoration for men like: Lenny Kravitz, Prince, Don Lemon, Will Smith, Denzel Washington, Little Richard, Billy Porter, Malcolm X, Dr. Huey P. Newton, Bayard Rustin, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, and John Lewis. Many of those male figures resonated with me because they exemplify the type of man that I want to portray to be. I refer to these 14 men as my Bakers Dozen in reference to my identity. This is the most effective way of translating my identity socially for lay communities.

Lenny Kravitz and Prince were deemed metrosexual. They were edgy yet poised. They pushed the boundaries of traditional masculinity through their musical and

fashion choices. Denzel Washington and Will Smith were deemed the it boys of Hollywood. If you wanted to be seen, and dominate screens, these were the two men to reference. Malcolm X, Dr. Huey P. Newton, and John Lewis were deemed the rebels of their era. These were men who were unapologetic in their politics and practice. Additionally, these men were vocal powerhouses, and utilized their platforms to organize and raise awareness of countless social justice inequities. Furthermore, James Baldwin, Bayard Rustin, Little Richard, Don Lemon and Billy Porter have utilized their networks in order to bring LGBTQ+ disparities into mainstream arenas. Carefully dissecting the attributes of each one of these men, I arrived at new frameworks of thinking around deconstructing toxic forms of hyper-masculinity. I recall thinking one of the smallest changes I could implore at the time was committing to smiling. I was always told that I displayed a mean demeanor or disposition. Additionally, I was told growing up that boys should not smile all the time. It portrays weakness. People will think that you are weak or simple. It was stated that you must maintain a poker face at all times. Similarly, I never understood what that was about.

In my teenage years, around ninth grade, I became obsessed with trying to portray a different type of masculinity through my style choices. I did not want to have to contend with the sexuality or gender of clothing. I wanted to wear things and make choices that made Dominique feel comfortable. Feeling empowered to express my newfound confidence, I took a chance at wearing a bright pink collared polo shirt with a seashell necklace. The signature at the time that told others I was a different type of man. Or as we say in the Black LGBTQ+ community 'one of the gworls'. I did not abide by traditional constructs of masculinity concerning sexuality and expression. I felt that my

queer identity and black identity allowed me to deconstruct what does not align. Hell, for me, this was reparations! Ultimately, those 14 portrayals of men were how I escaped my reality of not being able to express myself as the version and vision that I had been bestowed. This was monumental for me and molded a healthy and positive model of self-imagery.

As I reflected on this imagery, I questioned how the men who have biological connections to me have impacted me. I realized that my father came from a military background, and he was very disciplined, and I value discipline. However, I am a person who doesn't like strict routines. I didn't want to be a person that always had to be so uptight, on time, and always by the book. Not saying that I should be allowed to cut corners; however, we should be able to relax and have fun in the work that we do. As for my grandfather, I love him to death. Nevertheless, he is just very traditional, and I feel as though that he has a perspective that works for him and his era, it's just outdated. Many of the examples that my grandfather has shared with me have been golden nuggets and you cannot find that anywhere else. Then there are some examples that must be unpacked and ultimately discarded. The framework of taking what is needed from social interactions with trusted gatekeepers in communal settings is a necessity in this world and oftentimes begins in our institutions of learning and at home.

In middle school, I credit my band and choir teacher for my institutional wellbeing. I remember my band teacher's name was Ms. Ginger Youngblood and the choir teacher was Mrs. Gaye Goddard. They were really instrumental, no pun intended in my safety while I was there at school. I had other teachers who kind of looked out for me along the way, but they articulated to me what the expectation was if I was going to be

my authentic self at school. They stated “All right. we see you, kid, we see that you are going through some stuff and these other kids are trying to bully you. We are going to help you protect yourself and be great.” Band class became my safe space when I was in middle school. I also was in the choir and so those 2 classes and teachers really helped me feel safe and cared for. Throughout the year, those classes kept me wanting to come back to school.

As far as my family. I had the unconditional support of my Aunt Dianne. She was the first person that I told in the family that I was gay. I remember being so scared to tell her this intimate truth. When I told her she calmly replied “okay”. On the brink of having an anxiety attack, I recall her adding to her previous statement “I thought that this truth was going to be something like a substance abuse issue, alcoholism, or something much more serious. Well, as long as you continue to go to school, legally do the things that you need to do, and graduate. This is a conversation for you and your parents to have. However, I will be there for you when that time comes when you come out. So, I had her as a central figure, and then I also had my grandfather. Although I had not come out to him officially in the depths of my soul I feel like he always knew. He would give me subliminal nuggets and bits of advice here and there. I believe those affirmations and advice were instrumental in my development. If it were not for these nurturing folks during my middle school years, I would not have developed in holistic and healthy ways. In essence, these individuals looked out for me and nurtured my identity. Personally, culture is formulated as a mixture of customs, dialect, and community equaling a shared and accepted expression. Respectively, identity is formulated to include the intersection of all things known divided by concepts yet to be known about our being. This equals

dissonance in our being that needs to be unpacked through trials of introspection and reflection.

Need For Queer Education

The K-12 educational sphere should be a time of discovery, excitement, and innovation for every student. However, in many school districts, draconian policies and administrative practices prevent institutions from exhibiting their pledges to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). This is an issue that permeates districts across the country and impacts student learning and performance. Although traditional public and private schools exist in most school districts and locales, there is a growing emphasis on charter school models and their implementation of state sanctioned school and parent choice. As I reflect on the latest advancements in the Alabama educational and political sphere, there is ongoing discourse on policies that restrict teacher curriculums and instruction in Alabama classrooms. With the signage of S.B. 184 and H.B. 322 in the state of Alabama, it is now considered a Class A felony for medical providers to perform gender affirming care to LGBTQ+ youth under the age of 19. Additionally, LGBTQ+ youth within Alabama will now have to utilize sports locker rooms, changing facilities, and school restrooms that align with their sex assigned at birth. Similarly, several other Deep South states have implored indistinguishable policies that restrict freedom and liberation among LGBTQ+ youth. This reminds me of a time where I was exposed to blatant forms of violence in my high school career. The lack of queer education exhibited by teachers, students, and administrators evolved into these egregious policies that rain down harm and oppression on this marginalized community. During my ninth grade World History

class, It was deafening to learn that I was a queer black teenager in the Alabama educational system. I never felt as though I fit in with all things that were male. Traditional masculinity called for men to be rugged, exhibit an absence of emotional intelligence, have sex with women but not care about or like them, and repress all things that are feminine to name a few expectations of this traditional hyper masculinity. On the contrary, I knew that I did not fit in with all things that were considered feminine either. So, when it came to things like sports, I was more interested in things like running, or like tennis volleyball. But we only had track and cross country for the boys. We didn't really have a boys' volleyball or boys' tennis team. When it came to academics. There were a lot of conversations that talked about Black boys being deviant and being misunderstood. I only felt like I could resonate with half of it, because I felt as though I was misunderstood, but I knew I wasn't deviant. I was really wondering who was going to see me and be the teachers that were gonna help me as I was coming through this discovery, and it really wasn't until about the fifth grade that I got a teacher that really understood me. like. It was like my teacher had a revelation that this is a Black, queer child. In that moment my soul heard her say "I need to emphasize safety, closeness, and security. I need to speak with him, not at him". In my recollection, that was probably the first time I realized that you had to handle queer identities with care irrespective of what the society stated. In addition to what is already being taught from traditional forms of heteronormativity, a coupling of new frameworks will be needed in order to birth realities that we have only begun to dream of. I realized intersectionality was starting to take a toll at that point within my identity. It is of momentous benefit that there is research that

corroborates the need for progressive frameworks that emphasize diversity, equity, and inclusivity.

On a personal level, to identify as Black, Queer, Haitian, and educated is a powerful yet deafening space to exist within. I feel very authentic and liberated. I feel as though that I have a freedom that other Black, Queer, Haitian, and educated identities do not have when it comes to confounds of rules. When it pertains to tradition, I feel as though I have to rewrite the narrative of what tradition and legacy will look like.

Regarding my friends, I am reminded that community is important. Subscribing to that framework of thinking, I have friends from all walks of life, and I have tried to utilize my education and my experience for other people's benefit. Whether that be a good benefit, or something that can be considered a lesson learned. I try to practice an ethic of not being selfish with my authenticity and focusing on sharing the light that I have with other people. Building communal relationships, raising awareness of sociopolitical issues, augmenting education, removing barriers, and improving access are all vital characteristics to fund and operate institutions and organizations. To further introduce and implement this work, I am reminded by the thought of how my educational experience as a teacher and mentor significantly differs from the experiences students are having today. Subsequently, I strive to ensure my students and mentees do not have to relive my experiences. I call this process of thought risk and spatial mitigation. Risk mitigation is the intention of avoiding perceived threats. Respectively, spatial mitigation is the intention of consciously making choices to influence spaces in which an individual exists. The All Tea, All Shade model speaks to the concept of communal context. In theory, this speaks to the ability of Black queer identities to mask their identities. This

masking of identity is in response to the internal and external perceptions the individual is experiencing in conjunction with experiences happening in real time. This unique immersion and conflating of identity and communal context results in spatial mitigation. I subscribe to this practice due to the mitigation efforts that are offered and can be implored in institutions and organizations regardless of their status.

It is vitally important to distinguish the difference between public, private, and charter schools. Public schools are funded by federal dollars and oftentimes receive donations through endeavors such as school fundraisers and donations. Private schools are funded through private donations and tuition payments. This distinction allows them to avoid following federal policies since they do not receive federal funding. Charter schools are neo-classical frameworks of education. These entities and institutions are allowed to receive public distinctions based upon the credentialing and chartering body (i.e., school district or state) in which the applying school is seeking. Additionally, charter schools are public schools with a private board of directors. This allows these schools to set their own curriculum, personnel, budget, and code of conduct. As I reflect on my experiences as a teacher and mentor in the K-12 system, I am confounded with evidence of these differences in practice. One particular experience I noticed with teaching in both traditional public schools and public charter schools, is that there are differences when it comes to autonomy. When I was teaching in Birmingham City schools, there was a strict way of how we had to lesson plan, how many assignments were assigned to students per week, what conversations and books we could teach in the classroom, and many oppressive directives that restricted academic freedom. In the realm of public charter education, I was given more freedom and autonomy in the

curriculum around discussions on current events in our respective communities were encouraged. In addition to how we could combat social injustices that we were witnessing, we were allowed to push students to think critically around socio-political issues. It is my belief that those pivotal moments in my professional career and my educational experience forced me as a teacher and mentor to evolve. Moreover, I am reminded of my K - 12 experience, and how I wished or longed to have an educational experience where we could have talked about what was actually happening around us instead of what happened to us. Lastly, I am haunted yet blessed that I am tasked to guide students in their intellectual and social development. Blessed that I now possess the tools to help students and mentees avoid life altering traumas. However, haunted that there are still oppressive systems that are in place that will continue to miseducate and mislead our marginalized youth. Perpetuating a cycle of harm and abuse that will perpetually degrade and erode the educational and social spheres of our country.

The Miseducation of "Dominique Hector"

All right. Well. I will first have to say that I had a teacher in the ninth grade who was a coach. I cannot remember their name at the time, but I remember that this coach was in our history class, and it was World History - 1865, or something like that. So, I remember us being in the class, and we were having a discussion about African Americans being enslaved. We were talking about the trail of tears and the native Americans, and how, how, if native Americans were depressed, they don't do work. and so, they didn't make for the enslaved individuals at that time. And this is how we ended up, you know, utilizing Africans and spreading that throughout the world, and I

remember during that time I asked the question, and I was like Well, why do the slaves or the enslaved individuals still have so much hate towards them today, and he was like, Well, look at him. They're lazy. and all of the things that are happening in the country right now are at the downfall of this particular race, and I was like. How can this individual say this? You know our people. and then not be checked by anybody. And so. While sitting there, I remember because it was an honest history. You and I are one of the only little black boys. They do. I'm like, okay, what do I say next? Like to get him off the line? And so, I remember coming back with saying, like, you know, this is how civil rights movements are born and things of that nature. And then I said something along the lines of this is why America has been built on the backs of enslaved folks and coming on the back side of that is LGBTQ+. Folks like they're the next civil rights movement that's going to be happening, and they Their movement has been happening since the African American Civil Rights movement. And so, I was like, so are you saying that those people are also a detriment to the country, and he was like we should just send everybody back to where they came from.

I am someone who is about to hold a Ph.D. As an academician, it puts me in a space to where I do not fit in with the black gays here, because right now we're having the conversation of everyone wanting to be a city girl. We all want to be outside, and it's like Yes, I, too, want to be outside. However, we have to be gatekeepers and mentors within the community. I need to make sure the outside is safe. However, people are doing the things that I want to do. I am someone who is very sex positive, and I want to be a part of all the things that we are doing in the age of pleasure. But at the end of the day, it feels like there is no space for me to do those things here in Alabama. I am always

viewed as the mentor, the educator, and student. This is going to sound like a caveat. However, what I experienced in Birmingham City schools, the first school that I worked at was a predominantly African American High School. I felt very included and safe in that environment. I felt very warm, and as far as my queerness, it was actually welcomed in that space. I actually became a mentor to many of the queer students that were there at the school. Many of them were not in my health classes because health was for ninth graders. Ironically, I accumulated a mass of tenth, eleventh and twelfth graders who were always in my classroom because I was the queer identity there at the school. It was very humbling, because I always thought before that experience, that I wasn't black enough to be in the black community because of my weirdness, but due to me, leaning into that, I was able to be a pillar in the Black community regardless of my queer identity. On the contrary, when I look at the charter school realm, When I was at a school that serviced queer and alternative identities in Alabama, I experienced over this past year that my identity was very threatening. I believe the reason that my identity is threatening is due to the visible and invisible intersections occurring simultaneously. However, with Blackness, queerness, my Haitian identity, being an educator, and being educated, I oftentimes was treated as if I was not one of the founding teachers of the school. I was held to expectations that our white counterpart colleagues were not held to. I was subjected to hyper, policing, and hyper surveillance while I traversed the building. As the only queer man of color on the staff at the time that was a founding educator it was very disheartening to notice that I was experiencing racism, transphobia, homophobia, and xenophobia in a space that has a visible and signed DEI statement. If this space was created for everyone to be included, then we must acknowledge there are

five different populations that are supposed to be serviced at the academy. However, we only talk about one identity which is the LGBTQ+ plus community. The academy's underlying emphasis is pushing white cisgender identities that can pass and exploiting those identities to receive donations.

This reminds me of the historical context that is needed to view this issue in its totality. Historically, there has always been a divide amongst the LGBTQ+ community in reference to race and diaspora. As time has progressed, we have seen a more blended portrayal of LGBTQ+ rights and liberation. However, it is important to remember that it was not until the 2010's that we started to have images of unification for LGBTQ+ rights. Supreme Court rulings intended to allow interracial marriage for heterosexual couples such as *Love vs Virginia*, have substantial benefit. However, the ruling invites a concept that is seldomly unpacked in reference to race in the LGBTQ+ community. I also started to think about differences between our communities due to race and culture. Respectively, there is a mainstream LGBTQ+ community and the Person of Color (POC) LGBTQ+ community. What I was oftentimes witnessing was dissonance in these realms. Today, that dissonance remains due to rampant forms of racism, derogatory slurs that are utilized and blatant portrayals of graffiti. In that specific charter school, Teachers of color were not respected and were resigning.

In a STEM based pathway charter school in Alabama, similar issues were happening as the queer and alternative identity charter school. I was under the assumption that this institution was Black owned and led that there would be a commitment to social justice, liberation, and freedom. I was sold a dream that this space was different. This space was committed to diversity, inclusion, evolution, and impact.

However, STEM based charter schools proved to be worse than my experience with the previous institution. The similarities of these institutions are that they are in the first three years of their start up. Disappointedly, there is not a lot of organization when it comes to curriculum, how to effectively and impactfully run a school, social and emotional learning for the students, professional development for the staff, onboarding of new hires, nepotism of internal and external hires, and posturing for political and social gain. It is a very tumultuous situation, and I don't think that folks realize that a cold handoff, the absence of administration, what administration allows to happen in an environment/culture has the capacity to implode the overall vision and success of the school. That is essentially what I was feeling and what I experienced while I worked in public charter education within Alabama. I am grateful that now I am on the other side, because now I get to continue to be a community pillar and support those folks from the other side, which is sometimes more powerful and impactful work than being on the inside. As I reflect on these experiences, I am reminded that the Alabama educational system is not intended for free thinkers, those who may go against the status quo, and those who are deemed whistleblowers. My experience as an educator and mentor is that these bodies are expendable. The culture deems that a teacher/mentor can be replaced if they go against the established traditional educational framework.

Lastly, I am reminded of how these silencing tactics are full circle moments from my past. In the K-12 educational sphere, there were many teachers and bullies who tried to break my soul. Ironically, my mother was my first bully. What I mean by this is, my mother was the first person in authority who propositioned me with resistance. Whenever I questioned spaces, concepts, or my mother, she would be ever present with

her overarching opinion. In reference to my identity and sexuality, I am Black, Haitian, Queer man who is educated and have always found pride in my identity. When my identity and sexuality are attacked, it summons a spirit of calamity that thrusts me into a defensive rage. This is something that is both a blessing and a curse. A blessing that I now possess a thick skin and am ready to advocate for myself and the community at all costs. However, this is a curse due to my capacity to burn bridges with those who are not committed to social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion. My teachers have attempted to mold me by telling me things like don't smile and laugh so much, it's not okay for boys to be messy, or being friends with all the boys will not make the other boys like you. When I think back to these moments, deviating from these instructions has been the thing that has increased my social likeability. Similarly, with my bullies, I had fights in both 8th and 9th grade. These fights occurred because I exhibited evolved understandings around masculinity and sexuality. I remember being in 8th grade, all the boys in the 8th grade turned against me because I was openly gay, and I refused to hook up with a closeted white boy. We had a conversation in band class about porn and he asked if I performed oral sex since I was gay. I told him I did for people that I liked but I was not into being exploited because of my sexuality and identity. I realize now that I was having a complex conversation with myself around intersectionality, sexual exploitation, and attraction. In the LGBTQ+ community, we would refer to these closeted men as "trade". These are men who exploit members of the LGBTQ+ community for sexual and monetary gain. I knew that I was attracted to men in the 8th grade. However, I did not want to be taken advantage of or sexual with every man that was available. The proposition to perform oral sex with a popular boy at school was

tempting but I was not attracted to him. So, I refused. Sparking a myriad of attempts from other boys to fight day after day. There were fights in gym class, the restrooms, hallways, and eventually teachers' classrooms. In Alabama, we would call this scrapping. Although I believed in progressive forms of masculinity and sexuality, I was determined to whoop these boys' asses and prove myself. I come from a military background and daddy did not raise a punk. So, I fought. Fighting for survival and hitting as hard as I could to prove my point. Ultimately, things were so bad that my parents pulled me out of school for the rest of my 8th grade year. In 9th grade, foreign language classes were all the buzz in our school. We were allowed to pick our language preference. I remember choosing Spanish and I was ecstatic to be enrolled in the course. We were under the instruction of Senorita White, and she gave us all authentic Spanish names that we would go by in the course. My given name is Felipe. Not realizing at the time that this was a form of cultural appropriation, I remember being scolded for asking a question that triggered a series of events. I asked Senorita White how to conjugate something that we were learning around culture. A white male student in the class with the given name Jobel, stated "why is this faggot ass nigga always asking questions that take longer to explain?" Enraged by the terms that he chose to utilize, I flew out of my seat and dared him to repeat the words again. He slowly stated, "faggot ahh." As soon as the F slur was completed, my fist was in his mouth. He slapped my face causing my glasses to fly across the room. Even more enraged, I picked up a desk and slung it across the classroom striking him in the head. "That boy is strong", exclaimed one of my peers. Blood dripping from his head and as he lay unconscious, I uttered tell your friends you got knocked out by a faggot. "Felipe!" exclaimed Senorita White. Followed by

instructions to go to the principal's office immediately. These are not moments that I am proud of; however, these defining moments have helped me survive in a world that wishes death on Black queer bodies at every turn. Although these stories are tough and unconventional, these are isolated events from one individual. I am certain that there are countless identities in the world who are in need of sharing their narrative. This is only the beginning of a literary and academic movement to give birth to these neglected stories. As we march on towards that ethereal yet tangible future, it is vital that we remember we are only as rich as the stories that shape us.

Spilling the Tea

If we hope to break the cycle of intersecting oppression, we must be conscious of the unlearning of all things we know as traditional. I want to give *All Tea, All Shade*, tradition is nothing more than mindlessly following the advice of those who have perished before us. In the 21st century, it is paramount that we implore frameworks that speak to the didactic progressiveness we must achieve as a communal and human race. One theoretical framework we could implore specifically to view this phenomenon is the All Tea, All Shade model. Birthing formalized theoretical models that incorporate queer education will be central in the development, nurturing, and mentoring of Black LGBTQ+ identities. In the next chapter, I will expound upon the highlighted theme of queering educational curriculums in multifaceted and nuanced spaces with an aim at disrupting traditionally divisive curriculums and services. The dissemination of these evolved curriculums and practices will be charged to the brave educators, mentors,

community health workers, certified health education specialists, healthcare practitioners and allies of this population.

CHAPTER 6

DISKISVON [DISCUSSION]

I open with discussing the importance of utilizing Haitian-Creole language in this chapter. Historically, Haiti represents freedom and liberation. Haiti is the only Black country that defeated its colonizer and expelled them from the land (Mocombe, 2023). This is a country of resistance and serves as a powerful model of liberation. Toussaint Louverture, the famous and fearless leader of the Haitian Revolution, stated “I have undertaken vengeance. I want liberty and equality to reign in St. Domingue. I work to bring them into existence” (Mocombe, 2023, n.p.). I resonate with this statement because my name is Dominique meaning belonging to God’s dominion.

If St. Domingue and ultimately Haiti was able to expel its colonizers from its land, why can’t I, as Dominique, expel the colonizers system from my body? To do so would be the true meaning of liberation and autonomy. To me, to be Haitian and queer is to deviate from all things oppressively heteronormative and white supremacist in nature. It is a freedom that very few individuals on the planet experience. As I close out this work, I will expound upon how future practice and research can aid others in experiencing this type of liberation.

Konprann Etansyon Pou Fe Mal Idantite LGBTQ+: Understanding the Intent to Harm LGBTQ+ Identities

For the last decade violence against LGBTQ+ identities have been on the rise. Specifically, violence against transgender women is at a crippling high within the United States. According to the Human Rights Campaign's (2023) report concerning violence against trans women, 11 transgender and non-binary identities were killed because of violence (HRC, 2023). Wistfully, 25 transgender women were killed in 2022 within the United States due to violence. Through a search of the stories of each woman killed, it was found that 15 of the 25 women killed that year were victims of gun violence. That is a staggering sixty percent of trans women who have been killed in 2022 due to gun violence. Other forms of violence that have consumed the lives of trans women in America are knife assaults, battery, drowning and burning of the victim. Sexual assault is another contributing factor that perpetuates the dangers and disparities that trans women face in the United States. Sexual violence has been found in larger frequencies in subpopulations of the transgender community (HRC, 2023).

Subpopulations such as trans youth and trans people of color are two groups mentioned specifically who have adverse health outcomes and experiences regarding sexual violence (Budhwani, et al., 2022). A statistic from the National Transgender Discrimination Survey Report erected that 12 percent of trans youth experienced being sexually assaulted in the K – 12 setting by either peers or educational staff. 22 percent of homeless transgender individuals reported being sexually assaulted while staying in an overnight shelter (Glick et al., 2018). In addition, 13 percent of transgender individuals

who identified as African American reported experiencing sexual assault while in a workplace setting (Glick et al., 2018).

Perpetrators of sexual assaults who serve in *helping* roles often abuse their positions of power (Eisaguirre, 1993). This allows for individuals in subordinate roles to be subjected to sexual assault. Fifteen percent of trans individuals expressed experiencing sexual assault while in police custody or jail. Rates of sexual assault against African American trans individuals doubled at 32 percent (Eisaguirre, 1993). Additionally, sexual assaults targeted toward individuals who identify as transgender are integral in hate crime investigations and may be grouped with other capricious factors such as race and sexual orientation. According to the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, NCAVP (2010),

Acts of hate violence, such as harassment, stalking, vandalism, and physical and sexual assault, are often supported by more socially sanctioned expressions of transphobia, biphobia, and homophobia and are intended to send a message to LGBTQ communities. Many LGBTQ people also face substantial bias because they belong to other traditionally marginalized groups along other axes of identity such as race, class, incarceration history, immigration status, or ability.

Membership in more than one traditionally marginalized community can increase targeting for severe violence (p. 11).

Transgender women also continue to experience barriers in accessing healthcare and many transgender women report experiences of lack of provider knowledge in caring for transgender patients coupled with their health disparities (Nemoto et al., 2011). In a finding from the National Transgender Discrimination Survey Report on Health and

Health Care, fifty percent of the sample reported having to teach their medical providers about transgender care. Other key findings regarding healthcare include patients seeking gender reassignment surgery but could not access them due to providers biases towards transgender status and over four times the national average of respondents attested to HIV infection (Safer et al., 2016). In addition, 2.64 percent of the sample reported being diagnosed with HIV compared to 0.6 percent in the general population. HIV among transgender women is at 3.76 percent, 4.67 percent among those who are unemployed and 15.32 percent and higher for those who engage in sex work (Safer et al., 2016). Lack of adequate medical care coupled with crippling health disparities is a recipe for future endemics and epidemics for this population if not taken seriously.

When compared to their cisgender counterparts, transgender women experience far worse health outcomes that result from direct and indirect discrimination (Bauer et al., 2009). Within the past decade, efforts have been erected to advocate for awareness of issues that affect transgender women by enhancing and understanding the community. Despite these efforts, systemic and institutionalized barriers continue to block transgender women's access to healthcare. Bauer and Hammond (2009) identified two barriers impacting transgender women: (1) informational erasure and (2) institutional erasure. These concepts unearth vital action that is needed from researchers to garner information specific to transgender women's health disparities and also understand transgender women's treatment and need for interventions specific to this population. (Bauer & Hammond, 2009).

Tout Te, Tout Lonbraj Plis Eksplike: All Tea, All Shade Further Explained

The All Tea, All Shade model can be utilized to expound upon the importance of intersections of providers, community members and LGBTQ+ identities in hopes of increasing access to medical care and education. Adding to the All Tea, All Shade model, there are five core concepts that practitioners, educators, and mentors should home in on to support and advocate for LGBTQ+ youth. These concepts are: (1) Social Emotional Learning, Conflict Resolution and Emotional Intelligence, (2) HIV/STI Prevention, Sexual Decision Making, and Healthy Relationships, (3) LGBTQ+ Current Policies, (4) Gender Identity/Expression, and (5) Mental Health Conditions and Access. In my experiences as a Public Health Practitioner in the great state of Alabama, I have had both the privilege and disservice of witnessing these concepts in real time. Through my experience of working in the non-profit, governmental, higher education, and K-12 systems in Alabama, I have noticed that these concepts plague the LGBTQ+ population when it comes to access and equity. I arrived at these concepts through the observation of my reflexivity and fluidity. These multiple identities are always intersecting in tandem with the social systems of power that are constantly working to oppress and dispel LGBTQ+ and other marginalized identities.

In reference to social emotional learning (Gimbert et al., 2023), conflict resolution (Güth, Marazzi, & Panaccione, 2023), and emotional intelligence (Parinussa et al., 2023), these concepts are introspective in nature but also intersect into the interpersonal dimensions of being. The ability to notice how our emotions impact our decision-making skills or how conflict resolution is a method of negotiation and survival will continue to box in the framework around emotional intelligence. The All Tea, All Shade model

invites us to consider the core identity of the individual in reference to the filter lens that is utilized in phase two. As mentioned in chapter three, core identity-fluidity in conjunction with the filter lens creates a space where emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and social emotional learning conflux. Additionally, the All Tea, All Shade model invites us to utilize these phases to create lenses that view complex phenomena with the intention of creating effective and intersectional solutions. Moreover, depending on how the model is utilized and applied, it provides a framework for the next steps in communication and implementation.

Let Renmen Pou Pratikan Ak Cheche: Love Letter to Practitioners & Researchers
(Implications for Practice & Research)

Social service, education, and mentoring are all needed facets in order to produce effective and impactful practitioners. Many of these practitioners and educators are great in their own ways. However, what if I invited you to dream with me for a while? Why can't we imagine a world in which all marginalized identities are influenced and considered in the eradication of harmful healthcare services, education curriculum, and policies? This is a holistic approach, yet we continue to push traditional methods of care as the standard. It is infuriating that we are not more vocal about the educational and health implications of policies here within the state of Alabama. There are bills being passed that force practitioners and educators to make real life decisions in regard to their livelihoods rather than their service to the patient or student. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the All Tea All Shade model invites us to view this phenomenon through the intersectional lens of Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023), Black Queer

Theory (Lane, 2023), and Symbolic Interactionism (O’Neill, 2023). Utilizing this approach, allows us to see how these decisions have dire ramifications for the Black and LGBTQ+ communities. Additionally, the passage of bills such as H.B. 322 and S.B. 184 invite oppression and harm where these identities may respond by filtering and masking their identities: especially trans and non-binary identities. Refusal of health care is not only a violation of the Hippocratic Oath (Singer, 2023), is a disservice to the patient seeking care. If circumstances such as these continue, the stigma and lack of adequate medical care will continue to affect transgender women (Cruz, 2014). The lack of adequate medical care for LGBTQ+ identities coupled with uneducated allied health professionals, perpetuates the stigma and biases that these identities face within their communities. The Centers of Disease Control and Prevention stresses the need to establish cultural competence as a factor in reducing the prevalence of health disparities that affect LGBTQ+ identities (CDC, 2023).

The National Prevention Information Network (2021) defines cultural competence as “the integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific standards, policies, practices and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the quality of services; thereby producing better outcomes” (para. 6). Therefore, it is vitally important to ensure that allied health professionals are trained in cultural competency. Allied healthcare professionals act as gatekeepers within the community. These professionals are respected for their professions, opinions, and positions within the community. The Social Ecological Model examines the individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and policy levels (Moyce, et al., 2023). Similarly, the All Tea, All Shade model, examines Black LGBTQ+ identities and the

introspection of their core identity, filter lens, protective and risk factors, and communal context in order to make informed decisions around navigating spaces in real time.

Research has stressed the importance of tailoring interventions towards intrapersonal, interpersonal organizational, community and policy factors, which support and maintain behaviors with negative outcomes (Morgan et al., 2023).

Implications for future practice include several theoretical, policy, and intervention recommendations. In addition, we must champion for educational curriculum advancements, religious inclusivity practices and assessing the intersections of these dimensions (Bodine Al-Sharif & Curley 2021). In the future, I invite practitioners to design and create programs that highlight populations that are left within the margins. In addition to this practice, combining new theoretical frameworks such as the All Tea, All Shade Model with existing CDC and other US Department of Health and Human Services interventions. Moreover, it is paramount to for practitioners to immerse themselves in the community and champion for affirming and relevant policies. Lastly, future implications for practice for this dissertation should focus on community based participatory and continuity of care. “To be successful, these initiatives require policy development, long-term strategies, and interventions based on solid evidence and best practices” (Anderson-Lewis et al., 2009 p. Abstract). Additionally, a true advocate for the LGBTQIA2S+ population involves vulnerability, unearthing uncomfortable truths, and active listening (Hector et al., 2023).

The academic literature for LGBTQ+ individuals is evolving while becoming more inclusive. However, implications for future research should center citational justice, intentional narrative inquiries, and presenting LGBTQ+ research at national, state, and

local conferences. Specific journals that scholars should reference and publish around LGBTQ+ topics include Journal of LGBT Youth, International Journal of Sexual Health, Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling, Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services, and the Journal of Homosexuality. In addition, specific journals for community health promotion and public health include American Journal of Public Health, International Journal of Public Health, Global Journal of Health Education and Promotion, Public Health Research and Practice, and Morbidity and Mortality Weekly report. Lastly, social media venues such as podcast and YouTube can be employed to reach a variety of demographics. In addition to social media avenues, this approach could also be coupled with school, community centers and AIDS service organizations.

Communal context, relevancy, and support are imperative in the safety, thriving, and emotional wellbeing of LGBTQ+ youth (Wilkinson et al., 2022). While championing the spirit of social service workers, we must not forget the community health workers and gatekeepers that protect the culture we so vastly adore. It is paramount to consider how the concept of family is expressed within the LGBTQ+ community. Historically, when family is considered, we think about the traditional nuclear family that consists of a dad, mom, and two and a half kids. However, we must also consider how family has evolved throughout time. This reminds me of how we are often told from birth that blood family is stronger than any other entity. The old saying goes “Blood is thicker than water”.

That simply is not true in reference to LGBTQ+ identities. In many spaces our non-traditional or chosen families have served as a place of solace and peace. We must also consider the concept of blended families which include stepmothers, fathers, and siblings. All these variations of family are needed in the liberation and thriving of

LGBTQ+ individuals. Until that point is understood, addressed, and met with action, we will continue to perpetuate the cycles of intersecting oppression through generational and familial ties.

Libete Idantite LGBTQ+ Anba Opresyon K Ap Enteseksyon: Liberating LGBTQ+ Identities from Intersecting Oppression

We must reflect on the critical issues surrounding the education of Black queer and trans youth and the pressing need for unwavering support and love within schools and communities. I want to pause and point back to the word - we. Here you will note that I am not just inviting you, the reader, to my SPN, but demanding you be present. Drawing upon the experiences and insights I have had in my life, I delve into the transformative power of representation, cultural understanding, and autonomy in fostering an environment where LGBTQ+ youth can thrive. My aim is to illuminate a path forward, ensuring that voices and needs of these resilient young individuals are heard, respected, and championed. I cannot do this alone. We must do it together.

One resounding theme that permeates the discourse is the indispensable role of representation in supporting LGBTQ+ youth. It is imperative that educators and mentors not only possess the necessary knowledge and expertise but also understand the life experiences, history, and culture of the youth they serve. By cultivating a diverse cadre of mentors who share their racial, ethnic, and gender identities, we create spaces where LGBTQ+ youth feel truly seen and understood. This representation fosters a sense of belonging and empowers them to embrace their authentic selves with pride.

Acknowledging the historical oppression and mistrust experienced by Black individuals within medical communities, it becomes apparent that a deep well of cultural understanding and empathy is essential when addressing the mental health needs of LGBTQ+ youth. By recognizing the unique challenges faced by these communities and affirming their lived experiences, we can build trust and dismantle the barriers that hinder their access to mental health services. This entails providing tailored interventions that respect and respond to their specific needs, ensuring that their voices are at the forefront of decision-making processes.

Central to this mission is affirming the autonomy and self-discovery of LGBTQ+ youth. It is imperative to create an environment where their gender identities and experiences are validated and respected, free from the constraints of societal biases. We must uplift their voices, supporting their journey of self-discovery as they navigate the complexities of their identities. By embracing their autonomy, we empower them to make informed decisions regarding their bodies, their mental health, and their overall well-being.

Within educational institutions, we have an opportunity to shape the lives of LGBTQ+ youth by providing safe and inclusive spaces that nurture their growth and development. These spaces should not only embrace the diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities but also dismantle discriminatory practices and foster a sense of belonging. Gay Straight Alliances (GSA's) are successful programming that have occurred in schools and have been recorded in the scientific literature. GSA's are advocacy groups within schools that consist of LGBTQ+ identities serving alongside allies (CDC, 2021). Through curriculum reforms, educator training, and proactive

policies, we can create environments that celebrate and affirm the rich tapestry of identities within the LGBTQ+ community. The CDC is advocating the same and provides a great resource (i.e., Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Division for Adolescent Sexual Health (DASH) and Creating Safe Schools for LGBTQ+ Youth) (CDC, 2022).

Above all, our efforts must be grounded in love and unwavering support for LGBTQ+ youth. We must strive to understand their unique struggles and honor the resilience they demonstrate each day. By rejecting bigotry and hate, we create a foundation where compassion, empathy, and respect thrive. We must be allies, advocates, and mentors, standing beside them as they navigate the challenges they face. Together, we can foster a world that not only tolerates but genuinely celebrates the beauty and diversity of all individuals.

Conclusion

As we conclude our exploration into the critical issues surrounding the education of Black queer and trans youth, we are reminded of the transformative power of support and love. By prioritizing representation, cultural understanding, and autonomy, we create environments where LGBTQ+ youth can flourish and reach their full potential. Let us move forward with a steadfast commitment to embracing their journey, ensuring that our educational institutions and communities provide the love, support, and nurturing these remarkable young individuals need and deserve. Through our collective efforts, we can forge a brighter future where LGBTQ+ youth are celebrated, empowered, and loved.

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APPENDIX A
NON-HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH

NHSR DETERMINATION

TO: Hector, Dominique Jerome

FROM: University of Alabama at Birmingham Institutional Review Board
Federalwide Assurance # FWA00005960
IORG Registration # IRB00000196 (IRB 01)
IORG Registration # IRB00000726 (IRB 02)
IORG Registration # IRB00012550 (IRB 03)

DATE: 06-Feb-2023

RE: IRB-300010363
Memoir of A Future's Past: Utilizing Scholarly Personal Narrative to Unearth Innovative Frameworks for Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth to Teach Educators Ally Mentorship (T.E.A.M.)

The Office of the IRB has reviewed your Application for Not Human Subjects Research Designation for the above referenced project.

The reviewer has determined this project is not subject to FDA regulations and is not Human Subjects Research. Note that any changes to the project should be resubmitted to the Office of the IRB for determination.

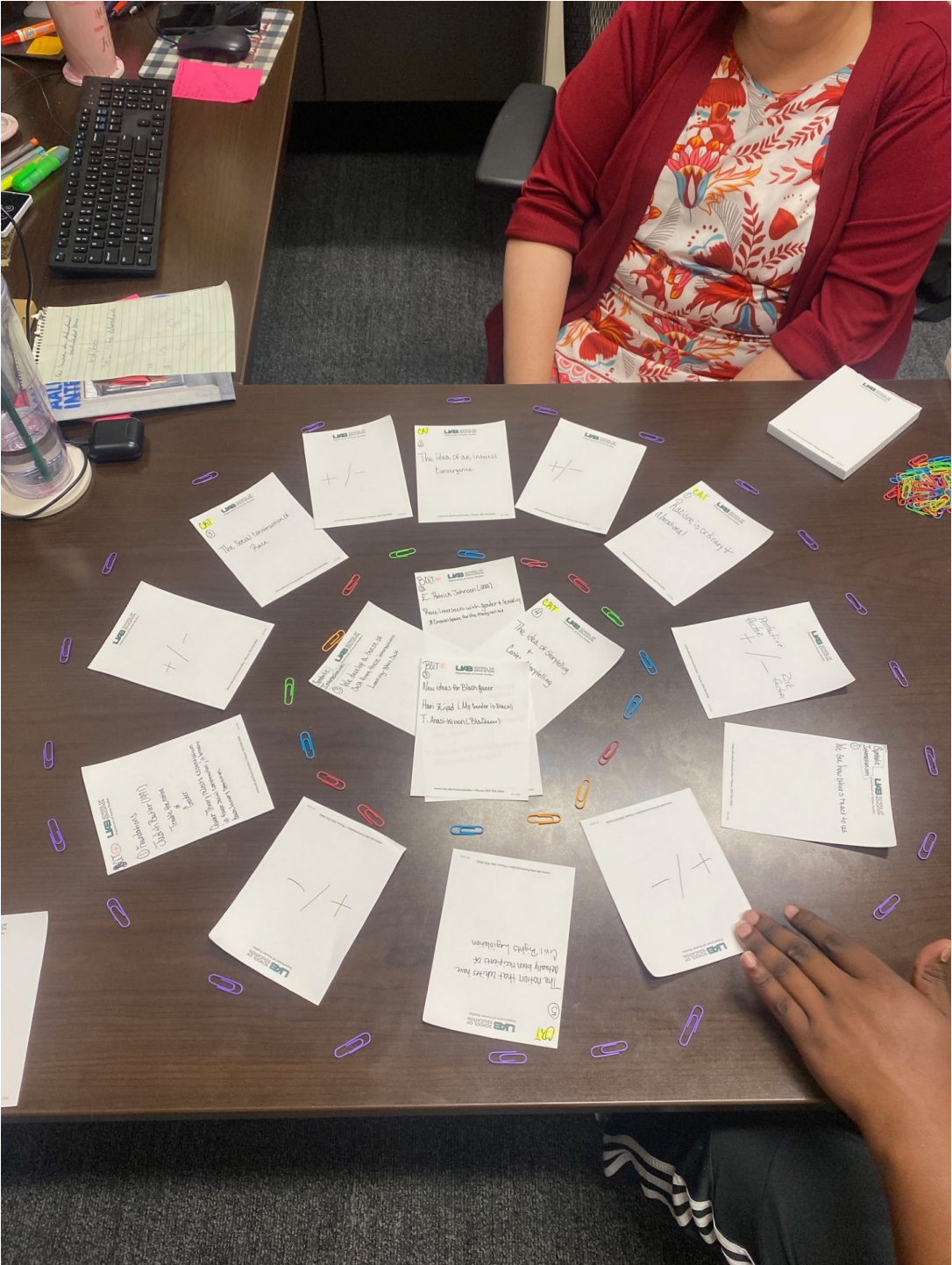
if you have questions or concerns, please contact the Office of the IRB at 205-934-3789.

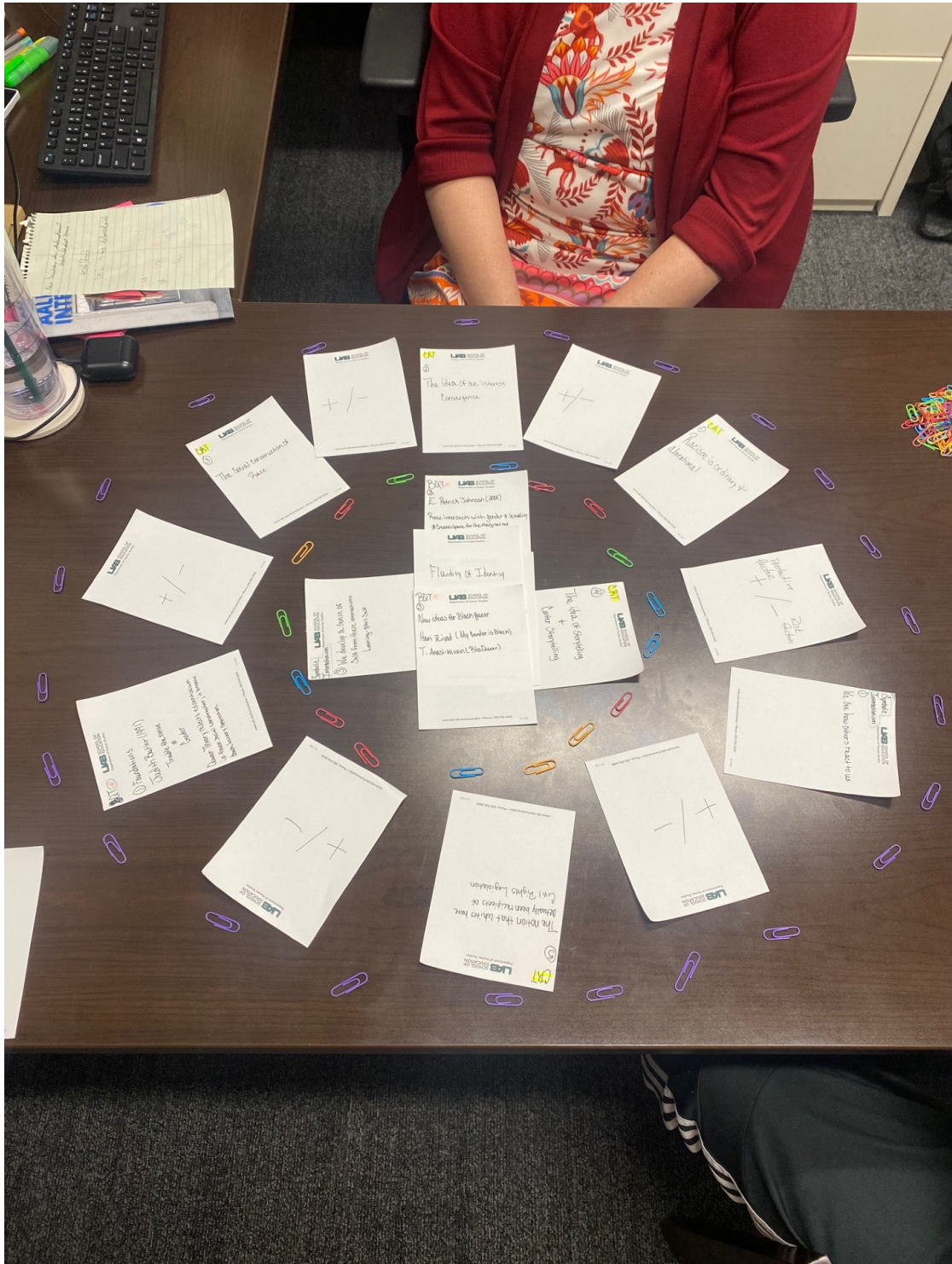
Additional Comments:

Not Research - Other (Personal History Narrative) - Capstone project

PLEASE NOTE: You may not refer to this project as *research* in any presentations or publications.

APPENDIX B
PRODUCING A BORDERLAND APPROACH





APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Question Protocol

K – 12 Questions

1. When did you discover you were a black queer youth?
2. What did it mean to discover you are a black queer child/youth in education?
3. What was it like navigating educational spaces in reference to what you were told versus what you authentically felt about your identity?
4. Where did you first learn the jargon/slang of the LGBTQ+ community?
5. How did you move from a negative connotation to a positive self-identity if at all during your formative years in school?
6. What discoveries did you make about your black queer self as a child?
7. Who or what facilitated the self-discovery experienced in childhood?
8. Were there educators who affirmed your identity? If not, what would you have liked to see as an affirmation from educators?
9. What role did religion/religiosity play in the development of your identity as a black queer youth?
10. How did you come to identify as spiritual but not religious (SBNR) Black queer youth?

Black, Queer, in Alabama Questions

11. What does it mean to be a Black queer man in Alabama?
12. How does Blackness and Queerness intersect?
13. What does it mean to be Black, queer, and educated?
14. What does it mean to be Black, queer, and educated in Alabama?
15. How did your education prepare you for internal discoveries and propel you from intrapersonal discovery to interpersonal expression?

Black, Queer, and Educator Questions

16. What does it mean to be a Black queer educator in Alabama?
17. What is your educational experience across districts (Public & Charter)?
18. What are the similarities between school types that you have taught in?

19. What are the differences between school types that you have taught in?
20. What systems of support/challenges were visible across school types?

Black, Queer, Educational Mentor

21. Who were your educational mentors growing up?
22. What mentoring strategies did they utilize?
23. What mentoring strategies did you adopt and keep from your educational mentor?
24. What mentoring strategies did you discard or get rid of from your educational mentor?
25. What strategies or interventions did you develop on your own to support your mentees?
26. What should ALL mentors who work with Black LGBTQ+ youth need to know?